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Poverty, place and pedagogy in education: research stories from front-line workers

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Abstract This article considers what it means to teach and learn in places of poverty through the narratives of front-line workers—particularly students and teachers. What is the work of teaching and learning in places of poverty in current times? How has this changed? What can be learned from both the haunting and hopeful narratives of front-line workers? Is it possible to continue to educate in these times and in ways that allow for critique, imagination and optimism? These questions are addressed by drawing from studies conducted over three decades in schools located in high-poverty neighbourhoods. Literacy education is considered as a particular case. Educational researchers need to remain on the front line with teachers and students in places of poverty because that is where some of the hardest work gets done. Reinvigorated democratic research communities would include teachers, school leaders, policy workers and young people.

Keywords Literacy · Teachers' work · Poverty · Critical literacy · Social justice · Positive discourse analysis · Place conscious pedagogy

Introduction

Ameliorating childhood poverty is a high priority for most governments in democratic western countries. Providing all youth with equal access to education and equitable outcomes is also an unquestioned goal. However, it seems that in many neo-liberal democracies, few inroads have been made on either of these fronts. Poverty and inequitable educational trajectories still abound. Indeed, if

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international commentators such as Piketty, Roy and Dorling are correct, economic inequities in the current era are of a different order and, to some degree, unassailable by policies only within nation states. As Fraser points out (2014, p. 17), a great deal of critique in the social sciences has been based on the 'prospects for deliberative democracy in a bounded political community', which identified 'the public with the citizenry of a territorial state'. Escalating economic differences produced by global market economies may threaten values of social justice on which democracies are contingent. However, it has been clear for some time that 'reducing inequality is the best way of improving the quality of the social environment, and so the real quality of life, for all of us' (Pickett and Wilkinson 2009, p. 29).

Notwithstanding the fundamental changes wrought by transnational economies and widening gaps between the rich and poor, the demand for equitable educational outcomes underpinned by 'human capital' rhetoric continues apace, as though making a difference is simply a matter of greater accountability. 'Fixing' educational problems, such as inequality, is frequently seen as a matter of 'fixing' teachers, students and families. Improving literacy, for example, is seen as *the* way to improve educational outcomes which in turn will improve economic conditions for everyone, and thereby eradicate poverty and inequality. This brackets out the fundamental material effects of poverty on people and deflects responsibility away from governments for redressing economic inequality.

In this article, I consider what it means to teach and learn in places of poverty through the narratives of front-line workers—particularly students and teachers. What is the work of teaching and learning in places of poverty in current times? How has this changed over time? What can we learn from both the haunting and hopeful narratives of 'front-line workers' (Griffith and Smith 2014)? Front-line workers include those public sector practitioners, such as teachers, nurses and social workers, who are charged with delivering specified standardised managerial requirements at their local work sites without any adjustment to expectations that take into account the local context. In such a policy environment, it is challenging to educate in ways that allow for specificity, critique, imagination and optimism.

To address these questions, I draw from studies that I have conducted over three decades in schools located in high-poverty neighbourhoods, mostly in South Australia. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage, South Australia as a whole is below the national average when compared with other Australian states (ABS 2013), and the schools which I research are located in areas amongst the most socio-economically disadvantaged in the country. The Index relates to factors such as household income, education, qualifications and occupation, and measure relative disadvantage. The studies to which I refer are part of my long-term documentary project of collecting alternative narratives about pedagogies in places of poverty—stories to rekindle optimism and speak back to deficit. Hence, this article does not set out to present a formal report of one particular study, but constitutes reflective stock-taking of cumulative projects across an extended time-span to consider how teachers and learners are positioned both by policy and relative poverty right now. The classroom examples of enabling literacy pedagogies of place are drawn from a recent collaborative project

undertaken with teacher-researchers.[1] Classroom examples of more troubling literacy pedagogical practices are taken from a recent multi-sited ethnography.[2] Literacy education is considered as a particular case—from the promise of the literacy fix, to the risks of fickle literacies which reproduce deficit, to the potential of critical literacy and enabling pedagogies of place. My work has always been concerned with teachers' work and social justice, and what this means in actual classrooms, for particular young people, in particular places. New public management tends to write out specificity of context and populations, and to insist on more generic, abstracted and standardised procedures, which is somewhat alien to earlier periods of Australian educational policy.

It is 35 years since Bill Radford contributed to *Education in South Australia: Report of the Committee of Enquiry into Education in South Australia 1969–1970* (Karmel 1971). He was, at that time, the Director of Australian Council of Educational Research. His philosophical contribution (as described by Jean Blackburn, who was a consultant on that project) focused on equality of opportunity and the purposes of schooling.[3] This was one of the first major reports in Australia to explicitly address educational inequality and preceded the national report *Schools in Australia* (Karmel 1973) commissioned by the then Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, in 1972. In the South Australian report, Karmel et al. (1971, p. 30) noted that 'The schools provided by the State … attempt to provide the means to realise an equality of opportunity between children from every kind of home'.

These reports heralded a period of federal government provision of extra resources to schools based on priorities and the establishment of the Australian Schools Commission. Many of the Australian working-class baby boomer population benefited from subsequent governmental interventions in high schools and universities to extend their educational trajectories way beyond what their parents had dared to hope for, and the relationships between schools and families became ever more complex. 'Every kind of home' in Australia has become increasingly diverse since Karmel, Radford and colleagues reported on education and, since that time, federal government interventions are more concerned with measuring the performance of the student population on standardised tests of literacy and numeracy (Lingard et al. 2016). There is less talk in public education policy about equality and students from different kinds of homes. Yet, it is an era of

[1] The project is entitled 'Literacy and the imagination: Working with place and space as resources for children's learning' and in South Australia was undertaken by Barbara Comber, Helen Grant, Lyn Kerkham, Ruth Trimboli and Marg Wells. Annette Woods worked with a teacher-researcher in Brisbane.

[2] *Educational leadership and turnaround literacy pedagogies,* an Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Project (No. LP120100714) between the University of South Australia and the South Australian Department for Education and Child Development (DECD). The project was under taken between 2012 and 2015. The chief investigators were Robert Hattam (University of South Australia), Barbara Comber (Queensland University of Technology), and Deb Hayes (University of Sydney). The research associate was Lyn Kerkham (University of South Australia).

[3] Thanks to Deb Hayes for pointing out to me this connection which emerged through her research. Craig Campbell and Deb Hayes (University of Sydney) are writing a biography of Jean Blackburn (1919–2001), a significant contributor to educational policy, including the SA and national Karmel reports. She was an Australian Schools Commissioner from 1974 to 1980, and key architect of the Disadvantaged Schools Program.

increasing gaps between the wealthy and the poor, as I discuss below, and an era of heightened youth unemployment and under-employment.

