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Changing literacies, changing populations, changing places – English teachers' work in an age of rampant standardisation[1]

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ABSTRACT: School-age populations in many nations are becoming increasingly diverse (in terms of languages, countries of origin, ethnicity, faith traditions and so on) especially in low socio-economic communities where recent arrivals tend to be accommodated. In Australian classrooms, it is not unusual for a single classroom to include children who speak many different languages. Their family trajectories to their current dwellings and lifeworlds may be very different from each other. Catastrophic weather events and other disasters change the very landscapes in which families and teachers work. At the same time, what constitutes literacy continues to evolve as new technologies and communication media enable different forms of meaning-making. Yet simultaneously, what counts as literacy is increasingly "fixed" by the normative demands of high-stakes, standardised tests. This paper employs Hilary Janks' (2010) synthesis model of critical literacy to explore some of the risk and possibilities for innovative and equitable pedagogy inherent in this contemporary demographic, policy and practice mix.

KEYWORDS: Critical literacy, access, diversity, dominant discourse, equity, pedagogy, design, standardised testing.

INTRODUCTION

School-age populations in many nations are becoming increasingly diverse (in terms of languages, ethnicity, faith traditions and so on) especially in low socio-economic communities. In Australian classrooms it is not unusual for a single classroom to include children who speak many different languages. Their family trajectories to their current dwellings and lifeworlds may be very different from each other. At the same time what constitutes literacy continues to evolve as new technologies and communication media enable different forms of meaning-making. Yet simultaneously what counts as literacy is increasingly "fixed" by the normative demands of high--stakes, standardised tests. In this paper, I explore some of the risk and possibilities for innovative and equitable pedagogy inherent in this contemporary demographic, policy and practice mix.

In 2006, one in five Australians aged 15-75 spoke English as a second language. According to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade:

> In the 1960s, 45 per cent of all new settler arrivals were born in the United Kingdom and Ireland. By 2006-07, this had fallen to 17 per cent with settlers and long-term

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> visitors increasing from countries in the Asia Pacific region, Africa and the Middle East. More than 10 per cent of permanent migrants in 2006-07 came from China, and since 1995, more than 200 000 people have come from Africa and the Middle East.[2]

The 2006 Australian Census indicated that the most commonly spoken languages in Australia are English, Italian, Greek, Cantonese, Arabic, Mandarin and Vietnamese. In the schools where I research, usually low socio-economic communities, these broad population and linguistic trends are evident in most classrooms, especially in the western and northern suburbs of Adelaide, where cheaper housing attracts a range of families, including long-term residents and people who have recently arrived in South Australia. That place affects educational outcomes is a widespread phenomenon internationally as poverty impacts on schools and families (Lipman, 2004; Thrupp & Lupton, 2006). As a literacy educator, my interest is in the ways in which some teachers capitalise on the rich linguistic and cultural resources of their neighbourhood communities and design culturally responsive curriculums (Lee, 2008; McNaughton, 2011; Hall & Thomson, 2010) and critical pedagogies (Janks, 2010) that assist children to assemble complex meaning-making repertoires.

Making space for inclusive pedagogy and an enabling literacy curriculum is urgent in the face of sustained population change, shifts in the teacher workforce, transformations in communications technologies and practices, and the heightened prioritisation of standardised literacy assessment of school students' literacy and numeracy. In terms of the latter, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) reports are now ranking participating nations in terms of 15 year-old students' reading and mathematics, amongst other domains. Not surprisingly, these public international comparisons have coincided with federal and state governments giving increasing weight to standardised measurements of literacy performance throughout the compulsory years of schooling, with a subsequent repositioning of teachers within a global education industry (Codd, 2005; Lingard, 2010; Locke, 2004).

In Australia, educational sectors are now grappling with the demands of the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), the *MySchool* website and the introduction of the Australian Curriculum. The paradox here is the desire to standardise and contain what is an increasingly shifting environment, characterised by mobility, diversity and ever-changing communication spheres (Comber, in press a; Lingard, 2010). The neo-liberal rationale for the preoccupation with competitive measurable standards as insurance for Australia's prosperity in the global knowledge economy is understandable in the context of the financial crisis, yet its effects need continual scrutiny.

