

# EDUCATING FOR SUSTAINABLE RURAL FUTURES

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## ABSTRACT

*Classrooms and their pedagogy have historically been characterised by a disconnection from the community outside, and this trend is particularly problematic for rural schools (Bryden & Boylan, 2004; Corbett, 2006). There is reduced encouragement for teachers to connect classroom and community with the current focus on standardised testing, national curriculum, and guidance on teaching strategies, all developed for students in general, without reference to local place. However, rural students differ from their metropolitan peers, particularly in their cultural and social experiences, and in the nature of their physical surroundings. For these reasons most rural students have few opportunities to bring their experiences to their learning in school, nor do they always have the background knowledge that will assist with their comprehension of texts and learning to produce texts that fulfil a particular purpose.*

*Whether or not students attending rural schools decide to remain in their rural community it is important they develop good literacy abilities so they and their community can prosper in the future. Rural students need to learn to become critical thinkers, able to use initiative, to be creative and effective communicators, and entrepreneurial (Darling-Hammond, 2010). A means for engaging rural students with quality literacy learning is place-based education, a pedagogy that puts place at the centre. With this approach students can be given the opportunity to pursue questions relevant to their local place, or identify questions that are important to themselves and their local place. In this way students can also develop stronger ties with and understanding of their local place and of themselves. This paper will consider some examples of place-based learning, and outline ways this approach can promote learning, and benefit the community outside the school.*

## INTRODUCTION

While there are some rural students who succeed in primary and secondary schooling to a high level, there are too many who do not, as is evident in the levels of average academic achievement of rural students, for example in measures of literacy and numeracy (McMillan & Marks, 2003), school retention (Curtis & McMillan, 2008), results at the end of schooling (Marks, McMillan, & Hillman, 2001), and participation in tertiary education (Marks, 2007; Marks, Fleming, Long, & McMillan, 2000; McMillan, 2005). While these measures can be subjected to critical reading, and their inaccuracy needs to be recognised, they do highlight the importance of carefully questioning curriculum and pedagogy for rural students. I argue that this questioning is important for achieving better social outcomes for rural students and more sustainable futures for rural communities. Rural communities are more likely to remain sustainable when community members are able to discern problems, and lead the community in identifying creative solutions and achieving successful outcomes. These future requirements point to the importance of successful quality education including literacy, for all rural students, both those who will stay in their local community and those who will leave for metropolitan or other rural locations.

## LITERACY

A useful definition of literacy when thinking about current and future literacy needs of our rural students can be based on the work of Gee (1990, 2012). Gee suggests that a person is literate when

they are able to communicate clearly with people from at least one social group in addition to the one into which they were initially socialised as a child. That is, to be literate is to be able to communicate in a variety of ways with some individuals who are different from themselves. This theoretical stance implies that literacy is primarily (or possibly exclusively) an activity conducted for social purposes, rather than being about skills applied correctly so that one can be understood (Street, 2003). It also suggests that individuals are continually learning new forms of communication, or new literacies, as they engage with different social groups, and seek to achieve different outcomes in new settings (social or work, and including school), rather than literacy being something that is static. An effective communicator will select an appropriate vocabulary, style of language, and text form, for each social situation where they wish to contribute or influence an outcome in a particular way, along with other appropriate social behaviours including dress, gestures, and equipment. Schools are sites where students are required to learn to communicate in a range of different ways, all at the one time, as they are asked to engage with different learning areas, each with a particular way of using language, sharing ideas or information, constructing arguments or discussions, and set of underlying values or ideology (Gee, 1990, 2012).