The stories told (and not told) about people and poverty impact upon everyday discursive and material practices. Educational researchers grapple with the politics of representation in reporting on our inquiries in schools in poor communities. On the one hand, we are committed to contesting pervasive deficit discourses by lifting expectations, offering significant learning and opening up educational trajectories for students. On the other hand, we do not want to pretend that the material realities of poverty do not make any difference to the processes and particularities of teachers' work and children's learning.

During this era of economic prioritisation, the glorification of numerical data, rampant standardisation and impossible accountabilities, educational researchers may need to re-consider the following:

1. Increasing poverty, or the big data we already have
2. How we make visible the everyday lives of people working and learning in situations of relative poverty
3. Researchers' relationships to the politics of knowledge production in educational institutions.

My aim is to position teachers and students in the foreground—as front-line workers. Documenting teachers' work and tracing the different and contingent take-up, appropriations and modifications of what is on offer by different learners over time represent a major part of my research agenda. This is not to suggest simplistic cause-and-effect relationships, but rather to consider what different teachers make available to different young people and what different young people do with that—especially with regards to assembling particular literate repertoires and learner identities; in other words, what the everyday adds up to over time—what actually gets negotiated in practice and with which effects.

One implication is that educational researchers engage not only in critical, but also in positive analysis and documentation of pedagogy (see also Hayes et al. 2006; Munns et al. 2013; Rogers and Wetzel 2013; Smyth and Wrigley 2013), contextually situated in particular places of poverty over time (Burwell and Lenters 2015). The other side of interrogating injustice is being able to specify 'which reading and writing positions and practices should be encouraged in the classroom' (Luke 1995, p. 40). Hence, I am as keen to identify hopeful enabling practices, as I am to interrogate what Martin Haberman (1991) has described as 'pedagogy of poverty' and that Annette Woods and I recently described as 'fickle literacies' (Comber and Woods 2016). By fickle literacies, we mean doing 'word finds' in Year 8 History on a Monday morning, copying out words with an array of coloured markers during the literacy block in Year 1, cutting and pasting instructions for how to make popcorn and drawing a picture on the popcorn bag in Year 5. These kinds of tasks buy student compliance and deliver nothing. Even more worrying is that such tasks are sometimes defended in terms of differentiation to cater for different ability groups. To address these risks, how might educational researchers work productively with school-based educators to foster a collective re-invigorated educational

imagination that speaks back to deficit and begins to document complex and enabling pedagogies and their effects long-term?

In exploring these challenges, I draw on the theoretical resources of Michel Foucault (1979), in the sense of we 'are freer than we feel'; Nancy Fraser's (2014) three dimensional model of justice, in terms of recognition, redistribution and representation; and Dorothy Smith's approach to the 'everyday world as problematic' (Smith 1987) and a 'sociology for the people' (Smith 2005). In particular, I take up Smith's notion of 'work' to consider the everyday activities of teachers and children in schools—how they negotiate the time and space of being, doing and learning together, and what this might accomplish. For this reason, school-situated narratives are foregrounded, rather than theory, in order to consider the politics of the everyday work of teachers and children, and implications for educational research.

Poverty and education: Revisited

There are many ways of becoming poor in Australia. While people in areas of poverty have low incomes as a common factor, their children come with many different histories. In one site of recent research, some are the children of third generation unemployed; some are recently arrived refugees; some are Aboriginal children whose families have moved to the area for housing near relatives; some are from single-parent families seeking refuge; some of the children's parents have recently lost jobs at Holden or related local industries; some children are living with grandparents who are surviving on pensions. Other children have parents on health benefits who have returned from military service, suffering a range of injuries, including post-traumatic stress disorder. Still other children come from families where parents have separated and now need to run two households. There are many more routes to poverty, and the options may be growing. What poverty looks like close-up can also vary, and how different children growing up in poverty present in classrooms are also extremely diverse.

Over two decades ago, Connell's seminal paper on 'poverty and education' was published in *Harvard Educational Review* (1994). The article explained how compensatory education for the poor had failed to produce social justice, in part due to a false mapping of the problem, and in part because any rethinking of schooling needs to engage in questions of power. Deficit logics are sustained because 'the poor are not like the rest of us is a traditional belief of the affluent' (Connell 1994, p. 131) This observation remains true today, as does 'the belief that educational reform is, above all, a technical question, a matter of assembling the research and deducing the best interventions' (Connell 1994, p. 132). Importantly, from my perspective, Connell went on to point out that:

> [P]olicy discussions about education have frequently been conducted in the absence of the two groups most likely to understand the issues, poor people themselves, and teachers in their schools. (Connell 1994, p. 133)

Some would argue that little has changed in this regard. Connell also noted the limits of ethnography for understanding the problems associated with poverty and

education, namely the tendency to 'emphasise what is unique and distinctive about its subjects' way of life' (Connell 1994, p. 132). There are risks with selecting and presenting critical incidents from classrooms in high-poverty schools. Yet, putting poverty on the educational agenda can never be risk-free. Not keeping poverty on the agenda for educational research comes with its own risks. Perhaps, this is why the work of the US commentator Ruby Payne attracts so much attention. She is at least talking about poverty. Despite the fact that the concept has long been discredited (Gorski 2008), Payne refers to a *culture of poverty* with its own *hidden rules*, which characterises children and their families as 'deficient' (Bomer et al. 2008, p. 2507). This kind of thinking underpins the 'false map of the problem' of education and poverty described over two decades ago by Connell (1994, p. 132).

One of the main problems with Payne's approach, in emphasising 'depravity perversity and criminality' (Bomer et al. 2008, p. 2510), is that it gives teachers the message that poor children need to be taught the rules of the middle class, whilst bracketing out the material realities of poverty or portraying their lives as exotic and alien and, as such, needing to be explained to middle-class teachers. Pedagogical relationships are then reframed in moral terms, as exemplified below, which can be rectified by giving poor children access to the right behavioural resources.

Payne (2012) is somewhat bemused by the criticism her work has received and points out that instead researchers should consider why it is that so many copies of her book have sold, and why it is that she has hard data that her program is working. Taking up Connell's metaphor, it may be that teachers prefer to have a false map than no map at all, to have poverty talked about rather than silenced, to have some suggestions for action rather than a vacuum. What are the alternatives? The 'no excuses' mantra from the right and the 'social reproduction' critique from the left have left teachers wanting. More complex accounts of negotiated curriculum drawing on children's funds of knowledge are frequently lined up in opposition to the academic curriculum that counts (Zipin et al. 2015). I return to these tensions later. For now, I turn to how poverty, and false maps of poverty, are produced in the public common sense.

For decades, we have witnessed the complicity of the press in producing deficit discourses that are tied to particular parts of the city and beyond. Rappaport (2000) describes such accounts as 'texts of terror'. Newspaper reports blame poor people for their poverty and create divisions between those who are judged and those who judge (see Fig. 1).