Before turning to my main theme of the risks and possibilities inherent in this environment, I briefly summarise my theoretical stance in approaching these problems. Broadly speaking, my research is informed by the New Literacy Studies (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2000; Street, 1984, 1993, 2003), the New London Group's theorisation of multiliteracies (1996) and several decades of work on critical literacy (Comber, 2001; Freire, 1972a, 1972b; Janks, 2010; Luke, 2000). An additional theoretical framing which underpins much of my

[2] See http://www.dfat.gov.au/aib/society.html.

recent work is place-based pedagogy (Gruenewald, 2008). Both place-based pedagogies and critical literacy assume that young people need to develop a sense of agency, that is, to believe they can make a significant positive difference in the world. In addition both approaches assume:

- That places and texts are constructed and they could be made differently in the interests of different groups of people;
- That the ways in which people and places are represented are open to question;
- That communication, social and spatial relationships involve power relations.

My standpoint towards inquiry in schools and classrooms is further informed by feminist scholarship, which foregrounds the embodied work of teachers, parents and indeed children (Griffith & Smith, 2005; Smith, 2005) and also by Michel Foucault's insistence that we are "freer than we feel" (1988, p. 10).

The New Literacy Studies have evolved since the pioneering work of Brian Street in the Seventies, a British anthropologist who studied the ways in which people took up literacy in everyday life, especially in communities which had not been schooled. For example, in a mountain village in Iran, he discovered that the people had developed their own ways of recording that enabled their commercial transactions. Work in that tradition continues to grow (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Prinsloo & Brier, 1996; Pahl & Rowsell, 2005; Rowsell & Pahl, 2007). These researchers take literate practices to be socially and culturally located, designed to meet the purposes of particular people in particular places. Street distinguished between what he called the "autonomous" and "ideological" models of literacy – noting that literate practices always involve social, and therefore power, relations. An *autonomous* view of literacy (as a set of skills with supposedly predictable benefits) ignores the ways in which people go about reading and writing to accomplish specific social, religious and economic goals.

Some two decades after the ethnographies of Street and Heath, in the mid-Nineties a group of leading literacy scholars got together to celebrate Courtney Cazden's important contribution to the field. During their meetings, they drew from linguistics, educational research, indigenous epistemologies, critical literacy and other domains, to develop a new blueprint for literacy education that took account of global media communication and digital technologies, multilingual and multicultural student populations, and the potential for young people to become designers, not simply consumers, of texts in various modalities. The resulting multiliteracies framework (New London Group, 1996; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) has been internationally significant in guiding the research of the following generation of literacy researchers, teachers and teacher educators (for example, Carrington & Robinson, 2009; Lam, 2006; Mills, 2011; Walsh, 2010).

My research and teaching has been informed by these traditions and also by long-term and varied approaches to critical literacy – which foreground the fact the texts are never neutral, that discourse is constitutive, and that literate practices are inevitably concerned with power relations. Literacy in and of itself is not necessarily empowering, but assembling particular ways with words, and other semiotic repertoires, has the potential to reposition people in relation to work, learning and everyday life. One of the best syntheses of critical literacy has recently been published

by South African educator and applied linguist, Hilary Janks (2010). Working in a highly multilingual context herself, Janks points out that students need to acces, and acquire mastery with, academic language; to learn how to deconstruct dominant discourses; to use the diversity of their language and life experiences as productive resources for learning; and to "harness the multiplicity of semiotic systems (Janks, 2010, p. 25) to produce their own multimodal texts in order to generate new meanings. Hence, students need to be able to work with powerful discursive practices even as they go beyond in critiquing them and inventing new communicative modes and genres. Janks' synthesis model is useful to apply to the contemporary policy moment, which I describe as characterised by *rampant standardisation*, where the emphasis is on measurable literacy based on an autonomous understanding of literacy.

In researching literacy education, largely in poor communities, I am conscious of my relationships with teachers, students and parents and the need to contest rather than contribute to the circulation of deficit discourses (Comber & Nixon, 1999; Comber & Kamler, 2004). As far as possible, I try to research *with* educators and students and where appropriate to involve parents. I have been guided by those advocating teacher-research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) and collaborations with teachers in producing knowledge (Comber & Kamler, 2009). In addition, the majority of educators I work with are women primary and middle-school teachers, who frequently perceive themselves as having relatively little influence in terms of theory, policy or research. In this respect, I have been guided by feminist researchers such as Smith (2005) who, starting from feminist standpoint theory, has developed what she calls a *sociology for the people*, where the aim is to conduct inquiries with people in order to understand how things are put together and how their work is coordinated. So my project has been to work against deficit representations of poor youth, their families and their teachers (Comber & Kamler, 2004) and instead to capitalise on Foucault's "spaces of freedom" (Gore, 1993) to document with critical optimism what is being accomplished through enabling literacy pedagogies in the so-called *disadvantaged* schools. Nevertheless, there remains a continuing need to scrutinise the unanticipated effects of policy and reform efforts in low socio-economic communities, as translocal managerial and audit cultures infuse more and more aspects of institutional and everyday life.