In response to our rapidly changing world and the increasingly diverse ways in which communication is being achieved, the New London Group (1996) proposed the concept of multiliteracies. This group of literacy theorists identified as important the diverse social and cultural ways in which communication is achieved, including the different types of texts used for communication, and the increasingly diverse modes of communication (e.g. written, visual, gestural, oral, spatial, digital, to name some) (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012). To teach solely with a focus on a skills approach to literacy benefits mainly students who have the social capital to understand what is being taught, and who value what is being offered, but this is not engaging for students who value gaining practical skills, particularly those in the middle years of schooling and beyond (Corbett, 2005). Nor will that pedagogical approach necessarily equip today's students to adapt to future changes in communication or the adoption of new literacy practices important for personal or work purposes or for contributing to their local community (Street, 2003).

The literacies of rural populations, where they differ from those of the mainstream population, are often stigmatised as lesser, deficient, insignificant and liable to be misunderstood (Donehower, 2007; Schafft, Killeen, & Morrissey, 2010; Schell, 2007). This situation needs to change if Australia is to prosper and be able to fully utilise resources in rural locations, particularly for horticultural, agricultural, pastoral and conservation work, or to strive for rural sustainability. If students are to become literate individuals who are able to live productive adult lives they need to be able to communicate in a number of ways. They need to be able to successfully communicate with others so they are able to influence recipients of their communication to act in the desired ways, for example when pursuing information, seeking financial support for a new project, or convincing others of the merits of a particular viewpoint. Students who are able to participate in rich classroom learning programs or extra-curricular activities are reported to benefit in a range of ways including in their literacy abilities (Heath, 2012; Wright & Mahiri, 2012).

## **TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY EDUCATION FOR RURAL STUDENTS**

Education for non-metropolitan students is too often based on what occurs in metropolitan schools, a problem even for the earliest years of schooling (Breen et al., 1994). Rather than having links with what is present outside the classroom, or drawing on what students bring with them into the classroom from their cultural capital and life experiences, that is, their virtual school bag (Thomson, 2002), or their funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992), students are encouraged to do much of their learning from textbooks and other commercially produced learning materials. Teachers then need to work to engage students, to find links with their lives, and to convince students that the effort to learn the set material is worthwhile (Smith, 2002).

Sher and Sher (1994) state:

*Rural educators understand the necessity of preparing their students to succeed in the urban context (given that many students eventually migrate to a city). And yet, their*

*students also must be equipped to be successful in the local rural context. There is an expectation that rural schools prepare their students to function well biculturally: as people who may move back and forth between city and country many times. By contrast, there is no expectation placed upon urban schools to prepare their students for anything beyond city life. (p. 39)*

The nature of the rural context and the future needs of each rural community vary, with factors such as community size, distance from metropolitan centres, sustainability of facilities and services in the community, the nature of ownership of private businesses, cost pressures in dominant industries in the area, exposure of those industries to foreign markets, the propensity to suffer from natural disasters, and the state of natural resources. Each will shape what is likely to be required of long term residents in the future. Students who remain in their rural community, or another similar community will be able to contribute to community sustainability if they are able to lead, communicate effectively, be innovative, and find creative solutions for issues that arise in their community (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Edmondson, 2003). They will also need to be able to participate in or conduct profitable and sustainable businesses. If rural communities cannot benefit from residents who are able to contribute locally in significant ways, and where required also act globally, the trend for people from metropolitan locations to take leadership roles in rural communities will continue (Edmondson, 2003; Kelly, 2009), or these communities stand to lose essential services and facilities, and become unsustainable.

## **PLACE-BASED EDUCATION**

Place-based education provides students with connections between the classroom and their lives and their community outside the classroom and beyond the school fence (Gruenewald & Smith, 2008). As Smith (2002) points out, place-based education is not about replacing the national curriculum but about having a better balance between the local and that which is beyond the lives of the students. It is about engaging students in personally relevant learning, and assisting them to then make connections with the more distant. Place-based education can provide opportunities for learning the skills and knowledge that will enable students to understand and apply knowledge that is more distant from their lives.