In contrast, 'optimistic narratives' that contest dominant cultural narratives and reposition children and teachers as positive agents, as people who can make a difference, are crucial (Rappaport 2000).

> 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. (Cope and Kalantzis 2000, p. 19)

Research has proven time and again that constructing counter-stories is a fundamental work for teachers who work in such communities. In the words of Maxine Greene:

Residents living in fear of the neighbours

By State Political Reporter GREG KELTON

STAR Group police officers are regularly called to handle disruptive Housing Trust tenants in the western suburbs, a parliamentary inquiry has been told.

Many of the people involved have been described as "clearly mentally ill".

Figures given to the Statutory Authorities Review Committee inquiry into the trust show that so far this financial year there have been 1077 complaints about disruptive tenants.

The trust figures show 30 per cent of complaints were lodged against single males and 21 per cent against single females, with only 4 per cent of complaints involving couples with children.

Labor MP John Rau, who gave evidence to the committee, said the worst area for complaints was The Parks, with Kilburn and Blair Athol also having a high rate of complaints.

Mr Rau, whose electorate of Enfield takes in the areas affected, said he was talking about people who were "not fully in connection with what is going on on this planet".

He said some trust residents were living in "genuine fear and distress".

Many of the people causing this fear wound up coming to the attention of police.

"We have STAR (Group) officers brought out quite regularly to . . . calm these characters down and take them away (for) . . . treatment," he said.

"And all too often these people are returning back to the same environment and the cycle repeats itself."

The committee was told:

TROUBLE IN THE TRUST
Number of complaints since July this year

Type of problem	Number of complaints	% of total
Abusive behaviour	177	16%
Alleged illegal activity	44	4
Communal property dispute	31	3
Noise and nuisance	716	66
Physical assault	27	3
Threatening behaviour	82	8
TOTAL	**1077**	**100**

DISTURBANCE: STAR Group police officers are called in regularly to calm down neighbourly strife in trust areas.

PEOPLE were afraid to come forward and complain, fearing being victimised.

THE trust has residents under surveillance.

ONE tenant had two people turn up at his door and say they were taking over his room. The tenant had to sleep on the lounge room floor and was given "pocket money" from his benefit payments.

"RATBAGS" who understand the system very well "finesse their position of abusing a neighbour to the nth degree and pull back a millimetre before they are booted out". Mr Rau said no one should seriously suggest an 80-year-old woman who had "20-year-old yobbos living next door who are making her life a misery" was going to paint a big target on herself by applying to have the trouble makers removed.

Trust general manager Malcolm Downie said only a very small minority of trust tenants disrupted the lives of their neighbours.

Eviction was pursued only when necessary but so far this financial year there had been eight evictions.

Mental health spending up 128pc

By ANDREA STYLIANOU

FEDERAL funding for mental health increased by $643 million between 1993 and 2002, a national report shows.

This increase of 128 per cent was well above the 40 per cent increase by state governments in the same period, parliamentary secretary for Health and Ageing, Christopher Pyne, said.

The *National Mental Health Report 2004* showed that the Federal Government was responsible for more than one third of total spending on mental health.

State Health Minister Lea Stevens said the 1993-2002 period referred to was when the Liberal Party was in government.

"We know that mental health services were run down for a decade under the previous State Liberal government, and that has now been confirmed by one of their own senior federal colleagues," she said.

"In contrast, since the Rann Government came to office we have boosted annual spending on mental health services by $20 million a year – that's a 15 per cent increase in two years." She also pointed to an $80 million capital works program.

The Advertiser www.theadvertiser.com.au Tuesday, November 30, 2004 13

Fig. 1 *The Advertiser*, November 30, 2004, p. 13

> When people cannot name alternatives, imagine a better state of things, share with others a project of change, they are likely to remain anchored or submerged. (1988, p. 9)

Connell's analysis did not only identify the problems, but also some prescient implications for educational change. These included the importance of negotiated curriculum, teachers' involvement in knowledge-making and the need for whole-school and whole education system responsibility. Connell also pointed out that while external researchers cannot provide solutions, they do 'have information, resources and skills that poor people and their teachers can use' (Connell 1994, p. 140). These insights still apply today. Collectively, teachers and researchers do have resources that can be useful in schools in poor communities and now more than ever we should not vacate that space—schools in high poverty—given the increasing gaps between the wealthy and the poor. As educational researchers, we could consider what might be learned from the Occupy movement, at least as a metaphor for our decision-making about the kinds of work we do, with whom, *where* and why. This will be increasingly important if governments privilege research drawing from 'big data" in framing educational and social policy.

The big data we already have (and ignore?)

French economist Thomas Piketty has argued that social scientists, activists, journalists and commentators and—I would add—educational researchers, 'should take a serious interest in money' (2014, p. 577). He reminds us that 'Those who have a lot of it never fail to defend their interests. Refusing to deal with numbers rarely serves the interests of the least well-off' (2014, p. 577). Knowing how wealth and poverty are produced in particular contexts is crucial knowledge for educators.

Roy (2014, p. 94), writing about capitalism, and its impact on India and Nepal in particular, challenged readers to consider the troubling irony:

> Today we know that the American way of life – the model that the rest of the world is meant to aspire toward – has resulted in four hundred people owning the wealth of half the population of the United States.

Shockingly, she writes:

> As a result of twenty years of the Free Market economy, today one hundred of India's richest people own assets worth one-fourth of the country's GDP while more than 80 percent of the people live on less than fifty cents a day. (Roy 2014, p. 94)

Also, writing about why social inequality persists, Dorling (2014, p. 21) explains that in the UK:

> The top 1 per cent have 53 per cent of the total personal tradable wealth … the next 4 per cent have 10 per cent of the wealth and the next 45 percent have 31 per cent.

Both Dorling and Roy point out that government ministers in the UK and India include members of the wealthiest top 1 %. And Piketty and Dorling agree that the solution is 'progressive tax on capital', but, as Piketty (2014, p. 573) notes, it requires a 'high level of international cooperation and regional political integration'. Otherwise, the rich can park their money somewhere else. This increasing location of wealth in the hands of a few is one of a number of challenges facing western and new democracies (Baker 2009; Piketty 2014) and thereby undermining clear principles for state-based action for social justice. Piketty (2014, p. 737) also emphasises the importance of learning from the complex histories of nations, the importance of analysing the collective representations of social inequality, 'the two-way interaction between inequality dynamics and the evolution of perceptions, institutions and policies' (p. 738) and the 'relatively modest role' (p. 739) of theory in his work (see also Smith 2007) in order to allow for the dynamism of change in specific places.