RISKS OF RAMPANT STANDARDISATION

Foucault's (1980) famous statement that "everything is dangerous" and his identification of the ways in which modern forms of power are exercised to manage populations gave progressive educators of the Eighties a new and troubling way to think about literacy (Comber, in press b). For example Carmen Luke (1989) argued that the use of institutional literacy could make students and teachers "identifiable 'visible' objects of knowledge through the written trace left by their own writings, and by the notations made of them by their supervisors and the surveillance experts of visitations" (Luke 1989, p. 126). Schools can act as an apparatus for continual surveillance, examination and record-keeping of the population. Furthermore, whilst human capital ideologies promote literacy as an economic imperative and indeed as a ticket to a better life, international research has made it clear that standard English literacy in and of itself is a necessary but *insufficient* condition for working-class and ethnically diverse young people to achieve higher education or find employment.

Now more than ever in Australia, we are witnessing the federal government's insistence on measuring the individual in terms of traditional print literacies as tested in NAPLAN as a form of public accountability. Internationally, educators have long voiced concerns about the impact of high-stakes testing and its potential dangers – narrowing the curriculum, curtailing teachers' discretionary judgement, and the possible negative effects of "labelling" on students' educational trajectories and self-esteem. In an ongoing ARC project[3], we are investigating the ways in which mandated literacy assessment is reorganising teachers' work in a range of primary and secondary schools (Comber & Cormack, 2011; Kostogriz &Doecke, 2011). Primary teachers have already reported that they have less time for work in subjects such as the Visual Arts, or even Studies of Society and Environment, as they need to prepare students for the kinds of reading and writing that are tested in NAPLAN. School resources are dedicated not only to preparing students, but also towards managing the tests themselves and to collecting, organising and interpreting the data.

P: …They've got a Regional – what's Terry's title – a data guy?
AP: Data Analysis Consultant, or something like that.
R: OK, so tell us about that. This is new too. So what does that person do?
AP: He drives and supports schools with the data collection. I guess his role is to support the schools to get a database up and running so that there's a whole-school approach, and so the teachers, because they're talking about teachers being able to access information and analyse information themselves, so they know what's happening with each individual child in their class, so his role is, I think his role is...supporting schools to actually get that process up and running, and then supporting with the analysis of that data, and then I guess it's up to us then, you know, analysing it and then working out what we do with it, yeah.
P: So he's helping us work out the schedule of what data we collect, when, who from, what we do with it, and how that then informs our improvement plan.

The sector's goal is to electronically record information about every child and provides a "data-guy" in order to assist. On the positive side, such an approach is less likely to let children slip through without being identified when they need extra support (Kerin & Comber, 2008).

Yet data is not neutral, no matter where, when and how it is collected, reported and stored. One school leadership team told us about the significant work that is involved in withdrawing students from NAPLAN, such as recently arrived students who do not speak English. This process may involve home visits and telephone calls, and principals may need to enlist the aid of bilingual support officers to translate difficult conversations with parents, explaining why their child should be excluded from this assessment. However after only one year in Australia, such students are tested along with their same-age peers. When the test results come back some five months later, teachers have more explaining to do in order that students and parents understand

[3] Mandated Literacy Assessment and the Reorganisation of Teachers' Work is an Australian Research Council (ARC) Discovery Project (No. DP0986449) between the Queensland University of Technology, University of South Australia and Deakin University in Australia and York and Victoria Universities in Canada. The chief investigators are Barbara Comber, Phillip Cormack, Alex Kostogriz and Brenton Doecke. Partner investigators in Canada are Dorothy Smith (University of Victoria) and Alison Griffith (York University).

what it means to be "a little dot sitting below the line", for students who fail to meet the NAPLAN benchmark.

> UPT: Yeah, which is pretty bad for some kids who worked really, really hard. I had a couple of kids who worked really, really hard and they came a long way, I think we were talking about this, their movement, and then they got up the test and they see this...
> ESLT: In comparison, yeah.
> UPT: … little black dot sitting underneath the line and they just go sort of … I said, "Look, don't worry about it, that's not what it's about."

One risk is that students' potential will be misjudged on the basis of these tests and that other data about their learning is ignored. As the upper-primary teacher puts it so poignantly, the results show the students where they sit in relation to their peers. The risk is that students may be discouraged by these results, which visually depict them as below standard, and see this as the truth about their abilities. In terms of students who neither speak nor write standard Australian English, teachers need to be vigilant in ensuring that future educational trajectories do not rest upon one-off tests which make visible only some of what students understand and can do and not the dynamics of what they are learning.

