

Schoolyard Geographies: The Influence of Object-Play and Place-Making on Relationships

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Abstract

The exploration of relationships between the physical characteristics of place and the activities that occur there is a fundamental question for geography (Patton 2002). This report is part of a larger case study documenting how the places, objects and practices in a naturalized primary school playground influenced a newly enrolled student's participation in creative play, social interaction and learning. Using natural and non-prescriptive schoolyard objects is shown to have helped the student negotiate and maintain satisfying relationships with people and places and to have been supportive of identity development. A three-phase model is proposed that conceptualises constructing and playing in cubby houses - also known as forts, tree houses, bush houses, houses and dens (Kylin 2003) - as foundational to the student's social relations and positive disposition.

Keywords: Nature, non-prescriptive objects, place making, learning, relationship, school grounds.

Introduction

Research into the “intimate and necessary relation[s] between the processes of actual experience and education” (Dewey 1938, p.7) has a long history but relations between children's use of everyday objects and learning have rarely been explored (Rickinson et al. 2004). This study forms part of a larger on-going project which aims to describe how students' experiences of school outdoor objects, places and practices are related to learning. Traditionally the nature-nurture dichotomy asserted that either internal or environmental factors drove human development (Wyman 2005) and contemporary literature does demonstrate, for example, that children's relations with objects are influenced by developmental (Bjorklund & Gardiner 2011) and cognitive (Peacock 2011) factors. However artefacts and places are also known to be rich in information (Barker 1968, Gibson 1979) and to play “a decisive, animating role in our collective lives” (Casey 1993, p.31). Consequently contemporary scholarship posits whole-systems perspectives that situate individuals in contexts (Bronfenbrenner & Morris

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2005). Accordingly this study assumes an “ontology of human development and learning that places *relations* between individuals and their world at the core” (Stetsenko 2009 p.126) and accepts two propositions that follow from the assumption. The two fundamental propositions are related and state that:

“The environment is not just an ‘influence’ on thinking and development. Rather the child and the environment are part of a unified system” (Plumert 2008, p.374); and similarly, Places - the cornerstones of human existence (Relph 1976) - are ongoing, dynamic accomplishments expressed in different forms across varying scales (Conradson 2005).

Human geography investigates individual experiences of places and events (Winchester 2000) and the sub-field of children’s geographies contributes to the field by exploring the “everyday lives, movements and spatial experiences” (Wake 2008, p.424) of child-actors (Lester & Russell 2008). Following Horton et al. (2008, p.343) who propose that “Children’s Geographers’ could and should ... support the development of ... active learning activities which are ... learning-centered” the current study aimed to explore the possibility that experiences with schoolyard objects and places might provoke and support - though not determine - student learning. Whilst theory and research affirmed that “the contents of our particular places [come to be] crucial influences on our behaviour” (Johnston 1986, p.67) and, following Heidegger [1889-1976], on ‘being’ in the world theory and research also indicated that individuals affect places (Casey 1993) or, in short, that student activities could alter schoolyards. Given that individuals and contexts were expected to influence and adapt to one another this study related the history of a growing student’s engagements with and influences on schoolyard objects and places (behaviours) as a narrative. Subsequently the history of the student’s engagements was interpreted as supporting learning about relationships with people and places and to have been supportive of identity development.

Methodology

For the purposes of this study, learning was defined as processes that supported more expert participation in culturally valued practices (Booker 2010). Mindful that learning could occur across multiple domains, and that learner-environment relationships were likely to be interdependent and recursive, this study used multiple data sources and ‘process tracing’ methods to discern the ecology and history of the student’s schoolyard learning.

Study site

Ocean View Primary School’s (Ocean View) schoolyard was identified as an influential (Gerring 2007) case for study because, consistent with geographies and sociologies of childhood, it constructed children as ‘competent actors capable of negotiating complex social landscapes and building relationships’ (Lester & Russell 2008, p.45). School policies, independent reports and textual analysis of the schoolyard demonstrated, for example, that the study site was a deliberately constructed collection of practices, objects and places that were intended to provoke active participation, positive

relationships and ethical decision-making by students.