The big data we already have concerning people in poverty now result in analysts speaking of *extreme poverty* and *deep disadvantage* and *intergenerational inequalities*. Education, if it ever was, is no longer a one-way ticket out of poverty, but it certainly can help to open up possibilities in the lives of particular individuals and their families. Many baby boomer generation educational researchers enjoy such a narrative—being the first in family to go to university. Indeed, many working-class teachers and teacher-educators have been inspired to some degree by such childhoods. However, it may be the case that we need to think very differently about what kinds of education today's youth need and also the limits of educational credentials. While the employment and housing situations for young people are becoming more complex, policy solutions frequently reduce these problems to an alleged lack of literacy and numeracy.

Literacisation and the meritocratic myth: Deflecting responsibility for justice

Making literacy the problem and insisting on a meritocratic approach to improving life futures place the responsibility for change on individual students, families and teachers. It is certainly easier for governments to speak of lifting literacy standards than it is for them to promise to address economic inequality. We suffer in western societies from the failure of governments to tackle the collateral damage of capitalism. Instead of embedding change for social justice in education into policy, as was laid out in the Gonski review (2011), faith continues to be placed in neo-liberal solutions.

The failure of governments to address major structural issues associated with poverty often means that action comes to depend on advocacy, philanthropy and publicity. As I wrote this paper, another Anti-poverty week' came and went (http://www.antipovertyweek.org.au/about/about-anti-poverty-week). It barely made the mainstream media. Interestingly, Anti-Poverty Week was founded by the Social Justice Project in the Law Faculty of the University of New South Wales, and the National Office has been based there since 2004. Apart from UNSW, other sponsors

of the week include Anglicare, Australian Red Cross, Brotherhood of St Laurence and St Vincent de Paul. In 2016, we are also over three quarters of the way into the Second United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (2008–2017) (http://undesadspd.org/Poverty/UNDecadefortheEradicationofPoverty/SecondUNDecadefortheEradicationofPoverty.aspx). Calls to address poverty have become so ubiquitous as to be easily ignored. In affluent nations, it is taken for granted that some people always remain poor. Now the UN world goals talk only about tackling 'extreme poverty'. It is difficult to know how access to more data will address such problems. What has education got to do with this? When did governments opt out of addressing poverty?

In Australia (and elsewhere), we have seen a rise in increasing gaps between rich and poor simultaneously with governments prioritising measurable literacy performance to the extent that it has become high stakes for many schools to do well in NAPLAN in order to maintain or improve their reputations. Most primary schools now have literacy agreements. Many kindergartens and early learning centres include explicit literacy instruction in their programs. High schools frequently have special extension classes, strategic practice for NAPLAN and so on. The literacisation predicted over a decade ago has eventuated (Comber and Hill 2000). We now have big data about literacy in the sense that the entire population of students at years 3, 5, 7 and 9 are tested annually. While the emphasis on literacy is welcome in some respects, the actual literate repertoires on offer to all children in all our schools need to be rich and relevant, to engage with big questions and to be ambitious in outlook. To offer a recycled version of the basics of our own childhoods, which does not address the communication demands or affordances of the present, is an injustice both in terms of how technologies are distributed and who has access to different representational resources (Fraser 2014). The kinds of literacy young people need in order to be active engaged citizens are complex, varied and changing, but inevitably they will need to draw upon all four resources and act as code-breakers, meaning-makers, text-users and text analysts (Luke and Freebody 1997). Pedagogy will need to include attention to the operational, cultural and critical dimensions of literacy across multiple modes and media (Green 1988; Green and Beavis 2012). There is no doubt about the importance of literacy; it is the way that schoolwork and many other aspects of contemporary life gets done in many places. What is in question is what constitutes proper literacy.

Literacy agreements—the dangers with familiar mantra

In schools situated in high poverty locations around Australia, the mantra of school improvement agendas is frequently linked to literacy, especially through the common cry of 'We need to lift our NAPLAN' (Comber 2012). Proffered solutions for low literacy performance are varied—including differentiation, whole-school consistency, literacy blocks, and explicit teaching. Although many different practices are enacted in the name of 'explicit teaching', or 'guided reading', as examples; consistency may be in name only. Many schools have literacy agreements or policies which are developed with the aim of all teachers enacting

a consistent program. It is not that these 'solutions' are bad or good, or right or wrong. If 'everything is dangerous' (Foucault 1983, pp. 231–232), ultimately it is how these literacy agreements play out in practice, what they entail and what comes alongside them. The enactment of policies and pedagogies is partly 'in teachers' hands' (Ball et al. 2012; Louden et al. 2005). I argue that we need to focus more on the 'partly'. How teachers interpret and enact an approach are contingent on many factors, including the children in their room, their own histories, their professional knowledge, their experience and their pedagogical repertoires. It is also contingent upon what else is going on. For example, what if a school decides to tackle literacy and behaviour simultaneously, seeing these as their two most urgent problems. How teachers 'hear' literacy agreement might be inflected with how they 'hear' behaviour routines. With this in mind, I now turn to a discussion of an interaction in a literacy lesson involving a young male student, Simon, and his early career teacher, Tanya, (on short-term contract) in a very disadvantaged school with an ICSEA (Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage: http://www.acara.edu.au/_resources/About_ICSEA_2014.pdf) of 891 and with 91 % in the bottom half and 70 % in the bottom quartile, with 12 % Indigenous students and 12 % who speak a first language other than English.[4]

Tanya had been reading *Charlotte's Web* to the class, and Simon pointed out to her that the word 'radiant' was the name of a type of detergent for washing clothes.

> Tanya: *Thank you, Simon. That's not what it said in the book. Thank you for that.*

In conversation with Lyn after the lesson, Tanya explained: But that's what he keeps telling me, *No, it's washing for my clothes. OK Simon.*

Tanya went on to express her exasperation with Simon's interruptions:

> And the really good thing with *Charlotte's Web* is lots of the words that they couldn't know are the ones that Wilbur asks Charlotte, *What does that mean?* As well, so when she said *salutations,* the second I said that Simon went, *What does that mean?* I was like, *Let me keep reading,* because I knew what was coming because I've known the book from previously, and we started the movie yesterday. Because then we compare the book to the movie … Charlotte says *salutations* in the movie, about where we're up to, and Simon goes, *Wilbur is going to ask what that means now,* and it's just all that connections between the book and the movie, but yeah, *salutations* was one.

One morning soon after Simon arrived in the classroom and greeted Tanya, with, 'Salutations', only to be reminded by her that 'We say good morning here'. 'Interactive trouble' can occur around talking about texts, when teacher logic and student practices conflict (Freebody 2003). Unwittingly, Tanya misses an opportunity to notice Simon's engagement and competence. Instead, her pre-existing assessment of Simon as a 'high functioning autistic' 'on the spectrum' frames his behaviour as an inappropriate interruption, yet again. On several other days, the

[4] I observed in this school over a period of 2 years, alongside my colleague, Lyn Kerkham. I thank her for sharing her fieldnotes and excerpts of the related video recorded transcript.

literacy lesson also evolved in a way that leaves Simon unable to participate. I draw from the research associate's, Lyn Kerkham's fieldnotes made from her observations and video-recording.

