PLACE ATTACHMENT:

GRADE 2 STUDENTS' SPECIAL PLACES AT THEIR SCHOOLS

by

Katrina Mosscrop

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Education

in conformity with the requirements for

the degree of Master of Education

Queen's University

Kingston, Ontario, Canada

(May, 2012)

ABSTRACT

Children transform different spaces into their own special places by interacting

with the physical and social environment (Hart, 1979; Rasmussen, 2004; Sobel,

1993/2002). Special place research has focused largely on children's place–making in

neighbourhoods, including the process of finding and constructing forts, playhouses and

dens in outdoor environments (Benson, 2009; Hart, 1979; Kylin, 2003; Sobel,

1993/2002). The significant presence of schools in children's everyday lives

(Rasmussen, 2004), however, has encouraged some researchers to investigate what

environmental conditions foster learning (Derr, 2006; Maxwell, 2006; O'Dell, 2011;

Upitis, 2007), as well as how children use and experience social and physical aspects of

these places (Einarsdottir, 2005; Peterson, 2009; Rathunde, 2003).

Although researchers recognize that learning environments have the potential to

enhance learning by the presence of specific design elements, little is known about what

constitutes places that elementary students characterize as special, and to which they

become attached. Some schools, including Montessori, claim to offer a uniquely

prepared learning environment that enhances students' development, though empirical

studies that involve Montessori elementary programs predominantly use academic

standardized test scores to compare them to other programs (Baines & Snortum, 1973;

Lopata, Wallace, & Finn, 2005).

The purpose of this study was to explore places at school that students

characterized as special and to describe what aspects made them special. This study

used photo elicitation interviews, walking tours, and focus groups to explore 11 Grade 2

students' special places in two Ontario learning environments: a privately funded, not-for-profit Montessori school and a publicly funded school.

Results demonstrated that Grade 2 students in both schools identified special places, both indoors and outdoors, for developing a sense of placeness; engaging in types of play; fostering and engaging in friendships; and having solititude and tranquility. Further analysis revealed two underlying themes: places were special because they afforded students opportunities to be interdependent or independent. Future research is necessary to determine the long-term significance of students' special places in different learning environments.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The design of schools has the potential to influence how students feel, behave,

perform and develop (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004; Upitis, 2010). The school,

which generally includes classrooms, hallways, libraries, cafeterias, gymnasiums,

washrooms, and playgrounds, plays an integral role in students' learning as the "third

teacher" (OWP/P Architects, VS Furniture, Bruce Mau Design, 2010; Strong-Wilson &

Ellis, 2007). Students interact and develop relationships with their learning

environments. They form attachments to different places depending on the kind of

support they need to develop emotionally, socially, physically and intellectually (Derr,

2006; Hart, 1979; Sobel, 1993/2002). Ellis (2004) explained that place attachment

occurs when students are free to explore their environment with little or no adult

control. The environment, Ellis added, also has to inspire play and engagement by

catching students' interests and imaginations. It is the freedom and desire to explore

which enables students to develop knowledge about their environment and sense of self

(Derr, 2006). Despite the substantial research on designing schools for elementary

students, researchers continue to ask how North American school environments serve

students' needs and imaginations (Ellis, 2004; Rasmussen, 2004; Upitis, 2010).

Many factors contribute to school design, including social, political and economic

contexts (Dudek, 2000, 2002). Since the *Good Places to Learn* program began in 2003,

17,000 school renewal projects, which include replacing roofs, windows and boilers

have been completed or are continuing. One hundred twenty-three projects have been

funded to retrofit or rebuild schools in poor conditions, and 30 projects have been

funded to build new schools or additions (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004). It is posited that the program will change schools and schooling experiences for over 5.3 million students who attend Ontario's 4,900 publicly funded schools. In terms of area, public schools occupy 280 million square feet (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2011a). Publicly funded schools are changing, in part, from the Ministry of Education's effort to achieve safe and supportive places for students to learn.

In addition to student spaces in publicly funded schools, privately funded schools educate another 1.2 million students (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2011a). Montessori schools, in particular, are the "most widespread" (Dudek, 2000, p. 59) and largest international method of education (North American Montessori Teacher's Association, 2012). The Canadian Council of Montessori Administrators (CCMA, 2012) certifies Canadian Montessori schools and claims that their schools offer learning environments organized according to Maria Montessori's education principles. Some design elements, such as size and arrangement of furniture, are not unique to Montessori programs and are present in other educational approaches (Craig, Kermis, & Digdon, 2001). Some research, however, supports the claim that students in Montessori schools perceive that their learning environment differs from that of students in conventional schools (Rathunde, 2003; Ryniker & Shoho, 2001). It is evident from existing research that school design has a significant impact on students' learning.

It is less evident, however, what young students perceive as the social, emotional, physical and intellectual impact of their learning environments. Place research has been conducted in many disciplines, including social geography (Holloway & Valentine, 2000; Rasmussen, 2004; Spencer & Blades, 2006; Tuan, 1977/2008), medicine

(Epstein, Stevens, McKeever, & Baruchel, 2006; LaRocque, 2008), ecology (Benson, 2009; Cobb, 1977; Hutchison, 1998), architecture (Brosterman, 2002; Dudek, 2000, 2002; Upitis, 2007, 2010) and education (Doppelt & Schunn, 2008; Einarsdottir, 2005; Fraser, 1998; Hart, 1979; Sobel, 1993/2002). These studies sought to understand children and young people by describing significant places within their daily lives. Schools have been observed as one significant place within children's daily lives (Holloway & Valentine, 2000; Rasmussen, 2004).

Although it is widely accepted that schools are significant places within childhood (Holloway & Valentine, 2000; Rasmussen, 2004), few studies have described them, indoors and outdoors, from young students' perspectives. This study explored a small group of Grade 2 students' special places in two schools: (a) a privately funded school that follows the Montessori curriculum, and (b) a publicly funded school that follows the Ontario curriculum.

This thesis is in seven chapters. The first chapter describes, in the autobiographical signature, my experiences with special places and explains the rationale, purpose, research questions and key terms that focused the study. The second chapter reviews relevant literature. The third chapter details the methodology and phases of research that were employed to answer the research questions. The fourth chapter describes the contexts for Maple Montessori School and Pine Public School (pseudonyms), including overviews of classroom and school routines from the researcher's on-site photographs and observations. The fifth chapter reports the data from Maple Montessori School and Pine Pubic School, including two subsections: photographs and places. The sixth chapter offers a cross-case analysis to show

similarities and differences among the data. The final chapter discusses the underlying themes, implications and limitations of the study. The thesis concludes with the contributions of the study and the researcher's reflections.

Autobiographical Signature

Special places are everyday places that become special by our interactions with them and the significance we assign to them. I remember my childhood according to the special places that I constructed and lived in—*explored, played, dreamed, learned in*—with my twin, younger sister and friends. I remember the natural playground at the private Montessori school I attended. There, I would hang upside down from a tree branch and stretch my five-year-old body. I remember the wooden stairs at the elementary public school portable that hid my friends and me from boys and their boy germs (Figure 1); the round table tucked in between two bookshelves in the school library; quiet, alone and spacious enough to permit me to sort through my favourite novels.

Figure 1. Researcher's special place by the portable steps on the playground at her public elementary school.

I remember the desk that I was assigned in front of the chalkboard. I had never sat at the front before: with my classmates sitting behind me, out of my sight, I was

enabled to focus on the math equations in my textbook. I remember my assigned locker

on the first floor near the technology wing at high school. It was decorated with

photographs and my first Valentine flowers (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Researcher's special place
to be with friends at her high school
locker.

I remember the room in residence that I occupied for my first year at university.

The coloured canopy gave everything a pink and purple glow, and created a safe place

for my friends and me to sit, share secrets and eat popcorn all night. I remember the

leather chair that was pushed close to the window in the fireside reading lounge on the

third floor of the library where I read Chaucer and reflected on my lived experiences

(Figure 3).

I remember the sun-filled Montessori classroom to which I excitedly returned

each spring to assist with student projects. I would move throughout the classroom

carefully to avoid stepping on students' work that was arranged on floor mats.

Figure 3. Researcher's special place to read in a library at university as an undergraduate student.

As a graduate student, my one–bedroom apartment and the local coffee shop have become my special places (Figure 4). It is from my own experiences in different learning spaces that I found my interest in those school spaces that are special places to children.

Figure 4. Researcher's special place to study in a coffee shop as a graduate student.

Rationale

The *Convention of the Right of the Child*, first declared by the United Nations

International Children's Fund in 1959 and adopted in 1989 as the *Children Act* by the

United Nations General Assembly, established children's individual and civic rights,

and, in particular, children's right to education (United Nations, 1989). In Canada,

schooling is compulsory for students aged six to 16, though some jurisdictions mandate

school for students aged 5 to 18 (Council of Ministers of Education Canada, 2008). The

Ontario Ministry of Education (2011b) mandates that schools offer classes for 194 days

from September to June. Students spend an average of seven hours each day at school,

35 hours per week and, therefore, 1,358 hours per year at school. Due to the

significance of schools in students' daily lives (Rasmussen, 2004), researchers have

investigated students' academic performance (Martin, 2006), emotional and social

development (Moore, 1986), and health and wellbeing (Maxwell, 2006) in different

learning environments (Baines & Snortum, 1973; Dohrmann, Nishida, Gartner, Lipsky,

& Grimm, 2007; Lillard, & Else-Quest, 2006; Lopata, Wallace, & Finn, 2005).

The rationale for the current study is based on three research findings. First, the

role of schools in childhood is significant (Holloway & Valentine, 2000; Martin, 2006;

Rasmussen, 2004). Second, place-making is prominent in middle childhood[1] (Hart,

1979; Sobel, 1993/2002). Third, place research with students is an effective method for

understanding students' place attachment and special places at their schools (Cele,

2006; Chawla, 2000; Dittoe, 2002; Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford & Davies, 2006).

In the following section, I explain each finding to establish the rationale for the

---

[1] Middle childhood refers to children aged 8–11 (Greig & Taylor, 1999; Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford, & Davies, 2006).

[2] Personal communication with Kim Rasmussen (2 May 2011) confirmed that the studies were only

current study on students' special places at two Ontario schools.

The Role of Schools in Childhood is Significant

Holloway and Valentine (2000) understand childhood as a period for socialisation: "childhood is a time when children are developed, stretched and educated into their future adult roles, most clearly through the institution of school, but also, through the family and wider social and civic life" (p. 2). Schools, along with families and communities, help shape children into adults.

Rasmussen (2004) organized children's daily lives into an "institutionalized triangle" (p. 155), which identified schools as one of three significant spaces for children, along with their homes and recreational facilities. She reported the significance of children's places in an article (2004) from two studies (Agervig, Jensen, & Jørgensen, 2001; Rasmussen & Smidt, 2002), though these studies are not available in English.[2] In Rasmussen and Smidt (2002), according to Rasmussen (2004), 88 participants, aged 5–12, from 13 different locations in Denmark, used disposable cameras to photograph "places meaningful to them" (p. 155). In Agervig, Jensen, and Jørgensen (2001 as cited by Rasmussen, 2004), 60 elementary students from four different Danish neighbourhoods led walking interviews of their neighbourhoods to show researchers their important places.

From the students' photographs and stories that focused on the "school arena" (Rasmussen, 2004, p. 168), Rasmussen concluded that most students "primarily relate to their schoolmates and teachers" (p. 168). While some photographs were taken of play objects, the walking interviews revealed emotional and physical connections to

---

[2] Personal communication with Kim Rasmussen (2 May 2011) confirmed that the studies were only available in Danish. Researchers who focus on children's places are largely from Denmark, Iceland and the United Kingdom (Foley & Leverett, 2011).

important places within their schools. Students often described being corrected or

scolded for seeking out these places, in particular while they were in the playground.

Rasmussen concluded that, "places for children" (p. 168) including playgrounds,

courtyards, and ball courts often did not meet the children's emotional and physical

needs to empower them to make these places special "children's places" (p. 168). She

questioned:

> Is there any place and justification for 'children's places' outside the 'places for
>
> children'? Primarily, I am thinking about institutions for young children and
>
> schools, where in the Danish context children spend more and more time fenced
>
> in, monitored, risk-assessed and pedagogically employed.
>
> (Rasmussen, 2004, p. 166)

In other words, "the environments *of* children are not always the environments *for*

children" (Spencer & Blades, 2006, p. 1). Rasmussen's conclusions about places for

children in Denmark led me to consider Ontario places for children and children's

places in their schools.

Place-making is Prominent in Middle Childhood

Children begin to develop a sense of self at age seven (Hart, 1979). Self-

development is largely facilitated through finding and creating special places in the

adult world (Hart, 1979; Sobel 1993/2002). The process of finding and creating special

places is commonly referred to as place-making, and is prominent in middle childhood

(Sobel, 1993/2002). Sobel asked 90 students, aged 5–11, at Denbury Primary School in

Devon, England and 101 students, aged 5–15, at Harvey Vale Government School on

the Island of Carriacou in the West Indies, to draw maps of important places and to

discuss them in an interview with him. He also conducted field trips from both schools

with students from different age and gender groups. Sobel noted developmental

patterns for place-making.

Overall, boys (81%) and girls (75%) indicated that they had "built, found, or

played in" (Sobel 1993/2002, p. 33) places such as dens, playhouses, forts and bush

houses. Sobel observed that, "these places seem to become significant beginning

around age six or seven and reach their height of importance around age ten or eleven"

(p. 20). He later identified the "height of interest" (p. 33) for these types of places

occurred during ages 8–11. Furthermore, Sobel noted a difference between boys and

girls place-making. Boys aged 5–7 years and 12–15 years were "more likely to say they

did not build or use" forts and bush houses whereas girls were "consistently interested

in playhouses or playshops throughout the five to eleven year age period" (p. 35).

Children's interest in special places appears to have developmental and gender

implications. The next section in this chapter further describes the implications of

school design and place-making.