Conventional schools constrain children's spatiality (Thomson 2005) in "flat, wide-open expanses of turf and asphalt" (Dyment & Bell 2007, p. 464) but Ocean View's policy sought to encourage and empower student relationships with objects, with places, and with one another. Staff, for example, talked about:

"not stopping [students] but observing and setting up the context; giving the benefit of the doubt for [students] to have that experience; and, allowing time ... for students to experience" (Staff Meeting 2009).

Ocean View's policy of encouraging free relationships extended beyond allowing students the autonomy and time to 'have experiences' and was also expressed in the material construction of the schoolyard. For example topographic variations (e.g. mounds, pits and channels) and groves of vegetation had been incorporated because research (e.g. Hart 1982, Lucas & Dyment 2010) showed children preferred to play in them and because they provided "many more affordances for play and discovery than barren school ground[s]" (e.g. Fjortoft 2004, Samborski 2010, p.100). Similarly logs, twigs, leaves, stones and flowers were incorporated in the belief they encouraged students to use the schoolyard in purposeful ways (e.g. Malone & Tranter 2003). Whilst natural loose objects of this type were common the school also sought to extend the number and diversity of non-prescriptive objects available to students. The school newsletter of 24 May 2010 explained that, for example:

"At Ocean View we value play and are constantly exploring ways to extend children's play. One way we do this is by providing materials which students can safely use and adapt in their outside learning. In the past parents have donated tree and vine branches, timber, cloth and a range of other materials for students to use."

A consequence of Ocean View's providing loose parts for play was that the schoolyard contained a range of objects that students were free to use and adapt including, for example, barrels, bowls, cardboard boxes, carpet squares, hessian and other fabric, milk crates, mugs, saucepans, spoons, straw-bales, string, and timber offcuts.

This study's reading of Ocean View's places, objects, and practices identified the school as an influential case and the identification was supported by feedback from third parties who visited the school. For example, following its formal review of the school the Non-Government Schools Registration Board reported that:

"the attractive and distinctive design of the building and grounds facilitates children's learning in many ways ... and the obvious enjoyment and engagement of the children is quite unlike that seen in more traditional school grounds" (Non-Government Schools Registration Board 2007).

Three years after the above review personal communication (17.08.2010) from the director of Catholic Earthcare Australia indicating that images of the schoolyard's places and objects had been influential in helping to shift educator "perspective[s] about

what 21st Century learning means and looks like” also verified Ocean View’s selection as an influential case.

Ocean View was also a ‘convenient’ (Patton 2002) case for study because this researcher had been a part-time teacher at the school for four years and remained so during the year of in-field data collection. Being a researcher with close ties to the study site enabled a detailed insider understanding of the case and a particular knowledge of the schoolyard’s history both of which could “be invaluable in producing an accurate portrayal of a case study phenomenon” (Yin 2003, p.94). Case study research is known to be susceptible to observer effects including ‘acting up’ and bias (Smith 2011) but these issues were canvassed and resolved to the satisfaction of two university supervisors and the auspicing university ethics committee. Observer effects such as acting up were considered to be a minor issue when video recording was conducted from a discrete distance and because being photographed and videoed by teachers had become normal part of Ocean View’s schoolyard. Safeguards against bias included: 1) triangulation of documentation created before this study (e.g. school policies, newsletters & student texts), interview transcripts, researcher video observations, and participant videoing; 2) participant and expert review of analyses and interpretations; and 3) employing ‘process tracing’ (George & Bennett 2005) as a research method to limited possible researcher-induced bias.



Images 1a & 1b.

(1a) Ocean View’s mounds, channels and groves that were constructed to offer differentiated play places. (1b) Loose objects that supported children’s adaptation of places.