In addition to the risks for individual students, there is also the danger at a school level of the loss of reputation when poor results are reported on the *MySchool* website. Given the increased marketisation of schooling (Ball, 2009), this is not inconsequential, when parents can choose another school. School principals need to assess the risks of particular students undertaking the test and they need to decide how much energy and resources should be put into increasing students' measurable performance on these limited tests in relation to richer opportunities for learning.

Despite the intensification of educators' work around testing and school rhythms, and activities being adjusted to meet the demands of the testing cycle, some educators continue to offer students experience with genuinely enabling literacies. From my perspective as an advocate for public education, it is more important than ever to document the complex work and learning that teachers and students accomplish in schools located in high poverty and culturally diverse locales (see also Paugh, Carey, King-Jackson & Russell, 2007). In what follows, I provide several illustrations of curriculum and pedagogies that allow students to do significant, positive identity work whilst simultaneously assembling new semiotic repertoires.

FOSTERING ENABLING LITERACIES

Using Janks's synthesis model of critical literacy, introduced earlier, I offer some observations taken from a range of research projects that begin to show how different teachers work with students' ***diverse*** linguistic, cultural and semiotic resources as ways to ***access*** academic literacies and sophisticated ***design*** work and make spaces for the contestation of ***dominant*** discourses. As Janks points out, these dimensions of critical literacy in practice overlap and intersect and this is true of the examples presented here. In each case I have chosen to foreground one dimension, though usually teachers are working across all fronts simultaneously.

Access – narrative, identity and place

Faced with the demand that students be able to write the narrative genre for the NAPLAN tests of 2009 and 2010, teachers at one highly multicultural school in the western suburbs of Adelaide started with the resources of students' rich experiences of coming to Australia and and/or starting school. Teachers helped students to use their memories of life in specific times and places as resources for narrative writing. Students who had come to Australia as refugees were positioned as having significant material to draw from in constructing their narratives. Through selected children's literature (for example, Baker, 1991, 2004; Brian, 1996; Russell, 2001; Wheatley, 1988) and Indigenous studies, the teacher introduced students to notions of time, place and belonging and engaged them in reading maps as a way of tracking how they had come to be living in their current abode and to be going to that school. Working from memories, interviews with parents and family artefacts, the young people began to reconstruct their lives so far. Autobiography was a bridge to narrative.

The class set of autobiographical pieces give a sense of young people's complex and changing relationship with places, which raise questions about identities and class. Here I refer to just one autobiography – that of Raphael (see Appendix 1), who spent his early childhood on the border of Uganda and Sudan, where he described his family as farmers. Both his parents were well educated in their homeland, and his father was also a teacher. In South Australia, his family received school card, indicating a low household income. They also held refugee status.

Raphael's autobiography is lengthy and detailed; while it is clear that English is his second language, he is not restricted to simple sentences and he draws cleverly on his history of experience in particular times and places to develop this narrative. From his own birth, told fleetingly in the third person, he quickly moves to narrate his story of family migration, of beginning life in one place, then dramatically moving to a very different place – from the farewell party, to the plane flight via Madagascar and Sydney, to the arrival in Adelaide. He incorporates memories of a life lived elsewhere, where the games were different and where there was a relationship between the village and the jungle, and where children could venture into dangerous games unseen. Raphael clearly derives pleasure from explaining the chasey variant played in trees, the fruits, vegetables and the baboon which took them. We remain uncertain how much this young author has embellished actual experience.

In this example of literacy pedagogy, in which the whole class participated as auto-biographers, we see how a teacher, informed by concepts of place-based pedagogies and notions of belonging, is able to foster a sense of recognition for identity as embodied, changing and situated. Raphael's writing suggests a classroom that welcomes a dynamic approach to culture, identity and place, rather than tokenistic static responses where cultures are explored to satisfy curiosity about the exotic. Raphael's account indicates a life lived in different places. In this classroom there is no normal early childhood experience of family, housing and parental employment. The young people in this classroom have vastly different histories and by making their experiences and moves in different places a legitimate topic for writing, the teacher allows her students to explore the affordances of place and memory as resources for writing and representation. The classroom becomes a site for productive diversity when students compile their individually authored pieces into a class book.

In terms of the demand for extended narrative required by NAPLAN, Raphael and his peers have learnt how to use their knowledge of people, time and place to construct autobiography, and in the process have learnt how to provide detail, how to describe different settings, how to select rich anecdotes to capture the ethos of a situation, and indeed, are developing a positive disposition towards producing extended texts. Accessing the authorised school genres which count is done without discounting students' diverse cultural and linguistic resources.