Place Research Methods and Implications

Students' involvement in place research is crucial to understand their learning

environments (Einarsdottir, 2005; Rasmussen, 2004; Sobel, 1993/2002). Special places

are particular spaces that are associated with positive emotions often through significant

experiences (Chawla, 2000). Research that focuses on special places encompasses both

the physical and socio-emotional environments (Dittoe, 2002). For example, the

physical environment often includes the size and placement of windows, which may

cause students to feel warm or cool depending on the amount of sunlight entering the

school. The socio-emotional environment often includes how the students feel about the school, and is dependent on the relationships that occur in-place. Students have user knowledge about their schools that adults may not be able to observe (OWP, VS, & BMD, 2010). For school architects and designers to understand how students feel about and use their learning environments, it appears necessary to hear students' voices and to involve them in the design research process.

Place research is often conducted with methods that empower children in order to gain insight about their experiences of place (Chawla, 2000; Foley & Leverett, 2011; Holloway & Valentine, 2000). Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford and Davies (2006) conducted a qualitative study with students aged 8–11 from across Wales about "Welshness." They "explored children's attachment to places and cultures through school-based interviews, focus groups and participant observation" (p. 2). The authors recommended flexible and plural qualitative research methods to "elicit the meanings children themselves generate rather than meanings constructed within the researchers' instruments" (p. 27).

The implications of place research are both short-term and long-term. Short-term implications will be observable in how school administrators, teachers and students (re)arrange and (re)use design elements in their classrooms and schools to create more opportunities for exploring and playing that are essential for developing place attachment and fostering learning.

In the long-term, place research could contribute to new school layout and furniture designs by informing designers, architects and community members about what children need in educational spaces and how they engage with their learning

environments. Furthermore, finding and constructing special places in childhood could encourage individuals, later in life, to find and create homes that give them similar feelings, and bring peace to their adult minds (Chawla, 2000; Cobb, 1977; Sobel, 1993/2002). Long-term implications, such as the significance of place-making and attachment, are lesser known, though some researchers (Chawla, 1992; Ellis, 2004; Rasmussen, 2004) suggest that they are integral for development of the self. The next section of this thesis describes further the potential impacts of place attachment on students' development.

Significance of Place Attachment

The current study was shaped by applying the concept of place attachment to students' use of special places within two different learning environments: (a) a Montessori school and (b) a public school. The concept of place attachment explains children's feelings of happiness and joy for going to or spending time in their special places. Children may also feel sadness and loss for leaving or not being able to spend time in specific spaces (Ellis, 2004).

A number of researchers have demonstrated that engagement with special places plays an integral role in childhood (Benson, 2009; Chawla, 1992; Ellis, 2004; Hart, 1979; Rasmussen, 2004; Sobel, 1993/2002). Chawla (1992) noted that place provides three types of satisfaction: (a) security, (b) social affiliation, and (c) creative expression and exploration. Tuan (1977/2008) also emphasized the sense of security that may come from place. He states, "place is security, space is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other (p. 3).

Furthermore, Chawla (1992) argued that place and personality are shaped by

12

childhood attachment to special places:

> Children's place attachment is important both for what it contributes to the
> quality of their lives and the enduring effects they leave after childhood is over.
> Our experiences are circumscribed by our places and our personalities and
> perspectives are developed from the experiences we have in the places available
> to us. (p. 62)

Children's experiences in special places involve the design of the physical environment, emotional and social relationships, and activities in-place (Kylin, 2003). The current study explored Grade 2 students' experiences of special places at two Ontario schools. The purpose of the study and the research questions are described in the next section of this thesis. The key terms that were generated from the rationale are also defined in the next section.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of the current study was to describe Grade 2 students' special places in two learning environments. The study explored which spaces became special and what elements made them so. Results of the study contribute to the knowledge base about (a) school and classroom design, (b) special place research with Grade 2 students, and (c) place attachment. The following research questions guided the study:

1. Where do Grade 2 students create their special places in a Montessori learning environment?

2. Where do Grade 2 students create their special places in a public learning environment?

3. What defines Grade 2 students' special places in each learning environment?

4. How do Grade 2 students use their special places in each learning environment?

Definition of Key Terms

The following key terms were used in the current study.

Learning environment: The spaces, inside and outside, which make up a particular school (Dudek, 2002). This generally includes classrooms, hallways, libraries, gymnasiums, washrooms, playgrounds and parking lots.

Space: An area that is free from meaning, available for interpretation and use (Rasmussen, 2004; Tuan, 1977/2008).

Place: A specific space that has specific meanings and associations (Relph, 1976 as cited by Rasmussen; Tuan, 1977/2008); a location of space (Cele, 2006).

Special place: A specific space that a child identifies as having significant meanings and associations (Chawla, 1992, 2000; Sobel, 1993/2002).

Place attachment: the feeling of excitement or joy for going to or being in a specific space and the feeling of loss or sadness for leaving that specific space; a sense of placeness (Ellis, 2004).

Summary

The three-fold rationale, which formed the foundation for the current study, explained that (a) the role of schools in childhood is significant, (b) place-making is prominent in middle childhood, and (c) place research with students is an effective method for understanding students' place attachment and special places at their schools. Purpose, research questions and key terms were also defined. In the next chapter of this thesis, relevant literature is reviewed to develop an understanding of space and place research, as well as special places and place attachment research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The current study explored students' special places in two learning environments, investigating design elements and feelings that students associated with particular locations. The following literature review examines research that has focused on (a) the influence of physical spaces and places on students' learning at school, and (b) the development of attachment to learning environments through students' engagement with special places. First, space and place literature is reviewed, including studies that investigated design elements and students' outcomes, as well as qualities of place within different environments. Second, special places and place attachment literature is reviewed, including studies that investigated specific locations which participants described as special.

Space and Place

Space and place have different meanings for children due to their interactions with them, their cultural contexts and their previous experiences (Derr, 2006; Holloway & Valentine, 2000; Matthews & Limb, 1999). The interaction between children and space and place has the potential to shape both the children's minds as well as the space's meaning (Matthews & Limb, 1999; Scourfield, et al., 2006). As De Botton (2006) described, "belief in the significance of architecture is premised on the notion that we are, for better or for worse, different people in different places—and on the conviction that it is architecture's task to render vivid to us who we might ideally be" (p. 13). De Botton's understanding of architecture may be applied to learning environments: children may be different learners in different schools and classrooms. It is, thus, one of

15

the purposes of the learning environment to provide optimal conditions for meaningful engagement and learning. For the purpose of the current study, space is defined as an area that is free from meaning, while place is a specific space that is associated with specific meaning (Rasmussen, 2004). In other words, "What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value" (Tuan, 1977/2008, p. 6).

Schools are spaces—for better or for worse—that have been designed for learning. Researchers have correlated students' standardized test scores, absenteeism, and perceptions of their schools (Erwine, 2006; Maxwell, 2006; Moore, 2006; Heschong Mahone Group, 1999; Tanner & Langford, 2003) with design elements. Some researchers compared these characteristics among students at different learning environments, including Montessori schools (Lopata, Wallace, & Finn, 2005; Rathunde, 2003). Researchers, also, have investigated students' feeling and emotional attachment to places in their learning environments (Cappello, 2005; Einarsdottir, Dockett, & Perry, 2009; Einarsdottir, 2005; Fraser, 1998; Peterson, 2009). In the next section of this literature review, I first discuss research focused on school spaces and how design elements affect learning. Second, I discuss research focused on school places and how students make special places in their learning environment.

Space

From one-room schoolhouses to multiple-floor, self-sustainable schools, school design has evolved and changed throughout history and across cultural contexts (Dudek, 2002). Despite overall differences in school design, learning environments are made up of indoor and outdoor spaces, including classrooms, hallways, libraries, washrooms,

16

playgrounds and parking lots. In each space, design elements have been shown to have a significant influence on student behaviour and academic performance. The following sections of this chapter critically contextualizes school design in studies that have focused on indoor and outdoor design elements, including (a) windows, (b) flooring, (c) furniture, and (d) asphalt, grass fields and gardens.

Windows. The positive effects of daylight, that is natural light from windows and skylights to illuminate indoor environments, have been demonstrated by numerous studies (Brossy deDios, Rogic, & Vaughn, 2010; Erwine, 2006). A significant study on "Daylighting in schools" was conducted by the Heschong Mahone Group (1999) for the Pacific Gas and Electric Company (Brossy deDios, et al., 2010). Correlations were found among students' academic performance and the quantity and quality of daylight in their classrooms. The study took place in 2,000 classrooms across three American school districts, including San Juan Capistrano (California), Seattle (Washington), and Fort Collins (Colorado). Each district included between 8,000 to 9,000 students. Classrooms were classified based on a series of codes from a 0–5 scale for (a) the size and tint of windows, (b) the presence and type of sky lighting, and (c) the overall quality and quantity of daylight. Standardized district math and reading test scores were used to represent students' academic performance.

For Capistrano-district schools, standardized tests were administered in the fall and spring of the same school year. Control classrooms were established at each school to assess individual school site and neighbourhood influences. Capistrano students in classrooms with the most daylighting progressed 20% faster on math tests and 26% faster on reading tests in one year compared to students in the least daylight classrooms.

17

Capistrano students in classrooms with the largest window areas progressed 15% faster in math and 23% faster in reading than students in the least window area classrooms. Similarly, Capistrano students in classrooms with well-designed skylights that the teacher was able to manipulate progressed 19–20% more rapidly than those in classrooms without skylights. Academic scores were 7–8% higher in classrooms that had operable windows compared to those in classrooms without them.

Progress was also measured in Seattle and Fort Collins school districts. Control classrooms were not available due to the lack of information about each school. All students completed math and reading standardized tests at the end of the school year. Overall, students in classrooms with the most window area or daylight achieved 7%– 18% higher scores than students in classrooms without windows or daylight.

Some reviewers, according to Heschong (2002), questioned the study's reliability and posited that students' higher test scores were due to better teachers and were not related to the students' exposure to daylight. Heschong reanalyzed the teachers from the Capistrano school district to control for (a) their years of experience, (b) their education level, and (c) their special academic and teaching awards. She determined that these better teachers only accounted for 1.4% of the variance. Heschong also noted that the report demonstrated, "strength of association between variables" (p. 67) and did not claim to prove a causal relationship between daylighting and academic achievement.

Daylight in the classroom is one way to provide sufficient conditions for students to complete their academic tasks. The Illuminating Engineering Society of North America (IES) promotes taking "a holistic approach to lighting" (Erwine, 2006. p. 20) which includes using daylight from windows and adjustable electric lighting to

illuminate not only horizontal surfaces such as desk tops but vertical surfaces such as the walls of the learning environment. It is necessary, according to IES (2011), to target lighting to the users, their expectations, functions and tasks such that the school distinction, whether K–12, vocational, college or university, impacts the "kinds of lighting effects to lighting equipment styling to luminances and illuminances" (p. 24). Further studies are needed to determine the significance of a holistic lighting approach, though research supports the underlying principle: to offer variety and choice to adjust lighting conditions to meet individual and program needs (Erwine, 2006).

Flooring. Researchers have isolated flooring as a variable in reducing noise in classrooms, which in turn reduced distraction, frustration and absenteeism due to health issues as well as increased academic performance (Maxwell, 2006). Student health issues related to classroom noise include stress, elevated blood pressure and increased heart rate (Maxwell). The presence of flooring and the reduction of noise within classrooms has also been correlated with increased student achievement.

Tanner and Langford (2003) investigated the effect of classroom flooring on student achievement. They measured reverberation times to determine noise levels in 100 public elementary schools in Georgia with carpeted and non-carpeted, hard surfaces (linoleum or wood flooring). Noise levels (high or low reverberation times) in carpeted classrooms were significantly lower than in hard surfaced classrooms.

Tanner and Langford then compared scores from standardized math and reading tests for students who were in carpeted classrooms to those in hard surfaced classrooms. For math, students in carpeted classrooms averaged 2.2 points higher than those in hard surfaced classrooms. For reading, students in carpeted classrooms achieved 2.3 points

19

higher than those in non-carpeted classrooms.

Tanner and Langford (2003) acknowledged that the Carpet & Rug Institute supported the study, which may have biased the results to promote the implementation of carpets in classrooms and increase carpet sales for the Institute. Other studies on flooring, however, have demonstrated similar results (Maxwell, 2006). It can be concluded that flooring is one design element that may be used as a modifier for noise and may influence academic performance.

Furniture. Appropriately-sized and adaptable furniture has also been shown to minimize classroom noise, as well as minimize students' disruptions due to their physical discomfort (McGee, 2008) and their psychological frustrations (Maxwell, 2006). Studies have suggested that the arrangement of furniture may further minimize disruptions and enhance learning by promoting on-task behavior (Maxwell, 2006; Wannarka & Ruhl, 2008).

Maxwell (2006) noted that the "important thing is that the classroom arrangement should fit the learning activity" (p. 17). Wannarka and Ruhl (2008) offered a similar conclusion from their analysis of eight studies conducted between 1979 and 2007, which correlated different seating arrangements (rows, clusters, tables and semi-circles) to students' behaviour, academic performance, question asking, and quality and quantity of work output. In two of the studies, participants were students aged 7–15 years. In the remaining studies, students were aged 9–11 years. Wannarka and Ruhl concluded that any desk arrangement encouraged on-task behaviour and, when the arrangement matched the task, increased academic performance. For example, rows promoted hand raising, writing and production of more work when the assignment was individual.

Conversely, when the assignment was group-based (e.g., brainstorming or questioning), desks arranged in clusters or semi-circles facilitated group interactions. All but one study reviewed by Wannarka and Ruhl (2008) demonstrated rows as the most effective desk arrangement for on-task behaviour. They cautioned, however, that the studies defined on-task and off-task behaviours differently based on the behaviours necessary to complete class assignments. Despite the consistent results, Wannarka and Ruhl (2008) also criticized the studies for their lack of control groups and controls among the participants.