> Simon had arrived in the classroom with something to say to his teacher. He wanted to check that today, Tuesday, was 'his day for sharing' … When the students were sitting on the floor ready for the morning routine, Tanya explained that the lights, computer, Smartboard and telephones weren't working this morning and that they wouldn't be able to 'do our songs'. Instead they would have sharing time and then recount writing, based on *On the weekend I* … Even though Tuesday was officially Simon's sharing day, he was not among the five selected to share his news and was very disappointed. After sharing time they recited the days of the week. Tanya asked everyone what day of the week it was and what the weather is like. She continued: 'The date on Friday was 6th of June – who can tell me what the date was on Saturday? On Sunday?' Simon jumps in at this point tells everyone that on Sunday he went with his family to scatter his Nana's ashes in the Port River, the news he had wanted to share earlier. Tanya does not respond to his statement (offered at the wrong time) and continues with her questions about the dates for Monday and Tuesday (today), and how many days there are in June. She asks the class to sing the *Days of the Week* song using the cards with the names of the days displayed above the Smartboard, and then to chant the *Months of the Year* referring to a chart on the pinboard. When Simon returns to his table he eagerly sets out to write about throwing his Nana's ashes in the Port River. After a struggle copying 'On the weekend' from the whiteboard', Simon realizes he has left out finger spaces between the words and starts to erase and correct the problem. Tanya makes herself available to children at Simon's table and writes Port River for him in his personal dictionary. The effort of writing, 'On the weekend I went to the Port River to' is considerable for Simon, and he needs more help to continue.
>
> Simon taps his pencil lightly on the table:'Scuse me (to Tanya who is nearby). He gives her the dictionary and asks: *Can you write frow?*
>
> Tanya: *Yes, Simon, what word did you want help with?*
>
> S: *Frow.*
>
> Tanya: *Frow? So what are you trying to say? Read the sentence to me?*
>
> S: *On the weekend I went to Port River to frow Nana's ashes.*
>
> Tanya: *Oh, th-row.*
>
> S: *Frow Nana's ashes, we had to.*
>
> Tanya: *That's OK. I was a bit confused about what word you wanted.* As she writes the word she names the letters: *T-H-R-O-W, throw. It's a 'th' sound, not an 'f' sound isn't it.*

> S copies 'throw' from the dictionary, and writes 'nanas' (sic) by himself and says the word.
>
> Tanya reminds him that when writing is finished he needs to do the drawing, 'Something nice that you remember'. She suggested 'something to do with your belly'. Simon said that 'his Nana only made spicy' and that he didn't like and that he didn't want to draw his Nana. Tanya insisted.

Tanya does not to turn to Simon or recognise him as resourceful as we might wish. Partly, it is her desire to keep to the rules for behaviour that she has set that prevents her noticing Simon's positive engagement with the tasks. We witnessed many similar occasions where students, who teachers had already assessed as problematic, were ignored, misunderstood or admonished for their efforts. Often, a teacher's insistence on compliance with an arbitrary routine, that made no difference at all to the learning, did matter to students when it was applied unfairly. It is not that Tanya does not care about Simon, but her ability to see and recognise the resources that students bring to literacy/learning may be blinded by her misunderstanding of children's 'backgrounds', in this case Simon's background.

Some years ago, I wrote about the dangers of research 'descriptors' such as 'background' (Comber 1998). 'Background' is still a significant key word in social science, and in educational research, is usually paired with key adjectives such as socio-economic, cultural, linguistic and rural. In interview, it was clear that Tanya's interpretation of Simon's literate behaviour was refracted by her understandings of his 'background'. How this plays out in the constitution of a long-term learner identity and trajectory for Simon, and students like him, is a serious question (Comber 2015; Comber and Kerkham 2016; Dyson 2016; Nuthall 2007; Wortham 2006). Simon becomes 'visible' only when his behaviour disrupts his teacher's routines. Ironically, it occurs in the context of a literacy lesson, when he actually demonstrates interest in the official curriculum. The teacher's earlier assessment of Simon in terms of his learner subjectivity frames his attempts at full participation and literate display as inappropriate.

Children's backgrounds are often invoked when students do not match the teacher's expectations for behaviour and displays of learning (Comber and Kerkham 2016). Teachers talked to us a lot about 'things going on at home' and 'family backgrounds'. How teachers understand the students as learners is often absent from grids purporting to assess 'quality teaching'; yet, recognition is a key move in achieving social justice through education (Nixon and Comber 2006; Comber and Woods 2016). Yet, as I have argued elsewhere:

> Whether standards come to be toxic in their effects depends on the extent to which they are placed alongside other policy ensembles that undermine teacher autonomy. (Comber 2016, p. 158)

Teaching is as much to do with communication of messages to students—about who they are and who they can be—as it is to do with techniques. It is to do with power, negotiation and possibility. Hence, 'feedback' is not just about timing and choice of words. 'Social support' in a classroom is always a matter of micro-

politics. In other words, children have to work to get the social support they need; it cannot be taken for granted as equally available to everyone.

When such instances are considered from a student's perspective, it becomes evident how hard this student works to display what he understands the teacher requires. Simon had planned ahead for his news and even reminded his teacher that it was his day. He has his hand up, but is not chosen. Yet, he returns to his table eager to write his news and works hard to enlist his teacher's help to encode the account. However, even when he achieves the production of his text, Tanya goes on to demand a drawing of his Nana, which is 'what they always do when they finish'. Simon resists the drawing, stating it 'might scare the other children'. He is in fact more aware at that moment of the socio-cultural nature of writing than his teacher, who is focused on skills and routines. Even when he does his best, he remains positioned as troublesome. The teacher's insistence on routines brings literacy and behaviour into a common frame and consequently Simon is considered deviant. This was not an isolated incident. We witnessed many such incidents where teachers' endeavours to follow literacy and behaviour agreements rigidly resulted in their inability to respond to the child right in front of them. The child's work in attempting to accomplish the classroom demands goes unacknowledged. In the process, what gets communicated to different children about who they are, and who they can be, as learners, is reduced to compliance. They are recognised in deficit terms only, and their teachers may remain unconsciously resistant to counter displays of positive engagement in learning.