Domination – critically reading texts with consequences

Also in Adelaide's western suburbs, "The Parks" area, now referred as Westwood, is the site of Australia's largest urban renewal project[4]. Gradually, the post-World War 2 semi-detached houses are being demolished and replaced by new housing designed for first-home buyers. Many of the families who were attracted by cheap rentals may no longer be able to afford the area. Along with these wider developments, a decision was also made to close two nearby primary schools and combine them with a third into one large new school, originally called a "superschool". This necessitated the building of a new large school. Even though teachers and students at the site where the new school was being constructed had previously been involved in several place-based and design projects, no consultation was undertaken with the school community in the planning for the new school. However, there was the opportunity for staff at the school to review the plans not long before the internal construction was to be undertaken. One of the teachers shared the architects' plans and designs with her students. Together they discovered that there was no longer going to be a space devoted to or adaptable to the needs of drama and performance, a curriculum area highly valued by this teacher and her class for developing her largely ESL class's confidence with public speaking in English and acting.

This kind of critical reading is new in several ways. Firstly, for these children, the opportunity to read such documents is rare. Few live in households who can afford new dwellings or renovations. Hence, this particular form of spatial literacy required to understand plans is unlikely to be part of their repertoire of home literacies. Secondly, this is not just an academic exercise designed to improve students' literacy and numeracy (though there could well be such learning outcomes). These authorised texts control what will be built, the size of spaces and their functionality. The result will not only impact on this cohort of students and their teachers, but on those in the future. Having interpreted the text to mean that there will be no drama space, the teacher acts as an advocate for the students and checks with the current principal. The children question the project manager on his fortnightly visits to report to them what is happening. Having established that they are correct, they then decide to write to the newly appointed principal of the new amalgamated school to see whether this can be changed. At first there is reluctance to consider altering the plans at such a late stage, but the teacher and the students persist and offer a solution by suggesting a change to some storage areas and spaces allocated for teachers' planning. Their request for change and the provision of a drama space is successful. Hence, this instance of critically deconstructing a text leads to discussion, research and writing. The children

[4] See http://www.westwoodsa.com.au/index.php?id=1.

are learning to identify how texts work in particular ways to organise the world and the options different groups have.

The dominant discourses here are those associated with urban renewal more broadly and how education is positioned within that. From the authorised perspectives of urban planners (along with architects and designers) and senior bureaucrats in education, there is no warrant for consulting with children, and a tokenistic, almost too late, opportunity to review the plans was provided to teachers. In this example, we can see how one teacher making the time and space to become involved and to take her students seriously re-positioned them as people who can have a say.

Diversity – students set the angles

In a range of projects we have witnessed the difference it makes when students take hold of the camera in representing themselves and their peers. Student film-makers and photographers use their linguistic and cultural diversity, along with appropriations and adaptations of popular culture, as potential resources for conveying complex meanings as they exploit the affordances of multiple modes (Jewitt & Kress, 2003). As children of an increasingly mediated age, they readily respond to opportunities to play with various media and digital equipment. Here I focus on a group of primary-school students recently arrived from Sudan and discuss just two texts to illustrate what they were able to accomplish.

After working with their ESL teacher on Hilary Janks' workbook activities on identity, students came to realise that they can simultaneously hold different positions and indeed identities. One activity students engaged in explored times when they felt Australian and times when they felt Sudanese. In the Powerpoint photographic images, one student visually represented his experience by depicting himself wearing different clothing and choosing different backdrops. In the "I feel Australian" photo, he wore a sport-brand, embroidered beanie and a denim shirt, had a brick school building as a backdrop and faced left. In the portrayal of "I feel Sudanese", he wore his Ugandan shirt, had an African material backdrop, wore no hat and faced right. The accompanying text for each image was:

> I feel Australian when I speak English, at school, watching TV and playing football and with my Australian friends, eating Australian food like pizza and sausages.
>
> I feel Sudanese when I speak in my language, going to African festivals, wearing my Ugandan shirt, with my family, eating kissera, beans, fassoulia, dakhneea, chapati and when I go to the little shop on Henley Beach Road and in the market, when I visit my family and friends, when I phone Uganda and speak to my family, when I teach people about Africa, when I travel around the world, when I look at the map of Sudan and tell my story…

The student here gives a sense of each identity being constituted by his choice of language, clothing, food, who he is with, where he goes and the roles he plays in different situations. Clearly these representations are a snapshot only but provide an opportunity for young people to explore the complexity of their changing and multiple identities and to share them with peers at school. At this school, the ESL teacher also worksedwith recently arrived children to make films which positioned them as experts.