Rosenfield, Lambert, and Black (1985) also studied seating arrangement, using methods that appeared to overcome the methodological limitations that Wannarka and Ruhl (2008) observed in their review. Rosenfield et al. (1985) measured on- and off-task observable student behaviour for students sitting at desks arranged in rows, clusters and circles by time-sampling observation. The study included four girls and four boys from each of two Grade 5, two Grade 5/6, and two Grade 6 classes in Contra Costa County, California. Students were further categorized for their ability to communicate.

Three variables were controlled. First, participants were purposefully selected from each class with varying verbal interactions, achievement and gender. Second, instructional content was controlled by the researcher observing similar lessons in each classroom on brainstorming ideas. Third, the position of the teacher remained constant as she stood at the front of the room for all seating arrangements. Three experimental classrooms were observed using all three desk arrangements for three 20-minute observation sequences, while three control classrooms remained in one arrangement and were observed for one 20-minute lesson.

Results demonstrated that no significant difference could be attributed to the desk arrangements for listening, discussion comments or disruptive behaviours. Circle arrangement, however, promoted more on-task responses and out-of-order comments compared to rows. Students arranged in clusters demonstrated more on-task oral responses than rows but more hand-raising than when they were arranged in circles. Overall, a circle arrangement appeared to facilitate discussion and control for off-task behaviour. Additionally, desk arrangement appeared to have more positive influence on low-achieving boys' behaviour than on low-achieving girls' behaviour.

Seating arrangement research has several limitations. The research is largely from the 1970s and 1980s. Although Wannarka and Ruhl (2008) explained that American schooling had not changed enough since then for this research to be considered irrelevant, it would be necessary to address furniture design that has changed. Current design technology in ergonomic workspaces has yielded its own body of research that has focused on the ability of the desk, chair and other equipment (e.g., computer monitors and keyboards) to adjust to meet the students' and teachers' physical needs (Bennett, Woodcock, & Tien, 2006).

Seating arrangement research is also limited by age group and is largely focused on students from middle school (aged 9–11 years), college and university (aged 17 years and older). Furthermore, the studies primarily relied on behaviours that could be observed to determine which desk arrangement positively influenced behaviour and academic test scores, thus leaving students' preferences out of the discussion.

One exception was McCorskey and McVetta (1978) who studied 972 college students' attitudes towards desk arrangement. Students marked their preferred seating

on three diagrams for (a) elective courses, and (b) required courses. McCorskey and McVetta also determined students' communication apprehension levels with a *Personal Report of Communication Apprehension* survey.

The results demonstrated that, overall, students preferred desks arranged in rows (48%) rather than arranged as a to horseshoe (33.5%) or modular (18.4%) desk arrangements. Despite this overall preference, the results varied significantly and depended on the type of course. Fifty-five percent of the students preferred rows for required courses and only 32.8% of the students preferred them for elective courses. The horseshoe arrangement was most preferred for elective courses while only 14.1% preferred it for required courses. Most students of varying communication apprehension preferred rows for elective courses, except for students with low communication apprehension who favoured the horseshoe arrangement.

Overall, McCorskey and McVetta recommended "giv[ing] students as much choice as feasible in selecting their own seats no matter what arrangement is employed" (p. 111). While participation is influenced by the seating arrangement, students with low desire to communicate during class will not change significantly whether they sit in high or low interactive areas (McCorskey & McVetta, 1978).

Despite the significant research on the arrangement of student desks, fewer studies have focused on the role of other furniture, including couches and armchairs. One exception was a study conducted by Coles (1969) who reported on elementary school students' perspectives of "those places they call schools" (p. 47). The students' accounts took different forms, including written compositions, poems and illustrations. Couches and comfortable places to sit figured prominently in their responses: "We

could have a big rug here in the room, so if you fell down you wouldn't get hurt, like I did. And they could have some places, some big sofas maybe, where if you didn't feel too good, you could lie down, or you could just sit in them sometimes, and you'd be more comfortable" (p. 48).

Peterson's (2009) findings were congruent with that of Coles (1969). She reported that students described a seating area (that included couches) in a hallway as meaningful for the emotional and physical comfort that the place afforded. Similarly, Upitis (2010) reports research from Iceland, Minnesota, Germany and south-eastern Ontario in which students described their schools and call for comfortable couches and sofas on which to spend time.

Asphalt, grass fields and gardens. Students in elementary schools spend an average of 25% of their day outside (Bell & Dyment, 2006). Outdoor spaces at schools include the schoolyard, playground, and parking lot. According to Moore (1986), "effective playgrounds provide a safe environment for active play, learning, exploration, and physical activity, which are crucial for healthy development" (p. 86). Other researchers agree, arguing that the design of outdoor spaces at schools has the potential to promote cooperative behaviour (Bell & Dyment, 2006), healthy eating habits and physical activities (Morris, Neustadtler, & Zidenberg-Cherr, 2001; Morris & Zidenberg-Cherr, 2002; Willenberg, et al., 2010) and wellbeing (Upitis, 2007). School grounds that foster place-making often have become green school grounds by including other natural design elements such as trees, shrubs, trails, rocks, logs, ponds, bird feeders, green houses and food gardens (Bell & Dyment, 2006; Upitis, 2007).

Bell and Dyment (2006) conducted green school grounds research with the Toyota Evergreen Learning Grounds program called *Grounds for Action*, which was funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada. The study included 105 participants: 27 parents, 45 teachers and 29 administrators at 59 elementary schools in British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec and Nova Scotia. Participants completed questionnaires that primarily asked closed questions to rate the students' behaviour and physical activity before and after their schools were transformed by greening. Some open-ended questions asked the participants to identify the 10 factors that they perceived to enable physical activity and the 10 factors that they perceived to limit physical activity. The schools ranged in size (from less than 200 to over 1,000 students), ethnic diversity (from almost entirely Caucasian student populations to largely Aboriginal, Afro-Canadian, Indo-Canadian, Arabic and/or Asian), and setting (27 urban, 21 suburban and 11 rural schools). The greening projects also varied in scale (from the construction of green houses to the planting of wildflower gardens) and duration (from one year to twenty-six years).

Results demonstrated that the school greening projects had significant impact on students' engagement in the environment and their physical activity levels. Seventy-one percent of the respondents perceived that their schools, after greening, promoted more moderate and light physical activity. This pattern of activity largely included "shelter building" and "place–making" (Bell & Dyment, 2006, p. 7). The green school ground seemed to "appeal to a wider variety of student interests (90% of respondents) and to support a wider variety of play activities (85%)" (p. 25). Green school grounds also promoted more activity (82% of participants), more constructive play (59%), more civil

behaviour (81%) and better integration of physical activity into school life (77%). They were reported to help "strengthen the link between play and learning" (82%, p. 26).

Respondents also reported that the provision of shade seemed to be the primary enabling factor (63%) for physical activity, while the lack of shade was perceived as the second most limiting factor (46%). The respondents also noted that green spaces were often off-limits to students during free time (24%), which is congruent with Rasmussen's (2004) finding that students felt discouraged from seeking out certain areas of the school playground. Bell and Dyment's (2006) study, however, was limited to adults' perceptions of the school grounds while feedback from the students, the "target audience" (p. 54), would have provided further insight.

Moore and Wong (1997) observed that, as a result of naturalized school grounds, students spent more time in cooperative group activities, that the level of positive social interaction was elevated, and there were more interactions among students of different ages, sexes and ethnic backgrounds. The atmosphere was more creative and peaceful. Moore (1997) suggested that further research needs to be conducted on special childhood places "where children and youth do find autonomy and access to the natural world" (p. 216).

Other studies have investigated the link between outdoor activities and learning. For example, the planting, weeding and harvesting of food gardens have become the focus for some nutrition education curriculums (Morris & Zidenberg-Cherr, 2002; Willenberg et al., 2010). Morris, Neustadtler and Zidenberg-Cherr (2001) conducted a pilot study to determine the influence of a garden-enhanced nutrition education curriculum. Forty-eight Grade 1 students at an intervention site took part in nutrition

lessons throughout the school year in combination with Fall and Spring vegetable garden planting, maintaining and harvesting activities, while 49 Grade 1 students at a control site received no formal nutrition or gardening education. All students completed questionnaires, interviews and surveys. The questionnaire consisted of two sections and took 12–15 minutes to complete. Each student was interviewed individually in his or her language of choice (English or Spanish). In the first section, a trained interviewer asked students to (a) identify each vegetable, and (b) organize pictures of food into food groups. In the second section, a trained interviewer asked students if they were willing to taste six different vegetables and rate how they liked them by pointing to one of three face pictures.

Results showed an average increase from 1.9–2.5 points (maximum 5) of students' knowledge about vegetables and their food groups in the intervention group while no significant change was found in the control group. The post-test results showed that students in the intervention group were more willing (4.8 average willingness score) to taste the six vegetables than those in the control group (3.9 score out of 5). It is significant, however, that the intervention group demonstrated an increased willingness to taste vegetables and, thus, the use of gardens with a nutrition curriculum may be linked to students' development of healthy dietary habits and activity. Morris et al. (2001) concluded that a slightly older group of students would allow for a more detailed evaluation and perhaps more significant results.

Based on the results from the pilot study described above, Morris and Zidenberg-Cherr (2002) designed a nutrition education curriculum for elementary students that consisted of nine nutrition lessons and garden activities. They evaluated the influence

of the curriculum by using nutrition-knowledge questionnaires and vegetable-preference surveys with over 215 Grade 4 students from three schools in one school district in California. One school was designated as the control site and received no formal nutrition or gardening education. Another school was designated as the classroom-based nutrition education site and received only in-class nutrition lessons. The third school was designated as the garden-based nutrition education site and received both in-class nutrition lessons and garden activities. Morris and Zidenberg-Cherr reported that students who were exposed to the nutrition and gardening activities showed significant improvement in their knowledge of the topics from the different lessons. Feedback from teachers and students also permitted revisions of the nutrition curriculum and activities to make the program more accessible to the participants.

Upitis (2007) described one case study of a school that also offered nutrition and ecology lessons with gardening activities. Martin Luther King Middle School in Berkeley, California, transformed its "cracked asphalt" into an "Edible Schoolyard" (p. 9), a one-acre organic garden and kitchen classroom. Students grew a variety of vegetables, fruits and herbs. Students also participated in a unique curriculum that was designed based on the Edible Schoolyard by the Center for Ecoliteracy (Upitis, 2007). Murphy (2003), in a report on *The Edible Schoolyard*, stated that the Schoolyard "provides a context in which to educate the whole child and seeks solutions to improving student behaviour and student learning in ways that are not typical in the isolation of traditional classroom work" (p. 2). Outdoor spaces at schools, as these studies have demonstrated, are playing an integral role in students' learning.

Furthermore, students' time outdoors at school is increasingly significant as it is

suggested that during their free-time in the evenings and on weekends they do not play

outdoors "to the same extent as in previous generations" (Elsley, 2011, p. 102). The

perceived threat of traffic and "stranger danger" are often viewed as causes for this

change in outdoor play and activities (Elsley, 2011; Moore, 1997). Elsley (2011)

investigated outdoor spaces that were meaningful according to disadvantaged students

aged 10–14 years in Scotland. In an out-of-school club, Elsley gave students cameras to

photograph their important places while they visited those places on "group

expeditions" (p. 107). Students described (a) formal (e.g. recreational centres) outdoor

spaces and (b) informal (e.g. wild fields) outdoor spaces as signficiant. Elsley

concluded from the results that (a) formal "designed play space" often appealed to

younger participants and older students "subverted [the spaces] to provide the kind of

play opportunities they wanted" (p. 110) while (b) informal "wild" places "were seen to

be special places, but this was only the case where these spaces felt safe and

unthreatening" (p. 110). Eisely's conclusions were congruent with those of Moore

(1986), who noted that effective playgrounds were perceived as safe and secure.

Researchers agree that playgrounds are spaces designed and designated for

students (Dudek, 2000; Rasmussen, 2004); therefore it may be equally important to

listen to students and create environments that allow students to feel safe and be able to

make their own special places.

Although researchers do not agree on one ideal school design, manipulation of

windows, flooring, furniture, asphalt, grass fields, and gardens have demonstrated

significant affects on students' abilities to learn (for a comprehensive review of design

elements studies see Frumkin, Geller, & Rubin, 2006). School architecture and design

studies have isolated variables within classrooms and measured the effect on students'

academic test scores. Place research with students offers a holistic approach to

understanding how students experience all design elements, and how they develop

special places in their learning environments. In the next section of this literature

review, I report on relevant literature about the meaning of place for students and the

effects of special places.

Place

Hutchison (1998) argued that, "the spirit of play and place are bound up together

in a unique fantasy world of secrecy, adventure and challenge" (p. 100). The feeling of

"place" may be considered in the different ways that humans experience, interact and

play with it, both as fantasy or imagined, and experiential places. Place is

simultaneously constructed by and constructs our worlds. For the purpose of this study,

place will be defined as a space that has specific meanings and associations (Relph,

1976 as cited by Rasmussen, 2004).

This section of the literature review first discusses human interaction with place,

including four elements: (a) place knowledge, (b) awareness of public and private place,

(c) place permanence, and (d) quality of place. Next, it discusses atmosphere: students'

feeling of place at school. Students special places are contextualized in special place

research in the final section of the literature review.

Elements of place: Human interactions that foster placeness. "Space is

transformed into place as it acquires definition and meaning" (Tuan, 1977/2008, p. 136).

Space "is experienced directly as having room in which to move. . . . Place is a special

kind of object . . . . it is an object in which one can dwell: it is pause" (p. 12). The

pause, according to Tuan, is what allows us to experience the place with our senses, reflect upon it and attribute meaning to it. Human interaction with place may be broken down into different elements: knowledge, awareness, permanence and quality.

Place knowledge. People are able to know places experientially or abstractly, intimately or conceptually. Experiential knowledge comes from sensorial experiences in-place. It is both how the body's senses perceive the environment and how the body interacts with the environment. Spatial ability is developed when our body interacts with space and learns to orientate itself by knowing landmarks and distances, and to move freely from one place to another.