Embedded Case Selection

This report is part of a larger study that tracked the schoolyard activities and learning of students who attended Ocean View Primary School. All students who attended Ocean View (n=184) were invited to participate in the larger study, 81 responded to the invitation to participate and six of those who accepted were selected for case study. Student activities and learning are influenced by the characteristics of both person and

place (Bronfenbrenner & Morris 2006, Wachs 2000) but because the characteristics of Ocean View's places were observable the six case-study students were selected on the basis of maximum variation sampling (Patton 2002, p.235) across personal characteristics. Values are the foundation of significant personal characteristics (Schwartz 1992) so Ocean View staff described each respondent-student's value priorities in terms of Schwartz's (1992) bi-polar value dimensions and a distribution of respondent-student value priorities was constructed (Figure 1). Araceli, the nine year-old student who is the subject of this report, was selected because staff described her as prioritising both 'showing concern for the welfare and interests of others' and 'a tendency to rely on and follow rules' (Schwartz 1992). The value priorities which placed Araceli's at (4,1) in the distribution of respondent-student value priorities affirmed her good fit for maximum variation sampling and differentiated her from the other case study students (not described in this report) whose value priorities were (4,4), (0,5), (3,3) and (1,1). Fortuitously Araceli was also a newly enrolled student who had no previous experience of Ocean View's schoolyard so her selection further increased the sample variation.

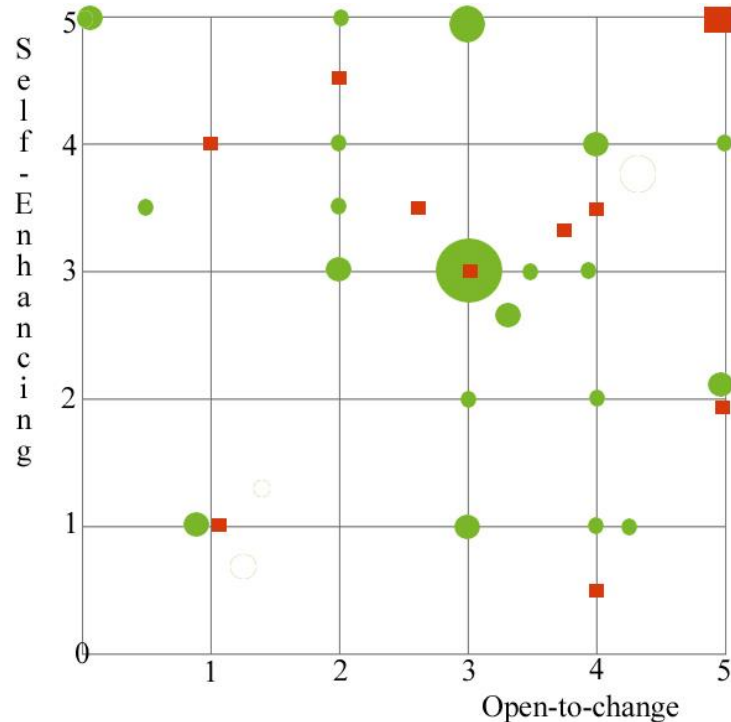


Figure 1.

Teacher ratings of respondent-student value dimensions. Green represents students who had been observed using the study site schoolyard prior to formal data collection and red represents students who did not frequent the schoolyard.

Data

Data was collected across one academic year and included researcher, student and participant videos of schoolyard activities, unstructured interviews, field notes and a

researcher reflective journal. The variety of sources provided rich and varied data which were not immediately compatible, so process-tracing was selected as an appropriate tool for analysis of the case study data because it “focuses on sequential processes within a particular historical case” (George & Bennett & 2005, p.13) and is particularly suited to studying “micro level intentional behaviors ... [involving] the use of qualitative variables ... [such as] cognitions” (Bennett & George 1997, p.17). Additionally process-tracings’ close attention to sequential events was a “methodological safeguard against investigator-induced bias” (George & Bennett & 2005, p.24). In this study process tracing had four distinct phases. Firstly videos of the case study student’s activities (primarily by the author of this report but also by the study participants), interview transcripts, field notes and journal entries were reviewed and transcribed into a chronology. Subsequently meaningful elements that emerged from consolidation of the chronologies were identified. Next the histories of developmental change that were revealed by aggregation of meaningful elements were described (see the three part narrative in this study’s ‘Findings’). Finally relations between behaviours and learning were interpreted from the histories of developmental change (see ‘Interpretations’).