One such film was simply entitled *Sudan*. The eleven-minute student and teacher-made film opens with a series of questions written in white italics script scrolling on a black screen:

> What is the largest country in the continent of Africa?
> What African country has hundreds of languages?
> In what African country is Dinka, Nuer, Ma'di, Kuku, Bari and Arabic spoken?
> From which African country have hundreds of thousands of refugees escaped because of war and danger to their lives?

Next "SUDAN" appears on the same black screen. Throughout this introduction, we hear African drumming (later it is revealed they are being played by the students). The film is too long and complex to do justice to in the space available here, but it goes on from this point to show the drummers and a small group of children from the Sudan, now at school in Adelaide, dancing to the African music and presenting artefacts their families have brought with them, including their mothers' embroidery, family photographs, as well as selected images gathered from the Internet. The film moves into its next stage and it becomes clear that it is a documentary. We see other school children, who are not from Sudan, asking questions of a female student who is from the Sudan. There is an edge to this sequence, as the non-Sudanese children begin to reveal their ignorance about Sudan. The Sudanese students are positioned as film-makers, experts and researchers. The film then shows a number of students, teachers and the school principal answering this same question: What do you know about Sudan?

This move is critical, as it is refugees who are typically positioned as needing to learn about Australia. Here the tables are turned. The first four minutes of the film show takes of the Sudanese children filming in the school as they repeatedly ask staff and students this question. The next shift is to students from Sudan showing their travels from their homeland across Africa with reference to a map. African music and Sudanese children with various levels of fluency in English then provide a voice-over for selected still images of Sudan and the Sudanese children in their school in urban Adelaide. Several students recount stories they recall hearing in Sudan. All the Sudanese students at school that day introduce themselves in a scene reminiscent of the wonderful World of Disney introductions, just stating their names – Ruth, Samuel, Francis, Mohammed, Aisha, Kuet, and so on. There is a pan to the Sudanese student film-makers. The film concludes with more images of the Sudanese student dancers with African music in the background. There is a translation in sub-titles of several Sudanese sayings and a line from the background song.

In Janks' terms, this work with the Sudanese students is a fine example of the way *diversity* becomes a resource for critical literacy. The Sudanese students of a range of ages and different experiences with speaking English work together to make a documentary that educates even as it takes a critical position on other students' lack of knowledge about Sudan. It goes beyond simply celebrating, yet it satisfies the viewer's need to see aspects of the cultures and the conditions of life in Sudan. This example could equally have been discussed under Janks' fourth dimension, that of design, because this film exemplifies the ways in which teachers can work cooperatively with students to design media and artefacts which have real social and educational purposes. In addressing the notion of design, I turn to another case of

film-making undertaken by a multicultural group of New South Wales secondary school students during a university-based summer school.

Design – imagining other worlds

The students in Years 9 and 10 were from priority schools in and around Sydney. These schools were so categorised due to the low SES status of the students who attend them. Students were invited to come to a summer school – *Make it reel* – at a city university during the holidays in order to learn film-making. The goal of the project was to provide extra opportunities for learning for students who may be struggling academically at school and who may not have ever had a chance to visit a university campus, let alone think about themselves as potential students there. So the twin aims were to improve students' literacy in English through film-making and to help them to imagine themselves as university students. Recruitment was done through the schools and attracted a range of students from different linguistic and cultural heritages and with different educational records and aspirations (see Comber, *Make it reel* in Sellar et al., 2010 for the full case study). Students received money for travel to the summer school and a small allowance to offset what they might have earned through casual work during the holidays. Details of the full program of learning are beyond what can be summarised here. However it is important to know that students were expected to work in groups with university-student mentors and teachers to design, script, film and edit a complete film for launching at the completion of the summer school. Few students had more than rudimentary experience of making films.

Students needed to commit to attending every day from January 6 to 22 from 9.15 am to 3.30 pm unless prevented by illness. Thirty students began *and* completed the program. Students were assigned to one of three teams and many were no longer with peers from the same school. Each team was supported by a university, film undergraduate who acted as mentor and guide throughout the three weeks, and as the "producer" of the students' films. The summer school program was based on a series of workshops, where young people were explicitly taught the various complex skills of film-making. Topics included: writing a synopsis, editing with iMovie, production design, writing the screenplay, camera operation, revising the screenplay, filming protocols, sound design, location reconnaissance and safety checks. At the end of the summer school, the students and their families were invited to a launch and "graduation" ceremony, where they were presented with certificates by the Vice-Chancellor.

When invited to reflect on their experience of *Make it Reel*, several students reported that they had made films at school and at home, which they described as "amateur", and contrasted these with the university experience as "professional". One student from an inner-city high school was quite articulate about what he had learned:

> The most I learnt was about continuity. I really didn't think about that much when we were like filming our amateur films, but then I saw the difference, like what goes wrong when you don't use, like when you don't think about continuity and linking all the parts of the film together.