Place knowledge may also be expressed abstractly on maps or in literature. Sensorial experiences of place are not necessary to have conceptual knowledge of place, although intimate knowledge is generated only by the social interactions that occur in-place. For example, home is an intimate place due to the feeling of familiarity and real, sensorial memories. It is "when space feels thoroughly familiar to us, [that] it has become place" (Tuan, 1977/2008, p. 73). The place, in other words, becomes special by the desire and experience of dwelling and spending time in it.

Children, however, come to know places differently from adults: "Children relate to people and objects with a directness and intimacy that are the envy of adults bruised by life. Children know they are frail; they seek security and yet remain open to the world" (Tuan, 1977/2008, p. 137). Security, as other learning environment researchers argued (Chawla, 2002; Moore, 1986), enabled children to move freely within a space, explore and develop special places.

31

Place awareness. "The world feels spacious and friendly when it accomodates our desires, and cramped when it frustrates them" (Tuan, 1977/2008, p. 65). Place develops a sense of consciousness or awareness. Tuan explained that, "the built environment clarifies social roles and relations. People know better who they are and how they ought to behave when the arena is humanly designed rather than nature's raw stage" (p. 102). In a way, as De Botton (2006) also argued, "architecture 'teaches'" (Tuan, 1977/2008, p. 102). For example, depending on the place, one may feel inside or outside, private or public, spacious or crowded. It is also necessary to engage with different types of places. "Privacy and solitude," according to Tuan, "are necessary for sustained reflection and a hard look at self, and through the understanding of self to the full appreciation of other personalities" (p. 65). Tuan cautioned, though, that one relies less on architecture to create a "tangible world that articulates experiences, those deeply felt as well as those than can be verbalized, individual as well as collective" (p. 100), due to the "increasingly literate" (p. 116) world.

Place permanence. Place provides permanence: it "stays put" (Tuan, 1977/2008, p. 29) in contrast to a human who moves according to her needs. A sense of stability and security come from place permanence. Place, things and objects endure and are "dependable" (p. 140) in ways that human beings do not endure and are not dependable. By interacting with place, one depends on the built environments' permanence and becomes familiar with it in the same way one developed place knowledge and place awareness.

Place quality. Humans define places by the quality or intensity of their experiences in them. Tuan (1977/2008) explained:

The visual quality of an environment is quickly tallied if one has the artist's

eye. But the 'feel' of a place takes longer to acquire. It is made up of

experiences, mostly fleeting and undramatic, repeated day after day and

over the span of years. It is a unique blend of sights, sounds, and smells, a

unique harmony of natural and artificial rhythms such as times of sunrise

and sunset, of work and play. (pp. 183–184)

In other words, as Milligan (1998) described, "the interactions that give a site meaning

do not have to be extreme nor do they have to be entirely positive for a strong

attachment to form" (p. 10). Intensity of experiences in-place, however, strengthen

knowing and attachment far more than extensity: "many years in one place may leave

few memory traces that we can or would wish to recall; an intense experience of short

duration, on the other hand, can alter our lives" (Tuan, 1977/2008, p. 185). For

example, Tuan described trees on a school yard that were planted to provide shade, to

make it green and more pleasant, however, "their real value may lie as stations for

poignant, unplanned human encounters" (p. 143). Place knowledge, awareness,

permanence and quality descriptions help articulate ways that students in the current

study may express their engagement with special places at school.

Atmosphere: Feeling of place at school. Physical school design elements are

seldom experienced in isolation, despite researchers' attempts to isolate them and

correlate specific behaviours. They are largely experienced as a *feeling* of space and

place: they combine together to create school atmosphere or climate. In contrast to the

physical school design, which has experiential and measurable properties (e.g., quality

and quantity of daylight, type of flooring, seating arrangement, and nature of outdoor

33

environments), school atmosphere and climate refer to the socio-emotional environment that is, in part, shaped by design elements but also by the school's approach to education and the human interactions that occur in the space.

Learning Environment Research (LER) seeks to understand school climate by asking students to evaluate their feelings about the learning environment on 4- or 5-point Likert questionnaires. LER research is relevant to this current study as it asks students to indicate their perceptions of their classroom, including social aspects that occur in-place.

The *Classroom Environment Scale* is one of the most widely used LER questionnaires (Moos, 1979). Items in this scale have been modified to fit better the participants. For children, *My Class Inventory* (MCI) is often used (Fraser, 1986, 1989, 1998; Fraser, Mahone, & Neale, 1989). Gentry, Gable, and Rizza (2002) used *My Class Activities*, which included 31 statements that evaluated four dimensions (interest, challenge, choice, and enjoyment), using a 5-point Likert response format (never, seldom, sometimes, often, always). In general, students in Grades 6–8 found that their classroom activities were less frequently interesting and enjoyable, with fewer opportunities for choice than did students in Grades 3–5. From their results, Gentry et al. (2002) stressed the importance of understanding students' attitudes for school reform.

LER questionnaires have also been modified for use in different countries. *What Is Happening In This Class* seems to be most valuable for assessing school climate around the world (Goh & Khine, 2002). LER largely focuses on perceptions of particular school subjects, including science and technology classrooms (Fraser, 1998).

Despite modifications to the LER questionnaires to accommodate age, cultural contexts and school subjects, few LER studies have investigated alternative educational learning environments. Two exceptions will be described.

Ryniker and Shoho (2001) used the *Classroom Environment Scale* (Tricket & Moos, 1974 as cited by Ryniker & Shoho, 2001) to investigate school climate according to 39 Grade 4–5 students from nine classes in one public school, and 42 Grade 4–6 students from an upper elementary class in one Montessori school. Three aspects of social climate were differentiated, including: (a) relationship dimensions (involvement, affiliation, teacher's support), (b) personal growth/goal orientation (task orientation, competition), and (c) system maintenance and change dimensions (order and organization, rule clarity, teacher control, innovation).

Results demonstrated that students in the public school perceived their classrooms as more competitive ($p = 0.0017$) than Montessori students, had clearer rules ($p = 0.0004$) and higher teacher control ($p = 0.0413$). Students in the Montessori school more often identified their classroom as innovative ($p = 0.0302$). Ryniker and Shoho (2001) observed no significant differences between public and Montessori classrooms for involvement, affiliation, teacher support, task orientation and order/organization. No significant differences were correlated to gender and only involvement and classroom organization demonstrated higher level for students in Grade 4 than Grade 5. Based on these results, Ryniker and Shoho (2001) described Montessori classrooms as "less competitive, less structured, more student centered, and more innovative than traditional classrooms" (p. 47). Furthermore, they argue that the "differences between the Montessori and the traditional groups are attributed to the fundamental approaches

of the two philosophies" (p. 47).

Rathunde (2003) found similar results. Rathunde used the *Experience Sampling Method* (ESM) for his study with 150 Grade 6 and Grade 8 students from five Montessori schools and 400 Grade 6 and Grade 8 students from 20 "traditional middle schools" (p. 13) in the United States. The participants represented different social classes and ethnicities. Students completed questionnaires throughout the day upon the sounding of an alarm from their watch to indicate (a) their level of engagement with and motivation to complete their academic work, and (b) their perception of the social environment. Rathunde (2003) analyzed data from four thousand signals (beeps); 2500 of those signals caught students during academic work.

Results demonstrated that students in Montessori schools reported a "significantly better quality of academic work than the traditional students" (p. 27). Optimal learning experiences occurred when the balance of motivation, ability and effort matched to create a flow-like state of deep engagement. As Rathunde (2003) described:

> There were strong differences suggesting that Montessori students were feeling more active, strong, excited, happy, relaxed, sociable, and proud while engaged in academic work. They were also enjoying themselves more, they were more interested in what they were doing, and they wanted to be doing academic work more than the traditional students. (p. 27)

Results also demonstrated that Montessori students perceived their teacher differently from students in the traditional schools. Montessori students (a) saw their teachers as more fair, friendly, and interested in them (2.7 Montessori: 3.2 traditional), (b) did not perceive as much chaos in the environment in terms of disruptions and

36

misbehavior (3.3: 3.7), and (c) felt safe from the emotional pain associated with putdowns by teachers and students (4.1:4.3). Friends were also perceived differently. The Montessori students more often perceived their peers as friends-and-classmates while they were doing schoolwork whereas the traditional students, in contrast, saw their peers as classmates only, however, both Montessori and traditional students reported the same average time spent with friends. Rathunde (2003) described the results as statistically significant where $p < 0.05$, which permitted 95% certainty that differences within the data were real and did not occur randomly.

The feeling of place and atmosphere in a school may be further understood by research that explores the meaning individuals attribute to school places. Researchers have described the process of associating meaning with specific spaces as place-making (Hart, 1979), which bonds or attaches the individual to place (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001). Students' experiences of school places, their desire to be in them and make their own special places, is discussed next in the context of place attachment and special place research.

Place Attachment and Special Places

Individuals have affective responses to places (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001). Yet researchers know little about types of places and the physical and social elements that cause individuals to desire to go to and be in these places (Ellis, 2004; Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001; Kylin, 2003). Special place research has investigated the bond or attachment between children and place. For the purpose of this study, place attachment is defined as placeness or an individual's feeling of connection, comfort and belonging that comes from a specific environment (Ellis, 2004).

Special places are defined in the current study as specific locations that children characterize as having significant meanings and associations (Chawla, 2000; Sobel, 1993/2002). Attachment and meaning may come from the social relationships that occur and physical design elements in the specific space (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001; Kylin, 2003). Place attachment and special places' literature is discussed in this section of the current study because of their integral role in conceptualizing students' experiences in learning environments.

Place Attachment

To date, research has focused largely on attachment to residential environments and has often expressed attachment to the people who live in the place rather than the physical landscape (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001). Altman and Low (1992) suggested that people form attachments to environments, which vary in scale, specificity and tangibility.

Hidalgo and Hernandez (2001) compared 177 people's degree of attachment to different spatial ranges (house, neighbourhood, and city) and different dimensions (physical and social). The study grouped participants by their age (between 18–64+), gender (44% female; 56% male) and social class (23% upper class; 42% middle class; 34% working class). Research took place in Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Spain. Hidalgo and Hernandez administered questionnaires that included a place attachment 4-point scale with nine questions regarding how participants would feel if they had to move out of their house/neighbourhood/city (spatial range) or how they would feel if the people they lived with moved or if they were moving with the people they lived with (social/physical dimension). The questionnaire was distributed in nine variations to

avoid response bias. Hidalgo and Hernandez also conducted one-on-one interviews at participants' homes that lasted, on average, 11 minutes. Interviews were used to ensure "representativeness" (p. 276) of the sample and provided an opportunity to distribute the questionnaires.

Results demonstrated that while participants expressed significant attachment to their neighbourhoods (2.9 on a 4-point scale), they expressed more attachment to their house and city (3.1 in both cases). Attachment was greater with female participants as well as participants in the older age groups. Social class did not appear to influence attachment. Social attachment (house: 3.1; neighbourhood: 2.3; city: 2.8) was higher than physical attachment (2.3; 2.2; 2.5) for all spatial ranges. The house represented the highest social attachment whereas the city represented the highest physical attachment. From their results, Hidalgo and Hernandez (2001) concluded that it is necessary to consider the potential for individuals to form social and physical attachments to different environments, including the house and city.

Kylin (2003) also attempted to distinguish between social and physical attachment. She explored students' attachment to social and physical aspects of their *kojor* (Swedish for dens). Kylin conducted open-ended group walking interviews with 18 students aged 9–13 from one primary school in Eslov, Sweden. In June, 38 students wrote essays about "my den" or "my favourite outdoor place" (p. 8). Results revealed that students' den-making was influenced by the outdoor environment, the distance from their homes and the availability of elements and materials to use in building and playing in the dens. She speculated that older children might have participated more in building dens if their physical environment had been more appealing. Students, from

Kylin's results, needed spaces that offered sites which were hidden from view and somewhat defined or enclosed from the larger space. These physical characteristics allowed children to feel a sense of privacy and control: encapsulated by shrubs, the children could sit in secrecy, manipulate their surroundings and determine with whom they shared their special place.

Studies have focused predominantly on children's discovery and creation of special places within their neighbourhoods to explore the bond between individual and place (Benson, 2009; Hart, 1979; Rasmussen, 2004; Sobel, 1993/2002). The neighbourhood as a spatial range for investigating children's special places often included children's bedrooms within their houses, friend's houses, streets they walked to get to school, playgrounds and courtyards.

Few studies have been conducted about students' place attachment to schools (Benson, 2009; Einarsdottir, 2005; Peterson, 2009). Einarsdottir (2005) and Peterson (2009) explored students' special places at their Icelandic schools, though the researchers discussed students' relationships with these places as necessary to develop a sense of place and did not directly mention place attachment. These studies, thus, are better suited to understand students' special places in their learning environments.

Despite the developing research about place attachment, it is necessary to acknowledge that there is little consensus among researchers about the name, definition and methodological approach for the concept of place attachment (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001). Lack of agreement is, in part, due to the fact that place attachment is studied in different disciplines, including environmental psychology, sociology, and geography. Place attachment may also have different names: it may be referred to as

place identity (Scourfield, et al., 2006), sense of community (Sarason, 1974) and sense of place (Cuba & Hummon, 1993; Upitis, 2007). It is undetermined, however, whether or not these similar terms discuss the same concept (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001). Hidalgo and Hernandez (2001) also noted that little research compared physical dimensions and spatial ranges: "we still do not know to what kind of places people mainly develop attachment; or what place aspects or dimensions are more likely to awaken attachment" (p. 273). Special place research addresses these concerns through its investigation of students' relationships with different environments. In the next section of this thesis, special places research is reviewed.

Special Places

Research has demonstrated that school-age children desire to find and construct special places (Hart, 1979; Sobel, 1993/2002, 2006). Hart (1979) conducted what is now a landmark ethnographic study for place researchers (Hutchison, 1998; Sobel, 1993/2002). He studied 86 students, aged 4–11 (preschool to Grade 6) in Inavale (a pseudonym), New England over two years. While all students participated in building models and drawing maps of their neighbourhoods, Hart purposefully sampled 20 students, representing both genders and all ages, from eight families of different sizes and lived in different areas, to participate in five additional methods of data collection: (1) direct observation, (2) students' geographic diaries, (3) structured one-on-one interviews, (4) place expeditions combined with students' polaroid photographs, and (5) place knowledge tests. Half of the data were collected while students were in one grade level and the other half while they were in the next older grade level.