Findings, Araceli’s story

Part One: Beginning and belonging

For Araceli, a newly enrolled nine year-old girl, Ocean View primary school was an unfamiliar place. It was however, a place where she recognised Kay and Yasmine – two girls who attended the same community gymnastics club as Araceli – so she knew Ocean View was a place for people like her. Co-incidentally, the three girls shared the same class and an interest in building cubbies so, from their first Monday together at Ocean View, Araceli, Kay and Yasmine began building a cubby amongst a group of four trees in the schoolyard. Initially the cubby was a simple single-celled structure of trees, sticks and hessian but the girls’ made and remade the cubby during nearly all of their free break times over the next three months so that it eventually included artefacts such as furniture and decorations, a rudimentary garden and multiple ‘rooms’. In time the cubby became an expression of group belonging for, although the participants spent most of their time in a single shared space inside their cubby, Araceli, Kay and Yasmine each had personal rooms within it. The cubby was not just a group of rooms, however. It was also a place for amongst other things: making rudimentary pots from mud/clay; crafting placemats, jewellery and tokens from wool, vines and leaves; and, scenting water with leaves and petals. Indeed adapting the cubby and making, sharing and receiving objects was such a routine and frequent group practice that Araceli, Kay and Yasmine were able to name and describe the particular roles each had negotiated through participation in making activities. In a movie about their first week’s cubby making for example Araceli named herself as the ‘handy-girl who put things up and fixed things and who upgraded the cubby’ and Yasmine (the group’s ‘Prime Minister’) explained that each girl would keep her role for two weeks before another girl assumed the role.



Images 1a & 1b.

(1a) Araceli, Kay and Yasmine pose in their newly constructed cubby (Source *Ocean View Newsletter 1:3:2011, p.3*). (1b) Homeroom display of place mats and bracelets that Araceli, Kay and Yasmine made during outside learning times.

Clearly Araceli's having both a personal room in the cubby and a named role indicated that she had successfully immersed herself in Ocean View's physical and social milieu. It was however, a contention of this study that cubby making and object use helped Araceli establish and maintain social relationships but this view was tested by events that followed weekend vandalism of the cubby.



Images 2a & 2b.

(2a) Cubby table covered with 'Bits and bobs' that Araceli, Kay and Yasmine had made from loose parts, and (2b) Araceli sits in the sunshine of her cubby garden and weaves with string while Kay and Yasmine sit less than 2m away (out of shot).

Whilst the Ocean View community valued and respected Araceli, Kay and

Yasmine's cubby children who visited on weekends began using, changing and vandalizing the cubby. Unsurprisingly Araceli, Kay and Yasmine repeatedly remade their cubby and in the context of regular reconstruction other students became temporary cubby inhabitants. Two girls in particular had wanted to join Araceli, Kay and Yasmine's group and each found ways to be useful during phases of reconstruction. Lauren, for example, spent several weeks standing close by the cubby and was quick to step in when her strength could help secure posts, or her reach could help drape fabric over taller branches. Lauren was rewarded by eventually being allowed to sit at the fringe of the cubby and to participate in collective activities. However by early March, the cubby making activity increasingly focused on the three key participants and rules were invented to govern who could visit on which days. Subsequently Araceli, Kay and Yasmine tightened their restrictions further and, although Lauren had collaborated in reconstructing the cubby and in making artefacts, soon she was only allowed to visit on 'Friends-day Wednesdays'. Lauren was thereby effectively excluded from the group and her inability to sustain participation in valued social practices brought into question this study's contention that creative object use supported being with others. This question may have gone unresolved but for an accident of history that precipitated the dissolution of Araceli, Kay and Yasmine's group.