While teachers might claim to be explicitly teaching and enforcing classroom rules, we can see the learner is a casualty in this process. In this situation, both the child's and the teacher's work remain limited and constrained. With so many early career teachers on short-term contracts and a rising number of unemployed or under-employed teacher graduates, it is not surprising that they feel the pressure to do the right thing as they understand it. In the context of contemporary educational reform and data-driven school improvement agendas, early career teachers may lack examples of expansive and responsive literacy pedagogy in action. The induction of beginning teachers into restrictive policy and practice contexts is worrying, in terms of the possible effects on their educational imaginations and pedagogical repertoires. To conclude this article with glimpses of how it might be otherwise, that is, how children's work and teachers work in literacy lessons might produce more hopeful learner trajectories and critically engaged citizens. I offer several counter-stories in the spirit of hope, rather than naive optimism (Eagleton 2015). As Eagleton recently observed:

> Hope is extinguished when language is obliterated. It is not true that one can repair one's condition simply by lending a name to it, but it is true than one cannot repair it without doing so. (2015, p. 124)

I would add a range of semiotic resources to bolster the linguistic, as illustrated in the following pedagogical examples.

Critical cosmopolitan literacy: Rekindling optimism and speaking back to deficit

Literacy researchers Glynda Hull and Amy Stornaiuolo recently posed a challenge for educational inquiry which is, I believe, at the heart of the research I have been exploring with teachers for some time.

> We are interested in how young people, coming of age at the front-lines of vast economic and social change, acquire and practice habits of mind and aesthetic and ethical imaginations as they envision and converse with others across geographic, cultural and linguistic distance. (2014, p. 16)

The need for a critical cosmopolitan literacy (Hull and Stornaiuolo 2014) that engages young people with past and present and looks to the future would address questions of identity and belonging, care for people, place and planet. In Australia, there is a long history of scholarship and practice in critical literacy, where theorists, researchers and classroom teachers have literally worked alongside each other and engaged in reciprocal learning. For example, early childhood teacher Jennifer O'Brien took insights from Annette Patterson and colleagues Bronwyn Mellor and Marnie O'Neill, Hilary Janks, Carolyn Baker and Allan Luke, and adapted these for working with five- and six-year-old children in a working-class school in Adelaide. Hearing about Jennifer O'Brien's work, Vivian Vasquez and colleagues from Canada and North America came to visit and to share what they were doing, which was informed by politicised whole-language approach. This work crossed boundaries between theory, research, policy, practice, and publishers, between countries and continents and continues to this day. Also inspired by a similar range of theories, research and practice, including also Alan Reid's critical curriculum studies and Pat Thomson's (2002), *Schooling the Rust Belt Kids*, were local Adelaide teachers Marg Wells, Ruth Trimboli and Helen Grant. Over time, they added to their repertoires inspired by the innovative work of Margaret Somerville on place-conscious pedagogy and Bill Green's work with eco-social justice. These teacher-researchers were cultural workers in the Freirian sense, engaging intellectually with complex ideas and assembling sophisticated repertoires of pedagogical practices over time and designing and refining their curriculum designs in negotiation with particular groups of students. No doubt there are other similar stories around Australia, which frequently remain undocumented.

Why tell these historical stories? Too often we, as educational researchers, miss the opportunities to work across sectors, across theories, across places, across approaches and to assemble our disciplinary knowledge over time. In the process, the pedagogical affordances of our work are often ephemeral as we follow trends in theory or methodology or topics, at the expense of the depth. There are two problems with this. Our battles between ourselves undermine the development of educational research as a whole, and we lose the impact that counts—the sustained impact on people, policy and practice. In the meantime of course, while we debate, teachers keep teaching.

What might happen when teachers do understand, design and enact a critical and cosmopolitan literacy program? What if school literacy was considered as a collective accomplishment across time and place in Connell's (1993) sense of justice, where all participants share responsibility for each other's learning? Such an approach requires the situated analysis of the micro-practices of literacy learning to be considered over extended time periods and across places, and as relational and accomplished by people learning and working together. Such work would require long-term situated research (see Comber 2015). And it is to teachers who keep on teaching, from whom I have learned a great deal and owe a debt of knowledge, to whom I turn for the remainder of this paper. The work of teacher-researchers Wells, Trimboli, and Grant is featured for its potential to trigger the imaginations of fellow educators and educational researchers. These teachers share a capacity to collaborate with children to produce culturally significant artefacts that represent complex and contested ideas about place and identity. In terms of Foucault's statement that we are 'freer than we feel', they are able to critically read policy, assessment and curriculum requirements, and to make space and time for ambitious situated projects. Rather than being governed by dominant demands to produce test results and to cover the curriculum, they design tasks with real-world consequences and in so doing incorporate appropriate genres, media and technologies. Their classroom literacy practices recognise the knowledge and languages different children bring to the classroom, explicitly negotiate the processes involved in representation and ensure that their students are able to access the resources they need to engage in complex communication. Their work practices have yet to be over-taken by new public management. Two short examples serve to illustrate what is possible for students, what these teachers enable and why this is important (but see Comber 2016; Grant 2014; Nixon et al. 2012; Wells and Trimboli 2014).

Grant's imagination and new arrival film-makers

Teacher-researcher Helen Grant is a primary school ESL teacher and film-maker. For over three decades now, she has assembled complex theoretical resources and invented ways of working with primary students to recognise their rich cultural, linguistic and semiotic resources, and to assist them to represent their views and participate in negotiation and decision-making. Her archive includes numerous films—*Cooking Afghani Style, Waves of Culture, Hidden Treasures of Adelaide, Sudan, Imagination*, to name just a few. Part of her mission is to produce counter-narratives. *Cooking Afghani Style*, for example, was produced as deliberate act to work against the demonisation of Afghani people, post 9/11. Later, she worked with a colleague on a classroom newspaper entitled *Afghani Newstand*. Grant is a 'cultural worker' in the way that Paulo Freire might have imagined, in that she explores the politics of literacy at the same time as she assists students to develop standard Australian English. In addition, she explicitly explores how democracies are meant to work in her film with the Student Representative Council *Kissing Babies and Pressing the Flesh,* a hilarious spoof on the election process. Her films are not made to sit on shelves, but to entertain, inform and communicate within and beyond the school.

Rarely do we think about teacher practice in terms of a body of work. Teachers' work is sometimes somewhat ephemeral and of the moment. Teachers are assumed to translate theory into practice or implement policy. However, I prefer to think of teachers as educators with complex design (Janks 2010) and semiotic repertoires (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006), with inquiry dispositions (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2009), who build a body of work across their careers. In this formulation, teachers assemble educational and cultural capital over time as well as rich discursive repertoires which they operationalise in various sites of their pedagogical work. Such an approach to teachers' work could well be considered their oeuvre, in the sense of what they create across a career. Grant's knowledge of systemic functional linguistics, critical literacy, multi-literacies, anti-racist theories and more infuses her curriculum designs and pedagogical approaches. In addition, her interest in world music, film, languages and popular culture provides other important resources for connecting with diverse student communities. As an aside, we can appreciate Grant's reported frustration sitting at the end of a school day being in-serviced on differentiation or explicit teaching, or the literacy block, as though she knew nothing. How we position teachers in terms of knowledge production is a crucial area for further educational research. Here, I explore just one text production collectively accomplished by Grant and her students—the film *Sudan*—in terms of its affordances towards students becoming critically literate cosmopolitan citizens.