It is important to note that this summer school program did not offer the typical "remedial" approach to young people's literacy skills. This program – based around

young people's serious engagement in the media arts – ensured the development of skills through high-quality learning and sustained motivation. The "professional" feel of the entire enterprise – equipment, feedback, time frame, speeches, cinema – had an impact on the students' valuing of the whole experience. The *Make it Reel* approach took young people seriously as apprentice filmmakers. They were not offered a watered-down approach to film-making or a top-up version of schoolwork during the holidays. This approach was in line with the characteristics of other long-term, sustainable and effective school/university collaborations, such as University/Community Links (www.uclinks.org) at the University of California (Gutierrez, Hunter & Arzubiaga, 2009). The characteristics of such approaches are important to identify, because students and parents believe that summer schools offer important and meaningful learning opportunities.

Indeed, these young people were looking for serious learning opportunities in an area of media/arts, not a traditional remedial program in literacy skills. Gutierrez et al. (2009) contrast traditional forms of "remediation", which focus on individual students practising basic skills in pre-planned tasks with generic forms of assistance (typically how many schools respond to poor results on tests), and approaches that involve groups of young people in complex learning "ecologies", using tools relating to activities that matter historically and culturally. Two decades of University/Community Links research in the 5th Dimension projects (after-school education programs that involve collaboration between education sectors and other organizations) indicate (see Table 1) that there is great potential for young people to be apprenticed to meaningful learning communities focusing on digital media and forms of representation.

REMEDIATION	RE-MEDIATION
Basic skills	Basic activity
Often individualised	Joint activity
Scripted	Generative
Low-level mediation or assistance	Multiple forms of assistance
Homogenous	Heterogeneous
Readiness models	Rigorous, challenging
Generic assistance	Strategic assistance
English-only	Hybrid language practices

Table 1. Contrasting practices: Remediation vs. re-mediation[5]

These distinctions apply to *Make it Reel*. Students were involved in all aspects of the entire activity. They worked together in groups on an evolving negotiated product, with assistance from various helpers who had varying degrees of knowledge, during a rigorous, challenging project. Evidence of how seriously these young people engaged in the task was their continuing interest in obtaining feedback several months after the summer school had finished. Students at the city secondary school were still seeking more critical feedback after their films had been launched and they had "graduated":

S1: Just one thing. For this *Make it Reel* thing, at the end of it could someone analyse our videos and then give us recommendations, feedback.

[5] Source: Gutierrez et al., 2009, p. 14.

S2: *Professional* feedback.

In closing, I consider what I learnt from the student film-makers of one film – *Imagine Peace* – about the power of design. In a moving documentary, adolescent student film-makers from different war-torn countries captured the experiences of family members and friends as they explored the toll that war takes. Students, whose families had left Cambodia, Vietnam, and Iraq as a consequence of war, interviewed family members about their experiences on camera. Stills of photographic images of war were accompanied by sound effects of war and excerpts from interviews. English subtitles were provided when it was hard to hear what informants had to say. The film had strong emotional impact on viewers and showed knowledge of a range of techniques. Students reported significant learning about film-making, working together, refining their language for the range of tasks involved (interviewing, voice-over, writing subtitles and credits, negotiating and so on). The point here is that students used their collective existing linguistic and cultural resources along with the new repertoires of explicitly taught techniques to represent complex understandings in powerful ways. Access, diversity, design and domination – Janks' dimensions of critical literacy – are brought together in a highly complex way, with important and authentic texts produced to share with the wider community.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

In reviewing developments in applied linguistics, Allan Luke (2002, p. 107) argues that critical researchers "must have the courage to say what is to be done with texts and discourse" – to go beyond critique. This work remains as important as ever with "increased global and local disparities between children of rich and poor" (Albright & Luke, 2008, p. 3). Educators need to develop understandings of positive and productive discursive practices across new sites and in various modes and media. For example, Lam has shown how immigrant adolescents' use of technoliteracy practices allow them to "develop and maintain social relationships and affiliations across countries" (2009, p. 377). Such work attests to the multiplicity of linguistic and multimedia resources deployed by young people in order to communicate across the time, space and language constraints that often limit what teachers and students accomplish in schools, and may provide a prototype for the kinds of research and pedagogies that are needed. The work I have discussed above indicates that some teachers are already exploiting the affordances of various modes and media, as well as students' own experiences, linguistic and cultural capital as bridges to academic literacies. Critical approaches to multiliteracies will need to invent new frames, vocabularies and pedagogies for changing population, communication and pedagogical environments.