Smith (2002) explains place-based education as a teaching approach that enables students to adopt local environments. He has identified five different dimensions of the local environment relevant to learning about and interacting with the local place: social, cultural, economic, political, and natural or ecological. While Smith and Sobel (2010) discuss four domains, cultural dimensions of community life, environmental and natural resource issues, economic possibilities and entrepreneurialism, and induction into citizenship, the earlier five dimensions (Smith, 2002) are used here as these allow a distinction for cultural projects in indigenous communities. This is an important division to make for the Australian context and for the purposes of this study. The social element is used to identify a focus on the interactions and activities that occur in the local area, that is, the types of activities that commonly occur, together with the social concerns of the members of the community. The cultural dimension includes the values, cultural practices and ideologies that underpin the lives of people in the local area, and can include spirituality and religious practices. In particular, differences in cultural practices between communities are influenced by the presence and proportion of indigenous people who observe their people's traditional cultural practices. Difference is also important in multicultural communities where there is a mix of different cultural practices from other parts of the world. The third of Smith's dimensions is economic, with a focus on the financial and entrepreneurial activities and the main sources of local incomes. Another dimension is political, that is, the decision-making processes that impact on the lives of people in the local area, and ways people can contribute to these processes. The fifth dimension is the natural or ecological, including the local flora and fauna together with the natural resources – water, soils, coasts and possibly air quality, aesthetics and noise.

Place-based education provides an opportunity for students to build an understanding of the local place where they live, and opportunities for students to participate in working for change. Gruenewald (2003a, 2003b) has argued that critical pedagogy and place-based education can converge to give a critical pedagogy of place. He points out future citizens are then equipped to

challenge what is assumed and taken for granted, and have the knowledge and skills to have a direct impact on the local place. In his work he has identified two dimensions of a critical pedagogy of place. The first, decolonisation is about moving away from the dominant culture, recognising disruption and injury, and how they are caused. Decolonisation can also include work to renew traditions and cultural patterns. Reinhabitation, the other of Gruenewald's dimensions, is about learning to live well in a place, understanding the local ecology and how it has been injured and disrupted in the past, and finding ways to nurture, conserve, and protect both people and the ecosystem. Reinhabitation and decolonisation can occur through critical engagement with local studies and the use of literacies for communication in local communities. Both can be identified in the next section of this paper where some Australian examples of place-based education for each of Smith's (2002) dimensions are discussed, highlighting the impacts of these programs on students and on their local community.

## SOME SELECTED AUSTRALIAN EXAMPLES OF PLACE-BASED EDUCATION

Each of the examples of place-based education discussed here can be accessed through publically available publications. The stories of the Aboriginal communities, including their schools, are told through award winning picture books. Information about the Kitchen Garden Program is available in book form and also via a website. The political and natural/ecological cases are available in academic literature. The entrepreneurial case study school has been visited and more recently a student presentation has been enjoyed, but information for this case study has been sourced from the school website.

**Social:** Teachers over the years, particularly teachers of history, English and social studies in secondary schools, and primary teachers when covering these areas of the curriculum, have included in their program students recording local history, for example conducting interviews then transcribing, writing and redrafting texts suitable for retention in the local library or local history collection (see Bartholomaeus (2012) pp. 148-153). An example of teachers responding to social opportunities in the local area include work in schools in the communities surrounding Auburn in rural South Australia where students are encouraged to write creative and information texts about C.J. Dennis, Australia's 'larrikin poet', who was born in the town. This work has complemented and contributed to a local festival celebrating the life of C.J. Dennis.