Part Two: Dispossession and dissolution

Araceli, Kay and Yasmine's cubby had been repeatedly vandalized and reconstructed during thirteen weeks of habitation so I was surprised to see it abandoned little more than two weeks into the second school term of 2011. The day before the cubby's dissolution Kay had explained that the cubby had been vandalized on the weekend and that the group (which included one new member) was in the process of rebuilding it as a smaller 'meeting place'. I took this to mean that the group would continue to use a smaller cubby and no longer provision it with objects. On the next day, however, I observed Kay and Yasmine sitting under trees in a small copse some 15m south of their dismantled cubby while Araceli and the new cubby member were building another cubby in a dense thicket 8m to the east. At the time and again some months later Araceli explained that her group had given up making the cubby because the repeated vandalism made them wonder "what was the point of rebuilding the cubby if people were going to break it all the time?" However, Araceli's immediate continuation of cubby building suggested that other factors were also relevant. Shortly afterward Araceli's teacher explained that because Araceli had recently celebrated her birthday (her first at Ocean View) Kay and Yasmine had realized that they were nearly 18 months older than Araceli so had dissociated themselves from her. Observations showing Kay and Yasmine hardly responding to Araceli on the same day as the cubby was abandoned and their subsequent avoidance of shared schoolyard activity with Araceli are additional indications that an intra-group change precipitated dissolution of Araceli, Kay and Yasmine's cubby group.

Membership of the cubby group had provided Araceli with a place for activity, relationship and security so abandonment of the cubby was a significant challenge for her. Initially Araceli responded to her displacement and alienation by trying to re-create

her earlier existence with other peers in a nearby location. Later Araceli tried a similar strategy by joining peers who had gathered in a secluded place on the other side of the school. However, none of Araceli's attempts to recreate a cubby existence were entirely successful so, during the remaining seven weeks of second term and through the first two weeks of the third school term, Araceli literally and metaphorically 'hung around' on the school's climbing frames. In this regard her behaviour was similar to other students (including Lauren who had attempted to join Araceli, Kay and Yasmine's cubby during term one) for whom easily accessible parallel and associated play on and near the climbing frames had become a default activity choice. Araceli however, was not entirely satisfied with her climbing-frame existence so she made occasional reconnaissance circuits of the school to investigate other potential affordances. Araceli's searching was nearly over however, because the second school term was coming to its inevitable end and with a new term would come a new student with whom Araceli would reanimate homemaking and dwelling activities and with whom Araceli would ultimately form a satisfying new relationship.

Part Three: Recovery

After the midyear break Araceli tried to reconnect with her old friends Kay and Yasmine but she was unsuccessful so within half an hour Araceli's activities focused once again on the southern climbing frames. But there was a difference this term. Araceli had happened across Dakota who had recently started at Ocean View and her focus had shifted, she had begun engaging with Dakota in a schoolyard place that supported joint activity and Dakota, for her part, needed little encouragement to reciprocate. When Araceli crouched over a frying pan filled with water, petals and scented herbs Dakota crouched too. After Araceli stirred the pans contents Dakota stirred the contents. When Araceli walked a few steps to pick rosemary so did Dakota. When Dakota smelt a leaf Araceli smelt a leaf. And when, at the close of their first period of shared outside learning, Araceli placed the loose parts she had been using under a small bridge near their work surface "so no-one step[ed] on them" Dakota did too. Again and again over the next two break times Araceli and sometimes Dakota left the other to collect resources then returned with something to share and each time one would wait for the other or hurry to catch the other up. Repeatedly, Araceli and Dakota adjusted their behaviour, resources or place to synchronise with the other. And for days Araceli and Dakota's coordinating-synchronizing activities continued while all the time a silent partner - the open, enriched schoolyard - afforded the visual connection and giving, receiving and reciprocating of communication that was an essential part of the pair's relationship formation. For days it also seemed that the schoolyard loose parts and water which were necessary for Araceli and Dakota's co-operative, goal-oriented perfume-making had afforded opportunities to create a sense of purpose and belonging that had been absent during the weeks that Araceli hung around on the climbing frames.

Outside forces are known to affect the coordination and synchronization of complex systems (Kovac 2002) and it was for this reason that, on the morning of their third day, I discovered Araceli alone on the bars again. But this was no permanent disruption. Dakota had only stayed inside to meet with her teacher and by the next break time Araceli and Dakota were together again. The short disruption did initiate other changes

however, and later that day and for the next week the two girls and three same-age peers made a place for themselves in the north-eastern corner of the schoolyard. The choice of a corner that “not many people visit” automatically gave 270° of enclosure and two shrubs that screened one quarter of the remaining opening further enhanced the group’s privacy. Collaborating with others to site the school’s metal pyramid in the remaining 2m opening, covering the ground with a mat and placing fabric on top of the pyramid further defined ‘the cubby’ so that Araceli, Dakota and their peers could use logs as tables and chairs, mix water and wattle flowers in cooking pots and negotiate new ways of being with each other free from interruptions.