Sudan is a student-produced documentary film that acknowledges the prior knowledge and life experiences of the Sudanese students in the school about their 'place'. In a sense, it puts them in a privileged position. While the film celebrates elements of their cultural heritage, it avoids the tokenism so prevalent in some versions of multiculturalism. Grant's use of humour problematises any easy romantic views of culture and having the older students recount their journeys out of Sudan, due to war, infuses the film with gravity. There are several key telling moments in the film that illustrate the complexity of critical cosmopolitan literacy.

Because the Sudanese students are pointing the camera, holding the microphones and asking the questions, their English-speaking peers are repositioned as respondents. They have little knowledge of Sudan, and therefore the tables are turned about who is in the know. No longer are the non-Sudanese able to take it for granted that their knowledge is paramount. The film records clear points of disruption where students use a range of strategies to try to repair their equilibrium and return to the normative status quo. Even the teachers struggle to respond when asked on-camera what they know about Sudan. Their bodily awkwardness and lack of confidence in knowing what to say are palpable. When we watch the mainstream respondents squirm, there is a moment of knowing what it is like to be marginalised, to have no easy answers available. Non-Sudanese viewers are 'out of place'.

Grant's pedagogy enables Sudanese students to work with their existing languages, cultural repertoires and life histories at the same time as she introduces new ways of knowing and representing that knowledge. Sudanese students are also shown as people with important stories to tell and as learners assembling new languages and new knowledge of filmmaking. They are also shown as learning about Sudan, reading reference books in the library, learning about African animals at the zoo, finding stories and cultural artefacts by interviewing family and

community members. By valuing what they already know, she positions these students as having significant cultural and educational capital. In Thomson's (2002) terms, she allows children to open their 'virtual back-pack' and to make use of their 'funds of knowledge' (Moll et al. 1992). 'Place' is one of those resources, and includes even painful experiences in real places, and journeying through those places as refugees. Grant helps students revisit their homelands and their journeys with maps and globes, and gives them skills and confidence by rehearsing English language accounts of how they came to Australia.

Students edit the footage and decide what remains. Such an account repudiates all-too-frequent claims that children have 'no language' or 'no experience' to draw upon due to their 'backgrounds'. The film disrupts the usual relationships between recently arrived students who speak English as a second language and their white peers and even teachers. Who knows what is interrogated. Given the state of international relations between people of different races, cultures, languages and religions, the need for school to be a genuine meeting place where there is 'opportunity for something new' and where 'place must be negotiated' (following Massey 2005), this kind of work is beyond urgent. Rather than literacies of compliance, we need critical and collective projects where young people engage in decision-making and meaning- making together—sharing responsibility for the production of texts that have real purposes and audiences to anticipate and consider. Without these social consequences, students do not have opportunities to consider literate practices as social and political practices. For example, writing a persuasive text for NAPLAN about whether too much money is spent on toys or whether rules or laws should be changed is not a neutral task! Children need to learn about the expectations of different readers, beyond the rules that are concerned only with grammar, spelling and punctuation. They need to understand the socio-historical political situations in which their texts might be read and viewed.

Wells and Trimboli's good neighbourhoods

Wells and her colleague Trimboli have long explicitly worked against 'texts of terror' (Rappaport 2000, p. 2)—representations of people in poverty that contribute to shame and blame depictions of the poor, such as the depiction of the neighbourhood that are shown in Fig. 1. Images of violence and reports of drug-dealing and fear are not atypical of the ways in which poorer suburbs are portrayed in the media both in Australia and internationally. Places of poverty become no-go zones for those who can avoid them. Children growing up in such communities can be subjected to these community narratives (Rappaport 2000) and may come to understand themselves and their place accordingly. Wells and Trimboli have been teaching for well over a decade in a poor area in South Australia undergoing urban renewal, where old post-World War Two Housing Trust dwellings have been gradually replaced by affordable housing targeting young families. Three small primary schools were demolished in order to build a super school where both teachers continue to work. Here, I briefly discuss their most recent work conducted during 2015 as part of a project entitled 'Literacy and the imagination: Working with place and space as resources for children's learning' (Comber and Woods

forthcoming) which focused on questions of belonging and the kind of neighbourhood in which the students would like to live. Wells conducted her inquiries with a Year 4/5 class designing her work through the geography curriculum, while Trimboli worked with a Year 6 class designing her work from a range of social studies, including the history and experience of migration. In this paper, for reasons of space, my focus is on Well's practice. Her two-term curriculum project built student knowledge of the design features of local houses and those in different climates, sustainable housing, house design, land sales and local government planning. Students conducted field work, took photographs, wrote formal letters to local government and designed and constructed their preferred house for their preferred location. Wells was delighted that at last geography was an official part of the primary school curriculum (however short-lived that proved to be). She also planned related work in Mathematics, Design and Technology, and Science and English using the Australian Curriculum. The key inquiry questions to be investigated with her class were as follows:

1. How do people and environment influence one another?
2. How do people influence the human characteristics of places and the management of spaces within them?

They began by reviewing a video of the local area and a range of photos of various buildings which Wells had made, together noticing their features and appropriating some of the concepts of architecture to describe the inclines of roofs and so on. Next, using the range of student experiences, they investigated on-line the kinds of houses that are designed for people living in different climates. They also used interactive web-sites which explored sustainable housing. After this initial work, they planned a field trip of the local area near the school. They brainstormed questions they would like to investigate on their walk and planned to take photos of a range of local houses, buildings and empty blocks. In addition, Wells had managed to source aerial photographs of the neighbourhood which indicated a change in the pattern of dwellings over the five-year period. We can see how Wells moved from the familiar to the unfamiliar, from the local to the distant, from the visual to the verbal and from the everyday language to the technical terms (e.g. 'triple glazing', 'solar panels') as she helped students to build new knowledge (see also Comber and Nixon 2011). This trip was focused around the explicit intention of identifying and recording how many vacant blocks there were in the area. Wells' plans for students were to have an auction where they would bid for the block of their choice after proving a rationale for their selection and then design and build a model of their desired home. Similarly, Trimboli's students investigated what made people from another place feel welcome and what a good neighbourhood might consist of, which they then designed on paper and reported to peers.