Results from the geographic diary entries demonstrated that students in Grade 4–6 traveled further from home than those in Grade 1–3, and increasingly further with permission or with other children. Diary entries also revealed that Grade 1–3 students spent significantly more time in places that they valued for the land (land-use) whereas Grade 4–6 students spent more time in places they valued for what they purchased or obtained (commercial) and people or events that occurred in those areas (social). In their diaries, students mentioned more than twice the number of social places rather than land-use places, whereas in the place expeditions, 66% of the students mentioned more land-use places (p. 162). Students older than or in Grade 3 most frequently mentioned the ball field as their favourite place. The most significant places overall, according to Hart (1979), were areas for "forts and houses" (p. 163).

Hart's study (1979) has several limitations, which may have influenced his results. All expeditions started at the students' homes and were conducted during the summer. During place expeditions, students were asked to discuss only outdoor favourite places. As a resulting limitation, students' special places may have been convenient places within walking distance and may have changed, if the expedition had occurred during a different season. To some extent, Sobel (1993/2002) addressed this limitation concerning season in his study, which took place in two sites with quite different climates. He suggested that the sites were almost opposites: lush and damp Devon compared to the desert-like island climate of Carriacou.

Students used their special places for privacy and social activities, giving these places physical and social dimensions (Hart, 1979; Kylin, 2003; Sobel, 1993/2002). Space was more often identified as special for the social relationships that developed in-

place than the physical landscape and constructions (including own places, forts and dens) that are built (Kylin, 2003). Kylin noted that students often perceived their dens as places where they could be alone. One Grade 3 female student answered that the best thing about her den was that "you can be yourself there, you are left alone, no one can disturb you, you can play without anyone hearing, and you can share secrets with friends" (pp. 18–19).

The physical landscape and constructions, however, have significance. The process of making and building meaningful places, some researchers have noted (Hart, 1979; Kylin, 2003), develops the place's specialness and the students' attachment to it. The emphasis on the process of construction is evident when children discuss taking their forts down or setting them on fire (Kylin, 2003). Special places also have the potential to facilitate social relationships. Benson (2009) invited 82 elementary charter school students to draw and photograph their favourite places in their neighbourhoods in North Carolina. She determined which places were special and what activities occurred in them by conducting one-on-one interviews with 12 students. From her research, Benson associated these special places and activities with developmental growth, place attachment and environmental stewardship. Students used special places to be alone and to socialize. Students discussed activities like exploring, creating, problem-solving and pretending, which Benson, along with others (Hart, 1979; Ellis 2004), pointed out only happen in places that students reported feeling safe and secure. "Special places," as Benson argued, "are what teach children to care enough—about themselves, each other, and the earth" (p. 37).

Special places may be found or constructed within indoor or outdoor environments, though research has largely focused on outdoor play spaces. Children more often chose natural, diverse landscapes than structured or open grass fields (Bell & Dyment, 2006) to engage in place-making activities, including forts (Hart, 1979), playshops (Sobel, 1993/2002) and dens (Kylin, 2003). This body of research has also demonstrated that younger children (aged 7–9) more often find special places closer to home or a secure space, while older children (aged 9–13) build special places farther away. Children are most active in building their own places at 7–9 years of age (Hart, 1979; Kylin, 2003; Sobel, 1993/2002; Powell, 2007). Special places for these children act as a physical creation of their place in the adult world (Benson, 2009; Kylin, 2003; Sobel, 1993/2002).

Special place research that encompasses both indoor and outdoor spaces in a learning environment is present within the literature, though it largely explores preschoolers and adolescents' perspectives of their schools outside of North America. Einarsdottir (2005) has conducted research that explores Icelandic students' special places at their schools. Einarsdottir worked with two groups of playschool (preschool) and kindergarten students who used either digital cameras or disposable cameras to capture important places and things in their playschool. The first group included 22 preschool students who conducted group tours of their playschool and simultaneously took photographs of what they found to be important. Each student printed between 8–20 photographs and referred to them in one-on-one interviews with the researcher. In the second group, 12 students used disposable cameras, took photographs independently and discussed them with their classroom teacher. The students then selected

photographs for personal photo albums.

Results varied between the two groups, who differed primarily in the type of camera and level of adult supervision (Einarsdottir, 2005). The first group photographed play areas, play things, other spaces (dressing room and kitchen), people (friends and some staff), personal artwork and other items in their classrooms (decorations, aquarium, charts). The second group took more photographs in private spaces, including the bathroom and behind closed closet doors, sometimes of their bottoms or silly faces reflected in mirrors. These photographs, according to Einarsdottir, demonstrated playfulness with the task: "they were having great fun doing something that they felt they should not be doing" (p. 534). From this study, the influence of the methodology on the data that was collected about students' special places at school was significant. It is, therefore, necessary to determine a method that gives students opportunities to express themselves freely for truly insightful data about their special places in and around their schools.

Peterson (2009) explored adolescents' important places at their school. Ten Grade 11 female students volunteered to photograph important indoor and outdoor spaces at their Icelandic school. Each of the students discussed 11 of their photographs in one-on-one photo elicitation interviews, led the researcher on a walking tour of one place, and interacted in a focus group discussion.

Results demonstrated that most students photographed indoor spaces (56 photos) and identified 15 important interior spaces, with the long hallway (14 photos) and the dining hall (10 photos) as the most frequent. By comparison, students took only 35 photographs of outdoor spaces and identified 10 important exterior school spaces, with

the playground as the most frequent (8 photos). Despite noting these frequencies, Peterson cautioned that the number of photographs taken of particular spaces did not necessarily indicate their importance. From interviews, students explained that although they only took one or two photographs of the sofas or art room, these spaces "were actually more important to participants than the number of photographs taken of these spaces would indicate" (p. 60). Students were also free to discuss issues that were related to the spaces to which five "school-related issues" (p. 55) were represented in 11 photos. Peterson concluded that, "[i]mportant school spaces are more likely to become meaningful places when there is balance and harmony between the design of educational facilities and students' experience" (p. 119). Her conclusion recognized that, "design features worked in one space and not in another" (pp. 119–120) and for one student and not for another. She noted from the variety of photographs that, "learning occurs in all kinds of spaces" (p. 122).

Peterson's study (2009) was limited by the difference between her cultural background (a native Canadian with Icelandic family history and a university course in the cultural history and language of Iceland) and that of the students (native to Iceland), as well as the single-gender of her sample. Despite these limitations, Peterson's study offered a model for developing place research with students that gives them freedom to explore and express their special places and experiences of the indoor and outdoor learning spaces through a variety of qualitative methods.

Summary

In this section, I described research that recognized environmental conditions and design elements as necessary for enhancing learning in preschool, middle school (Grade

4–6) and high school (Grade 9–12) programs. Student opinion was largely missing from design research about windows, flooring, furniture, asphalt, grass fields and gardens. Students' attachment and formation of special places was limited to neighbourhood spatial environments and largely demonstrated social attachments. It is necessary to add to this developing attachment and special place research, Grade 2 students' voices about their social and physical experiences of place in different learning environments.

In the next chapter of this thesis, I review relevant literature about qualitative research methods for conducting place research with young students. Following the methodological review, I describe the current study's research design.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this multiple case study was to describe Grade 2 students' special places by asking students to identify specific locations at school that were important to them and to provide details about what occurred in those places to make them special. Students were given cameras for their own use and instructed to produce a visual record of individual places of importance. Students led one-on-one photo elicitation interviews, went on interactive walking tours and shared their photographs in group settings to allow them to tell the stories of personally significant places in their own voices. Two distinct contexts (a Montessori school and a public school) were selected as sites to avoid location-specific anomalies and to afford an examination of special places in a more comprehensive way.

This chapter is divided into two sections. In the first section, I describe the methodological framework used to determine appropriate research methods for the purpose of the current study. In the second section, the research process, as it was conducted in both cases, is described in detail.

Methodological Framework

The research design was shaped by relevant literature that reported research about qualitative methods, as well as research that was conducted with young children about place. In this section of the chapter, I describe qualitative research, case study research, selection of participants, data collection methods and preparatory methods to support the design of the current study.

Rationale for Qualitative Research

The explorative nature of qualitative methods was highly appropriate for this study, which investigated special places for a purposefully sampled group of Grade 2 students at two schools (Benson, 2009; Cele, 2006; Scourfield et al., 2006). According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), "qualitative researchers become *immersed* in the situation and the phenomenon being studied" (p. 13, original italics). My immersion in the school settings helped me to develop an understanding of their contexts and to give meaning to the findings. Additionally, a qualitative research approach was necessary for a holistic understanding of students' special places in two schools.

Rationale for Case Study Research

The case study method contextualizes students' experiences within their specific learning environments. Case study research, according to Creswell (1998), is "an exploration of a 'bounded system'. . . a program, an event, an activity, or individuals" (p. 61). The case study approach is used when researchers are interested in an in-depth understanding of a small number of individuals, problems, or situations (Patton, 2002) and focuses on rich, contextual descriptions of a particular case (Stake, 2005).

Two case studies were used in this study in order to explore and compare each case in all their "particularity *and* ordinariness" (Stake, 2005. p. 445). A cross-case analysis allowed for the realisation of commonalities as well as situations of "unique vitality" and "complexity" (Stake, 2006, p. 39) between the two groups of students located at two different sites. Exploration and comparison instead of generalisability were focuses of the cross-case analysis.

Rationale for Selection of Participants

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) distinguished qualitative researchers from quantitative ones by their selection of participants. They argued that qualitative researchers purposefully sample for informants, groups, places and events that are "information-rich" (McMillan & Schumacher, p. 138) instead of for representative samples.

For research with young children, some researchers recommend inviting participants with above average language abilities, particularly if interviews are used (Conroy & Harcourt, 2009; Greig & Taylor, 1999). Conroy and Harcourt advocated for the "need for a heightened awareness of the processes of informing young children about research (its purpose, timeframes and intended methodologies) as a forerunner to children's subsequent authentic participation in such endeavours" (p. 158). Rich data, in other words, will more likely be obtained from participants who understand fully the research task and their role in it.

Participants' familiarity with the environment has also been documented as beneficial for collecting rich data with young children (Greig & Taylor, 1999). Students possess user's knowledge (OWP, VS, & BMD, 2010) about their schools, a type of insider knowledge of the setting that a researcher does not (Patton, 2002). The researcher employs specific data collection methods with the participants to gain access to some of this user's knowledge.

Multiple qualitative data collection methods were selected for the current study. In the next section of this chapter, the rationale for (a) preparatory methods and (b) data collection methods are reviewed.

Rationale for Preparatory Methods

Researcher and participants work together better when they share an understanding of the task and the context (Conroy & Harcourt, 2009). The relevant literature about the role of preparatory meetings, observations and reflections to support data collection methods are reviewed in this section.

Rationale for meetings. Conroy and Harcourt (2009) suggested that, "initial conversations [with children] must aim to inform and invite" (p. 161) them to participate. Authentic participation comes from participants' understanding of the research task through conversations with the researcher (Conroy & Harcourt, 2009). Other researchers who study space (Collier, Jr., 1967; Peterson, 2009; Sobel, 1993/2002) have used preliminary meetings to discuss the task and ask for volunteers. For research with young children, meetings may also establish a necessary rapport among participants and the researcher without the stress of audio-recording devices or one-on-one interactions (Greig & Taylor, 1999).

Rationale for observations. Participant observation is the most complete approach to gaining understanding of a natural setting because it places the researcher beside or often within the context of the desired phenomenon (Creswell, 2003). To conduct observations, researchers often place themselves in the field of their interest and document those aspects of the lived experiences relevant to their research purpose and questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Observations are often recorded as field notes, which are "observations of what occurs while the researcher is in the field" (McMillan & Schumacher, p. 354). Researchers focus their observations by describing "who, what, where, how and why" (McMillan & Schumacher, p. 352) for verbal,

nonverbal and tacit knowledge perceptions. The practice of observation also helps the

researcher to build rapport with or become familiar to the participants in a neutral way

before engaging in individual interviews (Patton, 2002). Both contextualisation and

rapport are essential for conducting effective research with children (Greig & Taylor,

1999), particularly about place (Hart, 1979; Scourfield et al., 2006).

Despite the benefits of observations, as Patton (2002) argued, "we cannot observe

everything" (p. 341). Other methods, including interviews, focus groups and

reflections, serve to investigate feelings, thoughts and intentions that may not be

observed.

Rationale for reflections. Patton (2002) described the importance of reflexivity

throughout the process of qualitative research. Reflections may be recorded in different

forms including researcher notes or "reflex records" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p.

354), which are "written immediately after leaving the site, synthesize the main

interactions and scenes observed and, more important, assess the quality of the data and

suggest questions and tentative interpretations" (p. 354). Reflections may also

document dates for meetings and data collection, and any changes to the method.

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) argued that reflex records, in addition to

synthesizing, organizing and assessing data, force the researcher to self-monitor for

potential biases. Pillow (2003) also suggested that researchers, through their reflections,

question their own beliefs and biases. She named this process "uncomfortable

reflexivity" (p. 193).

In summary, preparatory methods, including meetings, observations, and

reflections, are necessary to support qualitative data collection methods. They aid, as

the literature has suggested, participants to develop rapport with the researcher, which leads to more fruitful data. Preparatory methods also situate the researcher in the context of the study, which encourages a more holistic analysis of the data. The rationale for the three qualitative methods used for the current study's data collection process is presented in the next section of this chapter.

Rationale for Data Collection Methods

Photo elicitation interviews, walking tours and focus group interviews were employed for data collection in the current study. A review of relevant literature that describes best practices for conducting research with students about their special places is presented in the next section of this chapter.