Once more however, changes in other parts of Araceli and Dakota’s microsystem disrupted the pair’s co-ordination of schoolyard activities and posed a risk to their nascent relationship. For approximately three months senior students at Ocean View had made sporadic moves to repeal a rule that constrained games of chase to turfed areas and, while Araceli and Dakota had been constructing their new cubby in a corner of the schoolyard, the sought-after change had been made. So at the beginning of a new week it seemed that most senior students were playing a game of ‘round the school chasey’ (where players hide and run away from one player who seeks and tries to catch them). For Araceli, chasey was a chance to again share an activity with Kay and Yasmine so she joined in. Dakota, who was not as athletic as the others, might have dropped out if speed and endurance were essential prerequisites but, because the game involved hiding, she joined in too. By Thursday however, Araceli and Dakota had abandoned hide and seek games and settled into a secluded place amongst the stones and strappy leaved native flax of Ocean View’s ephemeral creek. Ostensibly this place was well suited to the girl’s home-making activities but brief experience showed it to be a through-way for children playing hide-and-seek chasey so after a few days Araceli and Dakota moved their activities into a more distant copse of shrubs. When asked, Araceli explained that they had indeed moved to avoid chasey areas ‘where people cut through and hid in other people’s cubbies’ and Dakota added that they had made their ‘own quiet place’ (Image 3a). From then on and for the rest of the third school term Araceli and Dakota made a cubby in their quiet place and, like any home, their cubby re-structured their attention, was central to their dwelling in the world and was foundational to their relationship.

Twice more during 2011 Araceli and Dakota moved their cubby, first back into the ephemeral creek (Image 3b) then to a place very near where Araceli’s experience of schoolyard homemaking had begun nearly twelve months earlier. Each time the girls moved their new cubby was different from those that had preceded it but each was also similar in many ways. Each cubby was easily accessible from the homeroom; each was a territory that offered security and control, continuity and privacy; each stimulated and supported homemaking activities and each structured relationships with friends and adults. When asked how these contexts suited her, Araceli replied that ‘even though there isn’t a [traditional] playground you can create your own ... [and I] ... feel very happy and safe’. Clearly Araceli felt at home in each context.



Images 3a & 3b.

Araceli and Dakota adapted secluded areas to build their cubbies and creative use of natural objects was typical behaviour in and near the cubbies.

Discussion: A participant observer's interpretations

A key aim of this study was to explore how engaging with objects and places in a schoolyard was related to learning. Ocean View Primary School was selected as the study because it had a naturalized schoolyard that was intended to provoke student's active participation, positive relationships, and ethical decision-making. At the beginning of this study Araceli was a newly enrolled student who had a pre-existing tendency to affirming relationships and an interest in craft. Her enrolment therefore offered a germane opportunity to observe if Ocean View's schoolyard actually supported positive social relations. Araceli's initial experiences with the objects and places in Ocean View's schoolyard affirmed and validated her participation in free cubby making and dwelling activities but she was displaced from such participation by changed social conditions. After trying unsuccessfully to define a role for herself at the school's climbing structures Araceli finally established satisfying emplaced relationships through creative, joint use of non-prescriptive natural objects.

Araceli's experience of objects and places in Ocean View's grounds directs attention to three phases of learning about herself as an active agent in relationship making. They are:

- 1. Araceli freely engaged in enjoyable creative activities with functionally non-prescriptive objects.*

Natural objects were essential, functionally non-prescriptive resources that Araceli adapted and used to construct artefacts and places. Araceli wove place mats, bracelets, baskets and string from rushes grown in the schoolyard and used flowers, leaves and sticks to make decorative artefacts and scented sachets. Other objects were also freely available in Ocean View's schoolyard and Araceli was able to use some of these for making and re-making artefacts and places. For example she used hessian to make cubby walls, to tie sticks into frameworks and to strain liquids. Importantly the non-

prescriptive character of most natural and some made objects meant they were amenable to creative uses and thereby supported transformations of objects into artefacts.