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APPENDIX 1

Raphael's story (original spelling)

In the lovely season of spring 1995, a boy was about to be born. He was going to be named Raphael. When I was born my auntie and uncle came to see me at my great-grandfathers house which was near the border of Uganda and Sudan and that's where I was born. Three years later my little borther was born. He was cute because he was chubby. When I was a few months old I had so many picture taken and at home now I have every photo except 10 of them. On my six birthday me and my mum planted a small tree and she said "the person that gave me this plant it six years ago." I was so happy. On the 20th of June 2001 my families life was about to change forever. My mum got the certificate to come to Australia. We got pack and it took us about two days to get ready. On the 23 of June we had a huge party and almost the whole village came in party. The children went to play and we used to play a really dangerous game where you would have a team of six and go into the jungle and go high up in the tree and started playing chase. If one of your team mate get touched your whole team has to touch one player from the other team. One of my friends fell off a tree about 15 metres to the ground and broke his leg and arm. The celebration was a success except for the child that fell off the tree. I will never forget it until the day I die. Few hours before we left my whole family went to say goodbye to everyone we knew. The best thing I remember doing with my dad was building a small cottage for us to spend time together. Before we left on the 25th of June I remembered all the great time my family and I spent in Africa. We used to be like farmers you could see vegetables and fruits everywhere like peanuts, corn, potatoes, bananas, tomatoes, carrots, grapes, grapefruits and plenty more plants. I still remember this baboon that kept stealing our corn. Me and my sister gave it corn so it wouldn't steal a lot of them. It kept coming for more and more near the house every time. One day when we came from church it was sleeping in the house. When it woke up it saw some corn outside so it ran of and took the corn along with he/her. One day a group of people named the baboon hunters chased it away or even killed it know one knew. As we left to aboard the plant Qantas we waved our final goodbye to everyone plus to my home country Africa. I cried and cried until we entered the plane it looked and smelled fantastic. I could hear the engines begin and got scared we meet crash. One of the attendants came and put on my seatbelt. When we were in the air I didn't want to touch the window because I though I would fall out and die. We stopped at Madagascar for petrol. Did you know that a jumbo jet uses 220,000 litres of petrol per tank? We stayed for a few hours and it was still about 10min before the sun rise. We were on our way to Perth or Sydney. We were in the plane for hours but I didn't mind because they had yummy food and cool music while my sisters were watching movies. We went to Sydney because I could see the Sydney Opera House. From there we stayed for about 30min because there was a delay at Adelaide airport. When the delay was over we left and landed and around eleven o'clock. When we got out of the plane some of our relative were waiting for us as soon as they saw us they started singing a traditional song to welcome us. We got driven to the house that we were going to stay at. We lived at Richmond and went to Gill street primary school for two months because that's how long we stayed there. After that we moved here to Ridley Grove. My sisters and brothers plus myself went to Pennington primary for about two years. Now only one of my sister goes to the same school as me at Ridley Grove school. There used to be eleven people living in our house but now four of them live on their own. On the 26th

June my family would be six years living in Australia. Ever since we left Africa I've improved my English and have lots of new friends. At first I found it hard to find friends because I couldn't speak English really good. I wasn't going to enter the classroom until I saw one of my friend there and he left my old school Pennington Juniors. Me and my two brothers go to visit my uncle and he lives in Henley Beach road while my two big sisters live with one of their friends in west Hidmash. My auntie and cousins came to live in Adelaide because they used to live in Tasmania in some town called Lonstastan. My uncle Josh, by brother Wallie and I visited them back in 2005. One year after or so they came to stay. My mum went looking for house they could stay in and they found a house in Torrensville. In the back yard was lots of fruit trees. They moved from there to MacDonald Avenue were there was oranges and other fruit trees on the road and when I go there I bring back some fruits. Tasmanian is a great place peaceful streets and wonderful places to see. There are mountains that you could climb and if you get to the top it looks beautiful because you can see a beautiful lake and the city. I want to work really hard and become successful and have a good future with a good job and have a house plus a really nice car. My mum wants me to be an aircraft engineer or work as an engineer. The reason why I chose to work hard to become and engineer is so I can buy a car and put a new engine, spoiler, two huge mufflers, level six turbo and Nitrous plus a really Gangster paint job. My uncle loves cars and I love them to because they are really cool. Believe it or not I want to pimp up my car because of a video game called "Need for Speed Underground". It inspired me to become and engineer so that I would know where the wires go and don't stuff up my car. Well if you read this biography you should know a lot about me and my ambition when I grow up.