Rationale for photo elicitation interviews. Photo elicitation interviewing is a qualitative research method that uses visual images, including drawings, photographs and film, to gain insight into the world of the participant (Prosser, 1998). Technology, including disposable cameras, has made visual methods a "common technique" (Epstein, et al., 2006, p. 2) as they are "user-friendly and relatively inexpensive" (p. 2).

In his critique of qualitative methods, Collier (1967), one of the first to use photographs in conjunction with interviewing as a qualitative research method, compared the efficacy of photo interviews to verbal interviews with fisherman, farmers and craftsman from Stirling County and a Navajo Reservation. He noted the ability of photographs to "establish your entree [as the researcher] to the interview" (pp. 47–48) and encourage second and third interviews with the same intensity as the first. The photographs in his interviews were made by the researcher (Collier) but were of the community: familiar and "compelling" (p. 47) to the participants. The photographs

acted as "wordless probes" that directed the interview: they "sharpen[ed the participant's] memory," which allowed the participant to become the "expert guide leading the fieldworker through the content of the pictures," free from the stress of being the subject (pp. 47–48).

Since Collier's (1967) study, photo elicitation interviews have been used in different disciplines, predominantly science and health studies, but increasingly in education (Holm, 2008; Prosser, 1998). Researchers have acknowledged photo elicitation interviewing as an effective data collection method with children due to its highly adaptable, engaging, empowering, and informal structure (Einarsdottir, 2005; Epstein, et al., 2006; Harper, 1998; Pink, 2005; Prosser, 1998).

Photo elicitation interviews may include photographs made by the researcher or the participant (Holm, 2008). Although researchers have reported in-depth interview data from researcher-made photographs (Harper, 1998; Epstein, et al., 2006; Samuels, 2004), most emphasized the benefits of including participant-made photographs in their studies (Cappello, 2005; Clark-Ibanez, 2004; Einarsdottir, 2005).

Clark-Ibanez (2004) admitted her own tendency to take photographs of situations that she found "beautiful or unique . . . but [which] lacked meaning for the children in [her ethnographic] study" (p. 1509) with elementary students from two different schools in Los Angeles. Following this realization, she provided disposable cameras and encouraged the students to take their own photographs. Though the 47 elementary students had taken all of their photographs within one week during the school year, Clark-Ibanez met with them in their homes over three months in the summer. The photo elicitation interviews lasted between 30 minutes and two hours (with family

members often joining the discussion) and revealed intimate details about immigrant culture.

Researchers also posit that children who use photographs in an interview become empowered, with some of the authority of the interviewer shifted to the interviewee (Clark & Moss, 2001; Harper, 1998; Pink, 2005). As a result of using photographs in an interview, children determine: (a) the content of the interview by what they think is important to photograph; and (b) the form of the interview by presenting, explaining and interpreting their photographs in a "show and tell" manner (Einarsdottir, 2005; Epstein, et al., 2006). In other words, the interviews are from children's perspectives (Clark, 2004).

Many studies confirm that the use of photographs encourages children to participate (Cele, 2006; Clark-Ibanez, 2004; Prosser, 1998). Children perceive using a camera as a novel activity different from their ordinary activities (Clark-Ibanez, 2004). Einarsdottir (2005) simply stated that, "children like taking pictures" (p. 525). Furthermore, each experience of taking a photograph is unique and children are actively making new meaning with each experience (Rasmussen, 2004).

Most often, researchers provided children with prints of their photographs to take home or keep in an album as a school memory book (Cappello, 2004; Clark, 2002; Clark & Moss, 2001; Einarsdottir, Dockett, & Perry, 2009). The concrete product is easy for children to reference as a prompt or trigger, but also one that the researcher can revisit later for analysis (Einarsdottir, 2005). Prints and memory books may also give children a sense of accomplishment and motivation to complete the task of taking and discussing their photographs.

Rationale for walking tours. According to Morse and Pooler (2002), "showing is powerful and persuasive" (p. 3). Monke (2007) reflected on America's obsession with technology and the need for schools to "unplug" and create opportunities for real experiences:

> Unless emotionally connected to some direct experience with the world, symbols reach kids as merely arbitrary bits of data. A picture may be worth a thousand words, but to a second grader who has held a squiggly nightcrawler in her hand, even the printed symbol "worm" resonates with far deeper meaning than a thousand pictures or a dozen Discovery Channel videos. (n.p.)

Showing can be enacted through walking tours (Einarsdottir, 2005; Peterson, 2009) or place expeditions (Hart, 1979), both of which involve the body and mind in experiences of the senses and memory. They, in other words, create a "worm-in-hand" experience for the participant, as well as the interviewer, that is physically real and grounded in meaning (from the task as it was completed for the study). Additionally, the informal arrangement and invitation for movement may help students express themselves more confidently (Gardner, 1983/2003).

Cele (2006) compared four methods for understanding primary students' experiences of place, including focus groups, drawings, student-made photographs and discussion, and group walking experiences. Results showed that drawing and photographing enabled students to guide the discussion and include places that were not bounded by routes or walking distance in the way that the group walking tours were place-bound. Cele noted that the group walking experience provided students with an opportunity for taking an active role in the research and equalized the traditional adult-

child power imbalance that was more evident in the focus groups.

Rationale for focus group interviews. Morgan (1996) defined focus groups as "a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher" (p. 130). In other words, focus groups are people-centred and directed group interviews. Focus group interviews were originally developed to gather opinions for market researchers and have since been used in a variety of disciplines, including education (Morgan). The strength of focus groups comes from the opportunity for the participants to ask, correct and compare their opinions, which is not possible with individual interviews (Morgan). Researchers caution, however, that it is this interaction between participants that is difficult to (a) foster, (b) keep on the desired topic, and (c) accurately record. It is thus necessary to prepare an interview protocol including an introduction, questions and conclusion prior to conducting a focus group interview, and to record the proceedings (Crabtree & Miller, 1999; Morgan, 1996).

Despite the ubiquity of focus groups in educational research, few have been conducted with primary school students. Research that used and reflected on focus group methods with students was conducted predominantly with students aged eight years and older; in particular, with students who were at transition periods (Grade 6 and Grade 9) between schools (Dockette & Perry, 2007; Greig & Taylor, 1999; Porcellato, Dughill, & Springett, 2002). This lack of models for focus groups with Grade 2 students was not a significant concern in this study since, according to Morgan, Fellows, and Guevara (2008), there is "no right way to do focus groups" (p. 190). The focus group structure may be explained by considering two components: (a) the number of participants in one focus group and (b) the degree to which the leader of the focus

57

group or moderator is involved in the discussion. The following literature, which discusses the number of participants and involvement of the moderator, was used as a guideline for conducting focus groups with students in the current study.

While researchers recommend that focus groups with adults consist of six to ten participants (Kruegar & Casey, 2000; Morgan, 1996), focus groups with children tend to be smaller, with only three or four participants (Bsela, 2009; Porcellato, Dughill, & Springett, 2002; Willenburg, Ashbolt, Holland, Gibbs, MacDougall, Garrard, Green, & Waters, 2010). It is also helpful for discussion if the group is homogenous (single-sex and age) and familiar with one another, although they may vary according to conversation ability. The articulate or "chatty" students may act as catalysts for discussion (Porcellato, Dughill, & Springett, 2002).

An interview guide is integral to facilitate discussion. The number and standardization of questions has the potential to enhance or limit focus group interactions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Morgan, 1996). Morgan (1996) recommended that some standardization will help develop an understanding of the commonalities and differences among focus groups. It will also, according to Morgan, ensure that the researcher asks consistent and topic-driven questions.

Willenberg, et al. (2010) used focus groups as part of their mixed-method research design to understand students' perceptions of their playground and environmental factors that may influence their physical activity. While their study included 23 primary and elementary schools (students aged 6–13) in Melbourne, Australia, due to constraints on time, and resources the research design included only students aged 8–11 in focus group interviews. Each focus group session included four parts: (a) brainstorming

58

concept maps, (b) discussing students' knowledge, (c) drawing pictures, and (d) arranging photographs from most healthy to least healthy. All focus groups were held at the schools during school hours, were led by two researchers and did not exceed one hour. The students were given 17 photographs of different situations and environments surrounding the school (e.g., school playground, sports equipment, classrooms, lunch boxes) and were asked to put them in order from the one they considered to be the healthiest down to the least healthy.

The collaboration among elementary students yielded rich data beyond the anticipation of the researchers (Willenberg, et al., 2010). Willenberg, et al. demonstrated that focus group discussions combined with visuals, including concept maps, drawings and photographs, provided significant data about the students' learning environment.

Porcellato, Dughill and Springett (2002), in their investigation of students' perceptions of smoking, compared data from individual interviews to focus group interviews with 12 single-sex focus groups of four to five Grade 2 students. The moderator engaged the students through interactive activities, including (a) ice breaker games (make a name tag and name a favourite thing), (b) questioning what the students knew about smoking, and (c) "visioning" (an activity from two health organizations that asked students to imagine they are teachers and then write messages to their classes). The authors noted that students communicated more in the focus group than in the individual interviews. They suggested that the focus group provided a feeling of "safety within numbers" and a "snowballing effect" (p. 317) where one student spoke out to comment, correct or expand on another student's statement.

The fruitfulness of the focus group method seems to rely on the ability of the moderator to foster engaging and on-task discussion among participants (Morgan, 1996). The moderator may adapt semi-structured interview questions according to the language of the participants and follow a semi-standardized order of questions to help guide conversation within each focus group (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Morgan, 1996). It is necessary to consider an emergent focus group design to allow for flexibility in the moderator's questioning (Morgan, et al., 2008). Furthermore, the design may be open to the addition of a focus group and any changes for participants' criteria to take on more or fewer participants to overcome off-topic discussion and responses that are based on group mentality instead of individual opinion (Morgan, et al., 2008).

In summary, the literature reviewed in this section of the thesis shaped the methods adopted for data collection in the current study. In the second part of this chapter, I describe each step of the research process as it occurred, including obtaining ethics clearance, selecting sites and participants, and conducting preparatory methods and data collection methods. The chapter concludes with a description of the organization and analysis of data, and the trustworthiness of the current study.

Method

Three qualitative data collection methods were used to answer the current study's research questions, which focused on investigating Grade 2 students' special places in two distinct learning environments: photo elicitation interviews, walking tours and focus group interviews. The steps that were taken to prepare for data collection and to collect data are detailed in this section.

Ethics Clearance

In January 2011, I obtained ethics clearance from the Queen's University General Research Ethics Board for compliance with the Tri-Council Ethics Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans, and Queen's policies (Appendix A). Next, I obtained ethics clearance from (a) a Montessori school in south-western Ontario (Appendix B), and (b) a municipal school board in south-western Ontario (Appendix C).

Once clearance was granted, I corresponded by email and then met in person with the selected School Director or Principal and Grade 2 elementary teachers at both schools to review the *Letter of Information* (LOI, Appendix D), *Consent Form* (CF, Appendix E), *Photo Consent Form* (PCF, Appendix F) and to answer any questions. All participation was voluntary and secured through the process of authentic, informed consent, which was confirmed by the student's hand-written name and the signature of a parent or guardian.

Each participant returned one *Consent Form* and one *Photo Consent Form* to their classroom teacher(s) and retained copies of the *Letter of Information* and *Consent Form*. Each participant chose a pseudonym, which was replaced by the researcher to protect confidentiality to the extent possible. All data was saved on a password-protected computer and external hard drive.

Selection of Sites

Two schools were selected based on convenience sampling for their (a) program and (b) location. One school offered a privately funded program that followed the Montessori curriculum accredited by the Canadian Council of Montessori Administrators (2010). The other school offered a publicly funded elementary program

that followed the statutory curriculum from the Ontario Ministry of Education. Schools were located within the same western Ontario city for convenience. In the remainder of this thesis, the Montessori school will be referred to as Maple School and the public school will be referred to as Pine School. The contexts of both cases are further described in *Chapter 4: Contexts*. The next section of this chapter describes the criteria used to select participants.

Selection of Participants

The classroom teachers in each school distributed LOIs, CFs, and PCFs to their Grade 2 students. From the students who returned their CFs and PCFs, I asked the School Director at Maple School and the Principal at Pine School, and elementary teacher(s) to purposefully sample four Grade 2 students from each of the schools, using the following criteria: (a) the children cooperate well with others (adults and peers), (b) have above average oral language skills, (c) express interest in photography from previous class projects, (d) have attended Grade 1 at the same school, and (e) are from different social groups (i.e., all participants will not be best friends).

For Maple School, all six students (three boys and three girls) who volunteered were included in the study since excluding two might cause emotional stress in such a small social group (there were six Grade 2 students in this multi-age class). For Pine School, all five students (three boys and two girls) who volunteered were included in the study for the same reason. Students at Pine School had not attended Grade 1 at the same school, as the school opened in September 2010. Despite these two allowances, the criteria helped to ensure that (a) all participants offered rich data, (b) were familiar with their particular learning environment, and (c) provided diverse experiences of the

learning environment. I distributed one *Letter of Thanks* to a student at Pine School who volunteered for the study but submitted his CF and PCF after the study had begun (Appendix D).

All participants selected their own pseudonyms, as Conroy and Harcourt (2009) recommended. This a positive way of engaging students in the research process and fostering a balance between the researcher and participant to encourage open communication. The participants, however, discussed their pseudonyms with each other, which permitted them to identify other participants. In an effort to protect the identities of the participants, I have assigned revised pseudonyms that are in keeping with the spirit in which they were chosen by the children (e.g., a topic of interest or a popular media figure). For the purpose of the current study, students at Maple School are identified as Alicia, Luke, Lily, Petunia, Rocky, and Viola. Students at Pine School are identified as Jessica, Kaleb, Hal, Mason, and Christina.

After ethics clearance was obtained, I conducted infield research for two periods: January 26 to February 4, 2011, and April 6 to April 15, 2011. In the next sections of this chapter, details about each preparatory method and data collection method are described.