2. Araceli participated in collective transformations of objects into meaning-filled artefacts.

Araceli's ability to create novel artefacts from non-prescriptive objects attracted and maintained the attention of peers and younger children and won her a central place in a stable peer group. In addition Ocean View's densely revegetated schoolyard promoted feelings of being away (both in time and space) and emplaced control that freed Araceli and her peers to find time for repeated, sustained engagement with a diverse range of non-prescriptive objects in places where they could choose activities that interested them. Observations of Araceli's use of non-prescriptive objects in free relationship with social others were consistent with Tolmie et al. (2010) who found that student's self-managed collaborative activity in stable group contexts increased mutual understanding. Awareness of our own or other peoples thinking is known as metacognition. The conjoining of free agency and mutual understanding in Ocean View's schoolyard provided the means and context in and out of which Araceli and peers transformed their participation in culturally valued activities.

3. Araceli initiated and directed engagement with and transformation of personal, physical, social and conceptual environments.

Ocean View provided a carefully constructed context of liminality that encouraged student use and adaption of schoolyard objects and culture. For example Araceli's freedom to build and inhabit cubbies may have helped her configure what Ward (1961, p.201) writing about adventure playgrounds described as "a free society in miniature, with the same ... unforced growth of co-operation and release of individual qualities and communal sense". Certainly Araceli's use of non-prescriptive objects during cubby building and habitation allowed her to create an emplaced world where she felt 'really happy and safe' (Image 3a). What Araceli learnt through engagement with objects and places in Ocean View's schoolyard may therefore be more than specific skills, knowledge or concepts. Indeed her experience of the schoolyard's emplaced objects, agency and relationship seems intimately linked to her sense of worth, connectedness and purpose.

Conclusion

Kant (1781) observed that 'all knowledge begins with the senses and ends with reason' but Araceli's story suggests that a qualitatively different interpretation of experience with objects and places might also be appropriate – that what can be learnt from non-prescriptive object use might, as Sutton Smith (1995, p.290) poetically suggests, be a sometimes unreasonable "belief in one's own capacity for a future". Maintaining a positive disposition may have seemed unreasonable to Araceli while she experienced an extended period of displacement but she did continue to believe in her capacity for a future. When peer relationships failed, Araceli sustained herself by animating objects and places and, when social contexts changed; emplaced object use was her means to new, satisfying relationships. Araceli's story therefore seems to suggest that naturalized

school grounds offer non-prescriptive objects and contexts which may stimulate learning about personal capacities, relationship making and identity. Interpreted as such Araceli's story may invite practitioners and researchers to consider if and how (following Moore 1986) providing access to non-prescriptive objects, animating object use and activating involvement in adapting schoolyards might influence the lives and experiences of child-actors in other places. Interpreting or investigating such suggestions and invitations requires care however, because if one accepts Araceli's story as testament to the fact that places make a difference, one is inevitably "led down a slippery slope, to the conclusion that every difference makes a difference" (Curry 2002, p.513). Accordingly this author acknowledges that just as Araceli's experience of places affected her participation at Ocean View each reader's emplaced experiences will affect how they respond to this study. This study's interpretations and conclusions are therefore offered in the hope that some part of the story may resonate with, or be useful to, the reader who will ultimately discern for him or herself what might be relevant, transferable or worthy of further research.

Endnote

Inquiry is a collective activity and I am grateful for the cooperation and support of Ocean View's students, staff and parents (past and present) without whom this study would not have been possible. I am also thankful to Catholic Education South Australia for financially supporting this study, to Professor Iain Hay and Dr Kerry Bissaker whose guidance shaped the inquiry and to the reviewers and editors for the time and effort taken in providing feedback. Whilst wishing to honour the participation of all those who have contributed to this inquiry and report the author declares that all views and any errors or omissions are his responsibility and should not be attributed to any of the individuals or organisations named above.

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