A national example of learning in the social dimension is the Kitchen Garden Program founded by Stephanie Alexander and promoted across Australia. This program assists schools to establish a school garden that will produce an array of fresh vegetables and herbs, and a kitchen where students learn to cook the fresh produce and then have the opportunity to eat what they have produced. The program is for primary aged children with the intention that the kitchen garden is integrated into the curriculum (Alexander & Dollard, 2006). Links to literacy, numeracy, science, health and personal development in this program are readily identifiable. Expertise for delivery of the gardening and cooking activities usually needs to be brought into the school, and for rural schools this can mean the part-time employment of local people. Additional assistance is also helpful, providing an important role for volunteers, and so introducing to the school another set of people who may be parents, members of the extended families of students, or other community members. Given the resourcing requirements for the program donations of funds, materials, expertise and labour by businesses and members of the community are necessary, adding further to the links between the school and community. Where schools in rural communities have joined the program news of the commencement of the program has appeared in local newspapers. Evaluation of the program showed that it was particularly effective in engaging students with challenging behaviours and those who were not succeeding in the academic curriculum (Block et al., 2009). The Kitchen Garden Program is assisting students to understand more about producing good food, and healthy eating, increasingly important issues in Western society.

**Cultural:** Grouped under this dimension of place-based education are two examples, each developed to assist Aboriginal students to learn about the culture and history of their people and to support literacy learning. These examples have enabled students to encounter the spirituality of their people

and land. There is also the opportunity for this learning to extend into students' lives outside the classroom as they interact with adults and elders in their everyday lives. There has been sufficient pride in some programs developed to retain Aboriginal cultural knowledge and pass it on to the next generation in the school setting, that books have been published, and some have won awards from the Children's Book Council of Australia. The *Papunya school book of country and history* (Papunya School & Wheatley, 2001) was written by the Papunya School community with the assistance of Nadia Wheatley, a well-recognised Australian author. The book includes some dreaming stories of the local area, the history of the community since the arrival of Europeans, settlement at Papunya, and the history of the school. Illustrations include some produced by artists in the community (it is a community renowned for its artists), photographs and pictures created by students of the school. This book is now a literacy and cultural resource for use in the school.

Another example of cultural learning for Aboriginal students is found in *Our world: Bardi Jaawi life at Ardiyooloon* (One Arm Point Remote Community School, 2010). This cultural program came about as a result of the community elders and other Bardi people recognising a need and asking the school for the opportunity to incorporate cultural education into the school program as a way of bringing knowledge held by the local community into the school. Some community members have become the team that teach students activities such as fish trapping, fish poisoning, stories, art, dance, collecting bush foods and medicines, and spear and boomerang making. The cultural leaders organise a cultural concert each term, and have led several cultural camps ([http://www.daretolead.edu.au/STORY\\_One\\_Arm\\_Point\\_WA](http://www.daretolead.edu.au/STORY_One_Arm_Point_WA) accessed 28/10/12). The school has also produced books and DVDs in Bardi, Aboriginal English and Standard Australian English and students have begun learning Bardi at school. While the annual report of One Arm Point Remote Community School indicates there are still issues with school attendance among some families, the academic achievements indicated by the NAPLAN results are pleasing, with the school results above that of like schools in many categories, similar in some and below in just one category (<http://www.myschool.edu.au/MainPages/SchoolProfileRep.aspx?SDRSchoolId=48613&DEEWRIId=0&CalendarYear=2011&RefId=ktjYCR0l8c7myQ0ZvxkaHw%3d%3d> accessed 28/10/12). The books and DVDs are being shared with other principals as a model of a contextualised cultural program. A song about healthy eating is a good advertisement for what is happening at One Arm Point Remote Community School for its students ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JHG9buTPZls\\_&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JHG9buTPZls_&feature=related) accessed 28/10/12). *Our world: Bardi Jaawi life at Ardiyooloon* is one product of the cultural program and comprises a range of text types including stories, recounts of some cultural activities, and procedures, such as making fish poison, treating snake bites and recipes for cooking shell fish. Artwork by the students is also a feature of the book. A critical reading of the text indicates an engaging program that combines the traditional with the modern, for example some of the means used for catching fish and the ingredients used for cooking are from mainstream Australian society.