Preparatory Methods

In an effort to prepare for data collection, three preparatory methods were conducted. Data was not collected but the experiences were used to introduce the research task to participating students, develop rapport with individual students and understand the unique contexts of both cases to enrich the study. Preparatory methods included eight observations, two meetings and 18 pages of reflections. Data collection

methods will be discussed in the second section of this chapter.

Meetings. On Day 1 at each site, one meeting between the researcher and the participating students took place. At Maple School, the meeting occurred on January 26, 2011 at 10:00 in the library. At Pine School, the meeting occurred on April 6, 2011 at 09:30 in the literacy room. I was careful to wear identical clothing on Day 1 at each site. I continued to be aware of my appearance and wore identical clothing to each site for the duration of the two data collection periods.

I began each meeting by presenting a photograph of my own special place and by telling a story about why it was special. I also explained how I used the disposable camera to take the photograph. I presented several more photographs to the students that showed problems that may occur if the camera is not used appropriately, including cutting the subject's head out of the photograph by not looking through the viewfinder and blocking the viewfinder with fingers. Students often laughed at these photographs.

Next, I asked the students about their experiences using a disposable camera and looking at photographs. From this discussion, I estimated their experience with taking photographs. To minimize students' stress with the task, I encouraged them to take three practice photographs during the meeting. They identified the parts of the camera, and demonstrated to me how to hold the camera, check the flash and take a photograph.

Finally, I invited students to take their own photographs over the week and to tell me about them during the following week. I asked the students to take a minimum of six photographs, anywhere on school property, of places that were special to them, that is, favourite places to go and spend time while at school. Lillard (2005) argued that six samples allows for individuals to feel empowered by the ability to make a choice

without being overwhelmed by what is available. This meeting and subsequent opportunity to take photographs contextualized the study for the students and helped them to understand the task without being overwhelmed by the addition of an audio recorder.

Observations. During two, four-day periods (Day 1, 2, 6 and 7) I conducted a total of 26 hours of observations at the two schools (Maple: 12.5; Pine: 13.5). Each observation ranged from 2.5 hours to 4.5 consecutive hours. During these observations, I first observed how students used school spaces. Next, I made notes on the students' behaviours, activities in which they took part and contents (design elements and physical objects) of the spaces. Conducting observations familiarized me with the school and with the students. This step also allowed me to photograph different spaces so that I could associate each space with a name and image for organizing each case. I took 317 photographs at Maple School and 281 photographs of Pine School.

At the end of each daily observation period, I transcribed the written notes from my observations. The transcriptions totaled 54 pages (Maple: 18; Pine: 36). The observation periods permitted necessary time for reflection and re-evaluation of my observation strategies in relation to the proposed research questions. Observing for 26 hours allowed me to (a) develop familiarity with the students, (b) ensure minimal participant stress by answering questions, and (c) complete my researcher's records and photographs.

Reflections. I recorded my immediate reflections from observations, interviewing and transcribing in field researcher notes. I also documented dates for meetings and data collection, changes to methods due to absenteeism or classroom schedules, and

included photographs of school spaces. I noted preliminary analysis by acknowledging

emerging patterns or experiences that reminded me of other studies. I reflected on the

research process and challenged myself to question my personal reactions, feelings and

memories throughout the research process. I engaged in "uncomfortable reflexivity"

(Pillow, 2003, p. 193) in an effort to acknowledge my biases.

Data Collection Methods

Following the preparatory methods described in the previous sections of this

chapter, I employed three data collection methods: eleven photo elicitation interviews,

11 walking tours, and two focus group interviews. In the next section of this chapter,

each method is described in detail.

Photo elicitation interviews. Photo elicitation interviews were scheduled for the

week immediately following the observations on Day 8 and 9 at each site. At Maple

School, interviews were conducted on February 3 and 4, 2011. At Pine School,

interviews were conducted on April 13 and 14, 2011. To collect data in the form of

photographs and discussion from individual students, I conducted a total of 11 semi-

structured photo elicitation interviews (Appendix G). In an available quiet but public

place, students chose the seating arrangement at their preferred table and I sat on the

side they suggested. I showed the students the disposable camera shell and offered

them their printed photographs.

From the six photographs selected by the student, I asked him or her to choose

five and explain their significance. I referred to my "interviewer guide" (McMillan &

Schumacher, 2010, p. 355; Patton, 2002, p. 343), which included four main items: (1)

Please tell me where this place is, (2) Please tell me what is in the photograph, (3) What

do you like to do in this place?, and (4) What would make this place even more special to you? Although I had an interviewer guide, I used it in a semi-structured way. This resulted in a conversation that was informal. For example, without prompting, students would tell me not only where the place was but why the place was special.

Qualitative researchers suggest that the interview questions be adjusted to use the language of the students as closely as possible (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2002). In the current study, for example, I used the word "washroom" instead of "bathroom" or "restroom." I also used "outdoor" instead of "exterior" and "indoor" instead of "interior" to use the students' language to refer to different types of spaces. All photo elicitation interviews were audio-recorded. Immediately following the photo elicitation interview and prior to transcription of the audio recordings, I noted my immediate reflections in the fieldwork researcher's log.

Walking tours. Walking tours immediately followed the photo elicitation interviews and, as a result, took place on the same days as the interviews (Day 8 and 9). I asked each student to take me to the most special place identified in one of his or her selected photographs. I audio-recorded any conversation that occurred while the student and I walked to the special place. I included the journey from the photo elicitation interview location to the special place because there was the possibility that the journey, as Hart (1979) suggested, was a part of the place's meaningfulness. Once we were in the special place, I asked the student about it and referred to the same questions used for the photo elicitation interview, including: (1) Please tell me where this place is, (2) Please tell me what is in the photograph, (3) What do you like to do in this place?, and (4) What would make this place even more special to you?

Focus group interviews. This phase of data collection provided students with the opportunity to interact with each other in a moderated group setting. In this study, two focus group interviews with Grade 2 students were conducted on Day 10 at each site. At Maple School, the focus group interview occurred on February 4, 2011 with six students. At Pine School, the focus group interview occurred on April 15, 2011 with five students.

During each focus group interview, I acted as a moderator and initiated a discussion about special places. Although the groups were the same age, gender diversity was dependent on voluntary participation and was not a criterion for participant selection. Each focus group interview included both female and male students. At Maple School, two students were male and four students were female. At Pine School, three students were male and two students were female. The students were familiar with one another and the location. I had developed a rapport with the students from my presence at the schools during observations, meetings and individual interactions in the photo elicitation interviews and walking tours, which helped to make my role as moderator comfortable for the students.

The focus groups were allotted between 30–45 minutes and were conducted after all of the photo elicitation interviews and walking tours at the one site were completed. Focus groups provided (a) an opportunity for students to clarify thoughts and feelings through discussion, (b) a safe space that fostered honest discussion, and (c) an opportunty for students to share and collaborate with their peers. At Maple School, the duration of the focus group was 23 minutes 17 seconds and took place in the community room (used for parent information sessions and after school care). Students elected to

set chairs in a circle for the focus group with the audio-recording devices in the middle. At Pine School, the focus group took place at a rectangular table that the students selected in one corner of the library and lasted 37 minutes 55 seconds.

The audio-recording devices were placed in the centre of the table. I referred to semi-structured open-ended questions from the focus group guide for each focus group (Appendix H). Five main questions included: (1) Who would like to tell us about their special places at school? (2) Where is this place? (3) What makes this place special to you? (4) Who has a question they would like to ask? (5) Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your special place?

Modifications to the Research Design

The research design was modified in two ways. First, students at Pine School were accompanied by the researcher to photograph two school spaces that they were unable to visit alone due to school safety rules. Specifically, the students expressed frustration that they were unable to photograph the library because they had missed their scheduled visit. They also experienced constraints while photographing the front of the school. Students were not permitted to use the front doors during school hours and had agreed to leave their cameras in the classroom each evening to prevent loss. Students were able to photograph these places as a result of this modification.

Second, a class camera was used at Pine School that permitted students who were not participating in the study to experience using a disposable camera at school. Two sets of prints were made from this camera and given to the class, along with a piece of bristol board and a photo album to display the photographs. Although the class camera was an option in the original research design, the students who were not

69

participating in the study within the lower elementary Montessori classroom did not express a sense of exclusion and the class camera was not introduced. The classroom (as I was told by the classroom teachers after the study commenced) provided students with a digital camera to use for daily activities and events.

Organization and Analysis of Data

Data included (a) participant-made photographs, (b) transcripts from the audio-recordings of eleven photo elicitation interviews, (c) transcripts from eleven walking tours, and (d) transcripts from two focus groups. Photographs were paired with the transcripts and analysed for important school spaces. First, they were sorted into two groups: indoor and outdoor. Second, participants' photographs were organized according to the type of school space they depicted: classroom, library, before- and after-school care room, cloakroom, music room, French room, other classroom, office, hallways, gymnasium, washroom, playground, parking lot and sidewalk. Third, each audio-recorded photo elicitation interview, walking tour and focus group was transcribed verbatim. For transcription, as Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) recommended, audio-recordings were documented for duration, date of interview, participant(s), researcher and transcribing date(s). I referred to the transcripts to code participants' selected photographs for special places within each type of school space.

Patterns of how places became special emerged from the data. I assigned emic codes that used the language of the students to identify four main themes: (a) placeness, (b) play, (c) friendship, and (d) solitude and tranquility. I cited participants by (a) case (Maple School = Montessori school, Pine School = public school), (b) their initials (V = Viola), (c) an abreviation of the particular method (O = observation, PEI = photo

70

elicitation interview, WT = walking tour, FG = focus group), and (d) the page number

from the transcript (p. 6). For example, a direct quote from a photo elicitation interview

at the Montessori school with Viola is cited as (Maple, PEI, V, p. 3).

Themes were further analysed for their similarities and differences between the

cases to establish the cross-case analysis. I first sorted students' special spaces and

places from both cases for the characteristics they shared. Places for play were

summarized for both cases and, if possible, matched between them. For example, a

match was made between the tennis courts at Maple School and the pavement at Pine

School because, although they had different names, students described both as places

that were (a) open with some walls on the peripheries, and (b) special for playing tag,

hiding and being with friends. Places from one case that did not correspond to places

from the other case were noted for their differences, including changes in the physical

landscape, accessibility for students, and students' purposes in-place. The analysis, as

Stake (2006) suggested, sought to describe each context fully and to set them up side-

by-side in an effort to draw out their commonalities and particularities that may not

have been noticeable in a case study.

Inter-coder Agreement

According to Krippendorff (1980), coding schemes must be evaluated for both

stability and reproducibility. Stability is made evident "when the same coder codes and

then recodes a data set at different points in time" (Krippendorff, p. 130).

Reproducibility, referred to as inter-coder agreement (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, &

Bracken, 2004/2010), is made evident when the researcher and a second coder code the

same text in the same way (Krippendorff).

In the current study, the researcher first coded the entire data set over a three-week period. This was then repeated after an interval of two weeks, when the stability was calculated as 94.2%. In order to calculate inter-coder agreement (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2004/2010), a randomly selected section of a transcript, containing 6.7% (333 lines) of the entire protocol, was provided to a second coder who has extensive experience of coding qualitative data in the form of transcripts. This second coder used four categories and 15 sub-categories from the entire coding scheme. Table 1 shows the codes that the second coder used and the percentage of agreement that occurred.

Overall, inter-coder agreement was 91.5%, which indicates a high level of consistency between the researcher and the second coder. This consistency increases external validity of themes and suggests they were not a result of the researcher's personal bias (Saldaña, 2009). Discrepancies may reflect both the short amount of time available to train the second coder and also the researcher's greater familiarity with the coding scheme. Where low percentage of agreement occurred—different codes were used to identify the same section of the transcript—the researcher and second coder discussed their choices and came to agreements in all instances.

Trustworthiness

Four strategies were used in this study to enhance trustworthiness. First, the research design included three data collection methods and two sites, which allowed for a multi-level triangulation of data (Patton, 2002). The variety of methods provided multiple perspectives, including different students from different contexts. Students were able to express themselves using four representations: verbal, physical and visual.

Table 1

Inter-rater Agreement for a Random Selection of the Transcripts

Transcript	Code	Researcher's Code	Second Reader's Code	Calculated Inter-rater Reliability $CR = \dfrac{2M}{N_1 + N_2}$	Percentage Agreement
Kaleb, PEI	The Study				
	Ethics protocol	5	5	$\dfrac{10}{10}$	100
	Camera skills	6	7	$\dfrac{12}{13}$	92.3
	Sorting	13	13	$\dfrac{13}{13}$	100
	Picture quality	2	2	$\dfrac{2}{2}$	100
	Task	2	2	$\dfrac{2}{2}$	100
	Play				
	Hide	1	1	$\dfrac{1}{1}$	100
	Games	3	2	$\dfrac{4}{5}$	80
	Free-time	2	2	$\dfrac{2}{2}$	100
	Imagination	1	1	$\dfrac{1}{1}$	100
	Place Knowledge				
	Practical	2	1	$\dfrac{1}{2}$	50
	Familiar	1	2	$\dfrac{1}{2}$	50
	Rules	1	1	$\dfrac{1}{1}$	100
	Physical	1	1	$\dfrac{1}{1}$	100
	Solitude and Tranquility				
	Books	1	1	$\dfrac{1}{1}$	100
	Noise	1	1	$\dfrac{1}{1}$	100

M = # of times the two coders agreed; $N_1 + N_2$ = sum of coding decisions made by each coder.

Second, I conducted consistent and informal member-checking throughout the

data collection phases. Member-checking, according to Patton (2002), will allow for

participants to verify and correct their responses to questions in the study. I achieved

member-checking by repeating the students' responses back to them and asking for

confirmation that I had understood what they meant to say throughout the photo elicitation interviews, walking tours and focus groups. I also took opportunities within the focus groups to refer to the students' previous responses to encourage them to connect both interview experiences and responses.

Third, randomly selected portions of a photo elicitation interview transcript were coded by a second coder. Inter-coder agreement (Lombard, et al., 2004/2010) was 91.5% which confirmed the patterns that the researcher noted logically corresponded to the collected data (Patton, 2002).