During the field trip, students noted different types of housing, boarded-up empty houses and empty blocks of land. While the Westwood Urban redevelopment project had been operating for over a decade, it was still not complete. After their field trip, they shared their findings and brainstormed further questions. Realising that empty blocks and boarded-up dilapidated houses had been a feature of the

streetscape for some time, they decided to construct a letter to the state housing authority. Here is an excerpt from the letter:

> We are studying our local area in Geography, looking at land use and where people live.
>
> We are doing a Field Study of blocks of land near our school. The blocks are bordered by Hanson Rd, Eighth Ave, Eton St and Ridley Grove.
>
> This is a large area of land that has many fenced off areas. The block of land facing Hanson Rd only has four houses remaining. We have noticed that while many new houses have been built close by these blocks have stayed untouched.
> We would like to know:
>
> 1. Why did the houses get knocked down?
> 2. Where did the people go who lived in these houses?
> 3. Why has the land been vacant for so long?
> 4. What are the plans for the blocks of land?
> 5. Are you going to build on the land or sell it?
> 6. Will the houses be for sale or be rental housing?
> 7. What will happen next?
> 8. When will something be built there?

These questions focus on what has already happened in a place, the effects on different people, what is going on now and why, and plans for the future. We know that housing is one of the biggest problems facing people with low incomes and that homelessness is increasing in Australia. Wells introduces primary school children to the politics of people in places with respect to housing through examining what is occurring locally. There is not the space here to examine how other aspects of the curriculum unfolded. However, it is important to note that it culminated in the building of a model neighbourhood, in the sense of children creating the houses they imagined and designed in the neighbourhood spaces they negotiated.

Wells, Trimboli and Grant carefully exploit the particularities of social and material change to negotiate a curriculum that is of the place, of the moment, and of the people. Their complex ambitious approaches put literacy to work as an enabling practice—situated, relational, local, but connected and political. Their work has the potential to expand educational imagination and practice. They assist students to properly occupy space and use language and semiotic resources for hope.

Concluding thoughts and more questions to ask…

The classroom vignettes taken from several research studies which I have described here demonstrate both the risks and the potential of not recognising and recognising, respectively, student knowledge and experience acquired from their lifeworlds and histories. We can see that Simon's significant news is sidelined, and his attempts to

appropriate the language of literature are dismissed, when he fails to display the protocols of classroom interaction that his teacher expects. In contrast, we can see the power of recognition and learning forms of representation (Fraser 2014) when Helen Grant positions recent Sudanese arrivals as experts and explicitly assists them to produce a fully developed documentary film. In doing so, she inducts them into new repertoires of literate practices—cosmopolitan multi-literacies—by giving them access to her knowledge and expertise as a language teacher and film-maker. Her classroom and the schoolyard become powerful sites for negotiating something new (Massey 2005).

Grant, along with Wells and Trimboli, makes school a site for inquiry, for engaging with what is going on in the wider community, locally and globally. They systematically involve student in genuine research—interviewing, field trips, library research, Internet searching, questioning, observing, photographing and seeking information from government sources. At the same time, their classrooms are places for pooling questions—learning to become an inquiry collective. This, in Connell's (1993) terms, is starting with 'the principle of the least advantaged'. Hence, we see children asking where the people have gone, whose houses have been demolished and why the blocks of land are still empty; Sudanese students pointing out to their peers, 'Of course we have cars in Sudan. Why not?' The space made by these teachers is not simply a tokenistic brainstorm of children's ideas, but serious critical engagement with things that matter. The fact that this can be done is cause for rekindling optimism. The fact that such pedagogy appears to be rare means that the task of documenting critical and powerful pedagogies in places of poverty is urgent. Early career teachers need to see more than the technical delivery of the literacy basics. They need to understand that their theoretical understandings of social justice and critical literacy can be operationalised and accomplished in actual classrooms, and they need to be able to imagine what that might look like and sound like.

Arundhati Roy (2014, p. 95) sees hope in the Occupy movement challenging the top 1 % and suggests some rules for moving forward—an end to cross-ownership in businesses; natural resources and infrastructure cannot be privatized; everybody must have the right to shelter, education and health care; and the children of the rich cannot inherit their parents' wealth. It is important to interrogate the directions being taken in Australia with respect to wealth and poverty, and education. It is interesting to think about how, as educational researchers, we might deliberately *occupy* this space, especially if some policies and practices that produce these inequities are beyond the nation state, as we have formerly known it (Fraser 2014).

As educational researchers, we are not exempted from the challenges of representation, nor from considering how and where and with whom we spend our time or what we recognise and ignore, that is what we 'do' in our work. We also need to examine our theoretical frameworks and what they leave out. The extent to which access to quality education involves the negotiation of power must not be lost! Critical incidents between students and teachers, uncovered in research, still need to be told—not to make teachers the object of blame, but to understand how interactive trouble is produced in situ. Such examples might be used to re-educate ourselves and our students in teacher education, so that educators' interpretive

repertoires for understanding poverty, race, gender and place are expanded or even re-framed. Teachers have tended to be the subjects of both critical sociologies of education (see Smith 1987) and also neo-liberal analyses of the main problems with schools. I believe that the educational community has reached a point where we need to re-imagine our research relationships. What are the relationships between researchers' work, teacher-educators' work, school-based educators' work and policy-makers' work in the production of knowledge and action for social justice? What constitutes social justice in educational research practice? To what extent is the work of educating the children of the poor gendered? How might educational researchers work to put poverty and education seriously back on the policy agenda in ways that speak against deficit? How might we seriously invest in educational research with (and about) teachers who have made a difference long-term to successive cohorts of graduates? What kinds of 'big data' would we want collected? What might that enable us to do differently?

I want to consider the implications of such work for educational research and teacher education more broadly as increasing numbers of the baby boomers leave teaching, teacher education and educational research. What might critical and collaborative educational researchers need to do? What might be the legacy of our privilege in conducting research? Where do we, as educational researchers, stand with regard to critique and positive critical discourse analysis involving serious examination of what is being accomplished over time in terms of student learning (see Nuthall 2007)? We need to keep doing policy and practice critique; we need to step up our analysis of the complexity of what is accomplished for, by and with different young people over time across educational trajectories and similarly with teachers and groups of teachers. We need to be distracted by the everyday, not the theory-blinded. Indeed, we need to be attentive to the everyday, on the ground and in real time. That is where the work gets done. Abstract phenomena, such as economic inequality, international conflicts and injustices are experienced by people living in particular places and impact on the work of teachers and upon children learning. The dynamism of changing places and populations also offers new possibilities for 'the negotiation of multiplicity' (Massey 2005, p.141). Classrooms, at their best, are sites for such negotiation.

In summary, I have argued for reimagining teachers' work and ways of documenting the positive practices that offer potential for enduring educational change and durable learner trajectories. I have argued for re-invigorating democratic research communities to include teachers, school leaders, policy workers and young people, for educational researchers to remain on the front-line with teachers and students in places of poverty, because that is where some of the hardest work is done.

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