*Cultural programs can play an important role in any rural school, and can be particularly important in those communities where there are people of other cultural backgrounds, such as groups of students from refugee families. Place-based learning education with a cultural focus can contribute to building better understanding of different cultural groups, and promote inclusivity and cohesion in the community. Care needs to be taken to ensure these programs are not tokenistic or promoting voyeurism.*



**Figure 1: Release of *Our World: Bardi Jaawi Life at Ardiyooloon***

Source: <http://www.abc.net.au/local/photos/2010/11/02/3054887.htm> Accessed 28/10/12

**Economic / entrepreneurial:** An interesting example of economic place-based learning is the School Shop run by the Mypolonga Primary School. The shop opened in 1994 in a disused post office building opposite the school, and has expanded to sell goods to passengers from the Murray Expedition Paddle Steamer who arrive at the school each Friday. Students, in their class groups, make goods for sale in the shop, and sell other goods on consignment. Students have responsibility for greeting visitors from the boat, serving them in the shop, giving a tour of their school, counting money, balancing the finances each week, and recording their sales. The students in the School Shop video (<http://mypolongaps.sa.edu.au/wp/?portfolio=shop-movie> accessed 28/10/12) mention several times that it is important they are accurate in their counting of money and financial recording as they are handling other people's money. The learning outcomes from this program include students learning how to communicate, handle money and keep good financial records. They are also learning how to run a business and older students mentor younger students in their roles. Younger students who are not involved with the customers on Friday mornings work in the school garden. As the letter included as Figure 2 illustrates, students are communicating with people from a variety of locations, including, potentially, overseas visitors.

Learning outcomes for students at Mypolonga Primary School are such that parents in the local area seek to have their children enrolled in the school (<http://mypolongaps.sa.edu.au/wp/> accessed 28/10/12). An additional benefit for the students is the opportunity to make group decisions about how money earned in the school shop will be used, and the variety of experiences they are able to experience as they participate in school excursions that might not be possible otherwise. Students, teachers and parents all have a pride in their small local primary school.

Figure 2: A Notice on the Mypolonga Primary School Homepage <http://mypolongaps.sa.edu.au/wp/> accessed 28/10/12

*Letter received from Visitor*

*"Dear Students,  
Bill and I visited your shop on Friday 14th September during our five day Proud Mary Cruise, and for us it was a highlight of our trip. You all work so very hard to produce your wonderful stock and with the guidance and help from school volunteers, you are learning so much.*

*We bought luggage tags, dried apricots and lots of pens, we also bought two bags in the shop for our grand-daughters, one bag is now with Chelsea in Northern Ireland, United Kingdom and the other is with Jasmine in New Hampshire, United States of America. They are both delighted with them.*

*Keep up your wonderful work.*

*With much love and happy memories  
Ruth and Bill*



**Political:** Politically focused place-based education can involve students seeking to exercise or influence policies that affect their lives. This focus can involve engagement with controversial topics teachers in rural communities often seek to avoid (Smith & Sobel, 2010). An example of activities where students learnt about influencing local policy is from a metropolitan school located in Adelaide where students were given opportunities to develop and communicate their views about local amenity, redevelopment of their area, and plans for a new park area. Comber, Thomson and Wells (2001) explain the activities of a class of junior primary students from a disadvantaged part of Adelaide, referred to as 'The Parks'. Marg Wells, the teacher, asked her students to draw pictures and write captions that expressed three wishes they had about where they lived, something that worried them and something that made them angry (Comber, et al., 2001). From these drawings she identified two main themes or issues of importance to the students: the poor condition of the few street trees, and the lack of parks in the area. In response to the students' issues Wells readjusted her curriculum. She organised walks around the local area where most of the students lived, armed with maps and pencils for recording trees and their condition. As they walked students asked questions about who was responsible for the street trees. Other discussion amongst students during these walks highlighted for Wells concerns her students had about plans for the removal of public housing, and development of a new subdivision on the cleared land. This urban renewal involved new housing for a different social mix of residents. In this disadvantaged community many of the residents faced being moved out of the area to make way for the new housing and roads, and some students' homes were designated for demolition or removal. The questions about the role of local government (after discovering their responsibility for the street trees) and the process of urban renewal led to two lots of research by students: about roles and responsibilities in their local area; and about the plans for urban renewal. They communicated with both the local government authorities and those in charge of the urban renewal program (with whom they shared their plans for a new park area) (Comber, et al., 2001). These students were engaged in challenging learning for junior primary students, including how to conduct research, to use technology and becoming competent with a range of communication genres. It involved them in authentic literacy learning, and about ways to have a voice to potentially influence what happens. Their learning activities also had these young students exploring several community issues, rather than simply listening to the talk amongst adults in the community and worrying about what they had heard.

While published examples from the political dimension of place-based learning in rural schools have not been identified there would be smaller projects where students have been given the opportunity to research aspects of school facilities or practices that are of concern to them, for example use of playground areas. At times teachers will also engage with questions that arise in class that can lead to learning activities that promote understanding about the importance of literacy and numeracy for researching and developing an opinion about a situation, and seeking to promote that opinion with a view to influencing relevant policies. Also, some place-based education activities can evolve into a political focus, for example students monitoring water quality may then wish to take action.

**Natural / ecological:** An example of students learning about the natural environment and the ecology of the local water resource, is Kingston-on-Murray Primary School in South Australia, a case study included in *Literacies in Place: Teaching Environmental Communications* (Comber, Nixon, & Reid, 2007). Kingston-on-Murray is a small town on the banks of the Murray River located between Loxton and Waikerie, and the school had a teaching principal and another teacher appointed as a 0.9 position in 2011. Therefore some learning areas are taught as two classes, R-2 and 3-7, and other learning areas are taught in an R-7 class ([http://www.komps.sa.edu.au/?page\\_id=5](http://www.komps.sa.edu.au/?page_id=5) accessed 28/10/12). The ecological learning at Kingston-on-Murray Primary School is outlined by Pfeiler (2007), a project coordinator in the Upper Murray area. Pfeiler records that the students she observed were involved in monitoring water quality with Waterwatch, with analysis of eight elements of water from the Murray: salinity, turbidity, temperature, pH, conductivity, reactive phosphorus, dissolved oxygen and nitrogen. Instead of sampling and analysing water quality quarterly, usual practice with the Waterwatch program, the school has chosen to do this weekly on a Tuesday. As a result students are able to consider causes of fluctuations in each of the measures in the light of their knowledge of what has been occurring in the local area, such as recent rainfall or increased flows from upstream. Students report their observations through a regular Friday segment with the local radio station. Awareness of this monitoring and reporting by students was sufficient for a member of the

community to contact the school with concerns about the collapse of a section of river bank after a weekend of activity by speed boat users. Pfeiler reports that the students then went for a walk to observe the damage themselves and decided to take action. Students wrote letters to the local government authority and the local newspaper and designed posters to display around the town. Their action prompted community level discussion and also awareness amongst students of the variety of opinions there can be on an issue in addition to the conservation viewpoint.

In the school's 2011 Annual Report an explanation of the school's context and continued engagement with the ecology program is given:

*Our school has strong environmental focus, with solid links to the community and regional environmental groups. We have developed a large network of agencies involved in Environmental Ed and our staff are seen as leaders in the field. Our students report Waterwatch on ABC radio and Loxton News. Students engage in many hands-on activities centred on the river and riverine area. Students lead other school groups in their engagement with the River Murray through the Riverlinx camps. We host approximately four schools per year on camps. (<http://www.komps.sa.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/Microsoft-Word-School-Annual-Report-20112.pdf> accessed 28/10/12).*

Pfeiler (2007) reported that students at Kingston-on-Murray Primary School were also involved with a local ranger working at Banrock Station, a property that includes wetlands, floodplain, typical Mallee scrub and viticulture. Through this program students learnt about endangered species, how to find evidence of animal activity and interpret what they found, and the work involved in species recovery. Later, students prepared and shared their knowledge of this conservation work with a newly arrived ranger. Students at this small school have learnt to communicate their ecological knowledge to a variety of audiences, including the public and students from other locations, and to use a variety of modes of communication such as audio, face-to-face and print. Successive cohorts of students have gained the respect of the community for their work, along with valuable understandings of local ecology that will equip them well for dealing with the significant ecological issues that are a part of living sustainably in the Murray Darling Basin.

**Integrated place-based learning activity:** An important place-based program is 'Special Forever' which ran from 1993 to 2010. It was an environmental communications program sponsored by the Murray-Darling Basin Commission and the Primary English Teaching Association. The program involved approximately 20,000 students in environmental communications each year across the whole catchment. The final product each year was a selection of poems, short stories and art work published in an eagerly awaited annual anthology. The program was so popular it was extended well beyond the originally planned two years, and later also included some multimedia productions that were published on the Special Forever website. The discourses published in the anthologies 1993 to 2007 included literary-English, conservation, tourism and recreation, historical, family, industrial-agricultural, geo-scientific, and Indigenous (Cormack & Green, 2007). This program allowed students to think about the place in the catchment that was important to them in a wide variety of ways and to communicate their feelings and ideas about that place. Many of the students' contributions can be fitted into the social dimension but the program gave students the opportunity to range widely. Some schools also chose to complement the Special Forever program with other place-based activities that focused on the ecological aspects of their local place, for example the work at Kingston-on-Murray Primary School reported above, and other projects outlined in *Literacies in place* (Comber, et al., 2007).

For teachers interested in the process used to create the *Papunya school book of country and history* Nadia Wheatley and Ken Searle, who collaborated with the Papunya School in its publication, have published *Going bush* (2007). The authors of this book were seeking to enable teachers to replicate their harmony project with the aim of having students experience harmony with the natural environment, the knowledge of the traditional owners of the area, with themselves through a connection with the land, and by working with others in a non-competitive way as is common amongst indigenous people (Wheatley, n.d.). While this program would involve significant preparation by the teachers as they become familiar with local flora and fauna and with patterns of activity and some of the local dreaming stories of the Aboriginal inhabitants of the land, it would promote significant learning opportunities about the local place where their school is located.



Wheatley suggests that the activities can be suitable for students aged seven to twelve years. As with the Special Forever project the learning activities teachers might devise from using *Going bush* would assist students to communicate through creative and factual texts as they become more aware of their local place, along with developing drawing, mapping and creative artwork skills.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

It is pleasing that resources which are culturally appropriate have been created with and for students attending Aboriginal schools, such as the *Papunya school book of country and history* (Papunya School & Wheatley, 2001). This is particularly so as Aboriginal people become more dependent on written rather than oral communication practices to record and retain their culture. Unfortunately, while the *Papunya school book of country and history* includes an inspiring vision for the education of the young people of Papunya, with students experiencing an education led by local people supporting teachers appointed by the public education authority, and with the students prospering like the 'fat honey ants' of the dreaming story of that place, it is not clear whether this vision still guides education at Papunya a little over ten years later.

Two programs that have continued over a number of years are found at Kingston-on-Murray Primary School and Mypolonga Primary School. The program at Kingston-on-Murray Primary School continues with local reporting about water, while the work with the ranger at Banrock Station appears to have ceased. The program of water monitoring and reporting has continued despite changes in school leadership. The financial/entrepreneurial activity at Mypolonga Primary School is also one of long standing that continues to provide significant learning for students. The School Shop has evolved since it opened in 1994, expanding the range of goods sold, with 30 consignees placing their products with the shop, and it becoming a regular stopover of the Murray Expedition Paddle Steamer. Students are proud of their varied roles in the business, and of the skills and abilities they have gained. Of particular note is the mentoring of younger students to prepare them to take over as older students complete their primary schooling. The School Shop movie (<http://mypolongaps.sa.edu.au/wp/?portfolio=shop-movie> accessed 28/10/12) indicates careful thought is given to goods students make to sell in the shop, utilising local produce (dried fruits which are dipped in chocolate and packaged) and responses to customer interests through the provision of recipes and the publication of a new recipe book each year. While not detailed in the movie or any reports of this project, students are clearly learning about food handling procedures, working in groups, and group decision making. Similarly, the work at One Arm Point Remote Community School continues despite a change in school leadership. This program is supported by a large team of people from the local community who lead the Bardi Cultural Program which has continued to develop since the publication of their book *Our world: Bardi Jaawi life at Ardiyooloon* including the creation of resources to assist other schools, and now support for language learning. Despite the success of these place-based education programs continuity can be limited by the departure of a key teacher.

The place-based education programs outlined here have each been based in primary schools although each of the programs in schools serving Aboriginal students also include a small number of secondary students. While programs linked to learning financial and entrepreneurial activities are not common in primary schools, they appear to be more common in secondary schools, particularly rural schools where a local industry has been incorporated into the school program, for example viticulture at Nuriootpa, Clare, Willunga and Gladstone High Schools and aquaculture at Cowell Area School. These programs are provided predominantly for senior secondary students in the form of vocational education.

Gruenewald's (2003a) concepts of decolonisation and reinhabitation can be identified in the examples of place-based education discussed. Decolonisation provides important learning for rural students, particularly if they are living in a social environment or interacting with a social group where rural is viewed as deficit and lacking. In place-based education young people learn to positively value their local social community, while also gaining experience with mainstream literacy practices. Writing texts for publication and communicating with other adults requires successful literacy learning that will also equip them to develop new literacy practices as their lives, and the world itself, changes.

Decolonisation is a central part of the cultural programs conducted in the Aboriginal schools as students engage in a variety of learning activities, with the elders of their community, and that value the cultural life of their people. In each case study students are learning about more sustainable ways of living, understanding the roles of the policy makers in the local place, or learning some skills for economic sustainability. A focus on communication also highlights the decolonisation achieved in these case studies, as students strive to successfully communicate to achieve their goals, whether it is to influence policy makers on a different point of view, discuss what is happening in the garden, greet and assist a customer, or contribute to the publication of an award winning picture book. In each case the communication is authentic, for a real purpose, and can be achieved without students needing to learn that the ways communication used in their community are lesser or deficit, but instead they are mastering another form of communication to achieve their desired goal.

Gruenewald (2003a) suggests that reinhabitation is dependent on decolonisation, with its focus on learning to live well in a place without further injury or disruption. He explains that reinhabitation requires 'identifying, affirming, conserving, and creating base forms of cultural knowledge that nurture and protect people and ecosystems' (Gruenewald, 2003a, p. 9). In different ways each of the examples of place-based education discussed are assisting students to work with elements of the place where they are living so they are able to make a difference, or to use Gruenewald's work, they are identifying, recovering or creating/recreating some small aspects of their local place.

In our changing world, there is a growing focus on the world of the metropolis, particularly in highly urbanised Australia, but also around the world, as the majority of the population now lives in urban locations. Simultaneously the complexity of living sustainably in rural locations is becoming more complex. The challenges of conducting businesses in rural locations and ensuring the sustainability of rural communities call for outcomes from education similar to those Darling-Hammond (2010) proposes are needed by disadvantaged students in the USA. That is, students need to emerge from school critical thinkers, good communicators, creative and entrepreneurial, and able to use initiative. These examples of social, cultural, political, entrepreneurial and natural/ecological place-based education each show how classroom learning can contribute to development of these important characteristics. Place-based education has much to offer that will equip young rural students for leading roles in building and maintaining sustainable rural communities in the future, or for fulfilling lives in urban locations.

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