Fourth, I maintained a field researcher's log throughout all phases of research (Patton, 2002). The log was not only helpful for recalling dates, names, and locations but also facilitated personal reflection and acknowledgement of my experiences and impressions that came from both schools and groups of students. I continued to document my impressions and ideas that developed while I transcribed the audio-recordings to evaluate my subjectivity. Triangulation among methods, use of member-checking and second coder, and the field researcher's log were used to increase trustworthiness of the study.

Summary

Qualitative research methods were employed in this study to gain insight into Grade 2 students' special places. Each case was bounded by a school context, including physical and social environments. Two schools within the same western Ontario city were selected for their educational programs. Maple School included six Grade 2 students at a Montessori school while Pine School included five Grade 2 students at a public school.

74

Three steps were taken for each case to support the data collection methods. First, I conducted a preliminary meeting with the students. Second, I observed each class over a four-day period. Photographing and visiting the schools proved to be crucial for establishing rapport with the participating students and organizing the data. Third, I maintained a researcher log throughout the data collection and analysis period. As a result, I was able to build rapport with the students and develop a deeper understanding of the case contexts and reflect on them.

Three methods were used for data collection. Photo elicitation interviews, walking tours and focus groups enabled students to share their special places in visual, experiential and meaningful ways. Visual methods have been documented for fascilitating interviews about space and place (Collier, 1967), in particular with young students (Cele, 2009; Hart, 1979; Sobel, 1993/2002).

In the next chapter, *Chapter 4: Contexts*, I introduce each case context in detail, including researcher-made photographs and observations.

CHAPTER 4

CONTEXTS

The current study explored special places in two distinct school contexts in Ontario: a Montessori school and a public school. I conducted 12.5 hours of observations at each school, which produced 54 pages of transcribed fieldnotes. From my transcribed observation notes, I composed a description of each context for this chapter. In the first section of this chapter, I describe the Montessori school (Maple). Next, I describe the public school (Pine). Each description focuses on school design and history, and classroom design and routines for both cases. Specific instances from the observations will be cited by school (M = Montessori school and P = public school), observation notes (O), and page number (p.). Photographs taken by the researcher are integrated throughout this chapter to illustrate both contexts as they were observed.

Maple School

Maple School was set in a Victorian heritage home in the downtown area of a western Ontario city. Elementary classrooms (Lower Elementary, aged 6 to 9, and Upper Elementary, aged 9 to 12) and school administration offices were located in one Victorian home. Toddler (aged 18 to 36 months), Casa (preschool, aged 3 to 6 years) and Junior High (Grades 7 and 8, aged 12 to 13) classrooms were located in five other buildings throughout the immediate neighbourhood and in one other part of the city. The Montessori school served 400 students and employed 70 faculty and staff members. In-depth descriptions of the school design and history, and classroom design and routines are next.

Figure 5. Front of Maple Montessori School.

Figure 6. Back of Maple Montessori School.

School Design and History

The schoohouses were nestled among residential homes and were identifiable only by the unimposing school signs hung on their front porches year-round (Figure 5 & Figure 6). The schoolhouses displayed characteristics of Victorian architecture (Kyles,

2002). They maintained the steep roofs and ornate gables, patterned brickwork, colourful stained glass accents in doorways and bay windows, and iron railings, which led up staircases to front doors. The Architectural Conservancy of Ontario and the Heritage [City] Foundation recognized five of the schoolhouses "for the outstanding contribution made to the preservation of [the city]'s built heritage by the adaptive re-use of these Street Houses and retention of a significant old north streetscape" (personal communication, 2011).

The school was founded in 1968 as an "offshoot" of the first Montessori school in the city and remains the only one in the city that holds accreditation from the Canadian Council of Montessori Administrators (CCMA). Accreditation is significant for maintaining a standard of Montessori education in Canadian Montessori schools (CCMA, 2012). The school became a registered not-for-profit organization in January 2010 and obtained charitable status the following May. As a not-for-profit organization, the school is no longer privately owned but controlled by a Board of Governors who have "passion for long term stability in Montessori education" and "contribute a professional skill-set" (personal communication, 2011).

The not-for-profit status is significant as it mandates transparency and continuity in leadership that would otherwise be dependent on one owner. Parents can benefit from a tax deduction and may qualify for school bursaries for financial assistance to help pay the school's tuition fee. Over 20% of the students at the Montessori school received school bursaries in 2010 to subsidize their tuition. Due to the accreditation and not-for-profit status of the school, the population draws from across the city, including students representing diverse socio-economic circumstances and varying ethnicity.

The school adapted Victorian houses to provide a safe and authentic Montessori learning environment for local students and their families. This was reflected in the school's mission statement: "to provide a nurturing environment which fosters a love for life and learning, awakening the full potential of the child." The classrooms displayed characteristics of Montessori education (CCMA, 2012; Lillard, 2005; Polk Lillard, 1996), including multi-age classes, Montessori materials, and table and floor workspaces. The classroom design and routines are described next based on my in-field observations, and they are similar to the observations made by Lopata, Wallace and Finn (2005) and Rathunde (2003).

Figure 7. Peace mural by entrance from the courtyard at the back of Maple Montessori School.

Classroom Design and Routines

At the beginning of the day, students were often dropped-off by parents or siblings on the sidewalk beside the school, and entered through the staff parking lot between two neighbouring houses. They walked through an open wooden gate, by bike racks and a peace mural (Figure 7), into a courtyard with benches and basketball hoops,

and in the back door of the school.

The door opened to two staircases: one led downstairs to the students' cloakroom and the second led upstairs to the secretary's desk, seating area, two administration offices and one lower elementary classroom (participating in the study). A banner, written in students' printing, read "We did it! 1000 Acts of Kindness Chain" with colourful plastic beads hanging on a string that draped across the it (Figure 8; M, O, p. 9). The staircase continued upward to a second floor that housed additional classrooms, offices and a kitchen.

Figure 8. Secretary's desk in the entrance of Maple Montessori School.

Students took off their outdoor clothing and exchanged their boots for indoor shoes in the cloakroom which was located in the basement. They walked up the same stairs they used to enter the school, and stepped into their classroom.

The soft yellow walls hosted framed artwork, some dry-erase boards and bulletin boards. Open wooden shelves stood side-by-side around most of the perimeter of the

dark blue carpeted, L-shaped classroom and offered brightly coloured materials—bead

chains, multiplication and decimal checkerboards, grammar boxes and charts, maps and

globes (M, O, p. 1). Tables, rectangular and circular, were pushed towards the windows

and clustered in groups of two and four throughout the space. Lighting came largely

from the windows (p. 7) but also from new overhead fluorescent lights that stood out

against the original crown molding (p. 9; Figure 9). An area in front of the fireplace,

which marked the corner of the L, seemed to be dedicated to floor work as students laid

out personal carpets and placed their materials on them (p. 2, 9).

Figure 9. Tables, windows and overhead lighting in a lower elementary
classroom in Maple Montessori School.

The Montessori classroom provided two, three-hour work cycles: one in the

morning and one in the afternoon, with 20 minutes for lunch and one hour for outdoor

recess. The work cycles were interrupted for class meetings and lessons. In the

morning, a class meeting was held during which students formed a circle and sat cross-

legged on the floor in front of the fireplace (M, O, p. 7; Figure 10).

At the meeting, and throughout the day, the teachers and students lightly sounded

a small brass bell to call others to attention (p. 3–4, 6). The meeting lasted no more than

10 minutes, during which time the teachers reviewed the schedule for the day, noted

lessons they would be teaching and whether there were specialty classes to attend. The

meeting also offered students the opportunity to ask questions and make special

arrangements to work in the library or with other students.

Figure 10. Front fireplace and meeting area in a
lower elementary classroom at Maple Montessori
School.

Movement within the classroom included students taking materials off a shelf,

placing them on a table or floor mat, using them to complete the task, and then returning

the materials to the same shelf. Students often said "hello" (M, O, p. 5, 7) asked about

my day and showed me their work as they moved from shelf to table to shelf. Students

kept their workbooks in personal "cubbies" (p. 5) or personal shelves within the

classroom (Figure 11). They used pencils, pencil crayons, erasers, rulers, and glue from

the supply shelf (Figure 12). A quiet hum was noticeable as students whispered to their

neighbours and flipped through their workbooks. The classroom was intermittingly

interrupted by groups of students returning from different lessons around the school (p. 6). The noise level would increase, similar to an outburst of loud laughter for a few minutes, and then settle into quiet whispers among students, most often without reminders from the teachers (p. 3).

Figure 11. Students' "cubbies" or personal shelves for their work in a lower elementary classroom at Maple Montessori School.

Figure 12. Supply shelf with basic tools for students in a lower elementary classroom at Maple Montessori School.

Teachers continually circulated around the classroom, answered questions and gathered students for lessons. They asked students, "What needs to get done?" and

reminded them, "Make good choices" (M, O, p. 4). The subject lessons, including

Geography, History, Botany, Zoology, Arithmetic, Language, and Geometry, often

involved four to six students from the same year (e.g., Grade 1). Lessons lasted

between 10 to 15 minutes (p. 11). For example, seven Grade 2 students (six of whom

were participating in my study) were asked to join one teacher, Sheila[3], for a Geography

and Culture lesson. The second classroom teacher, Sandy, gathered the Grade 3

students on the other side of the classroom to review multiplication. The two lessons

happened simultaneously.

Figure 13. Materials for a Geography and Culture lesson in a lower
elementary classroom at Maple Montessori School.

Sheila sat on one side of a world map that was placed on a white mat while the

students sat on the three other sides with their Culture notebooks, attached to "lap

boards" (similar to clip boards; p. 10), open on their crossed-legs (Figure 13). Sheila

introduced the lesson with a brief discussion: "Today's the last day of January. Thirty-

one days ago, we started a new year. Tomorrow, we start a new continent study. Take a

---

[3] Students addressed teachers and school staff by their first names, which I have done here using
pseudonyms.

look around the room, I've changed some things (studying Asia for Chinese New Year). And we will start with the map" (M, O, p. 11). The lesson on Asia continued. They discussed countries in Asia, which they found on paper maps, a globe, and in an atlas. Sheila showed the students a map that was coloured, mounted on yellow paper, and laminated, and discussed what elements make up a good map (e.g, title, date, and overall neatness).

The lesson concluded, after 15 minutes, with an assignment or "follow-up work" (p. 11). Sheila asked the students to make their own map of Asia similar to hers, which needed to include 12–15 cities and countries of their choice. Some students began working on their maps while others returned to work they had left on a table before joining the lesson. The mat with the map, globe and atlas remained on the floor for the remainder of the day (p. 15).

Sandy directed a review of multiplication with Grade 3 students. They were spread out among four tables and looked toward Sandy—resting their heads on their hands, nodding, and responding to questions (M, O, p. 11). She held a small dry-erase board that had multiplication problems written on it. Discussion continued about how to make groups of numbers and students called out answers. They were then instructed that to practice, she was going to time them while they completed the problems. Sandy said "Ok, go!" (M, O, p. 11) and the students flipped their papers over and began writing. I noticed that two students had moved to another table, spread out more, and some sat with timers. After the sounding of a timer, the students corrected the multiplication questions with Sandy and chose other work.

Students recorded any follow-up work in their daily planners and referred to a dry-erase board for an outline of the work that needed to be completed for each grade level (Figure 14). Smaller dry-erase boards leaned against shelves or in front of the fireplace and showed a variety of arithmetic questions.

Figure 14. Geometry shelf and dry erase board showing daily work for each Grade level in a lower elementary classroom at Maple Montessori School.

Students who were not in lessons worked independently in the classroom. Desks were not assigned by teachers but selected by students according to the materials they were using. Some materials required more space than others to set up, and students often chose to sit on the floor with their work on white mats. For smaller materials, students elected to sit at tables either by themselves or with others.

Students were also able to take breaks at any time during a work cycle. They selected snacks from their lunch bags and sat at a two-person table covered by a floral tablecloth at any time throughout the day. Students used the washroom and water

fountain attached to their classroom as necessary (p. 4).

Students were able to leave their classroom to visit the school library (which was visible from the classroom door) throughout the day. Students asked the teachers for permission to go to the library, and independently, would sign out their own books, read, work on projects or use the computers. The library had round tables (Figure 15), brown leather armchairs and a blue armchair (Figure 16) throughout the space for sitting among shelves of books.

Figure 15. Tables, shelves, and plants in back of library at Maple Montessori School.

Figure 16. Blue armchair in front of library at Maple Montessori School.

For lunch, students were dismissed to wash their hands, pick up their lunch boxes from the shelf in the classroom and eat at a placemat that a classmate had distributed on the tables (p. 3). A hot lunch was available on two days each week for an additional fee (p. 8). Two schoolhouses were joined by a walkway on the second story which permitted students to take their lunch or borrow materials from different classrooms without exiting the building. Students were also able to use a school kitchen that was

87

upstairs by the walkway for utensils or extra snacks.

After lunch, students went outside for a one-hour recess. The school had adopted

a nearby city park as their playground. Yard staff were identifiable by neon vests as

they circulated among the tennis courts (Figure 17), benches, trees, swings, climbing

bars and pyramid, and spiral slides (Figure 18). Mature pine and maple trees

surrounded the park. Houses and the tops of apartment buildings peeked through the

trees. Occasionally, adults from the community were seen walking with their dogs

through the park.

Figure 17. Hedges around the snow-covered tennis courts at a city park
that was adopted as Maple Montessori School's playground.

Figure 18. Play equipment at a city park that was adopted by Maple
Montessori School as their playground.

Figure 19. Front of Specialty building at Maple Montessori School.

During the afternoon, students often attended specialty classes, including French, music and physical education. The specialty classes were organized on a weekly schedule. For example, two French lessons and two music lessons occurred each week: one, lead by specialty teachers, in the students' classrooms; the second in the specialty building (also a house) down the street (p. 7; Figure 19). Physical education was conducted in a church gymnasium within the neighbourhood. Teachers walked students to the different buildings and specialty classes. The streets and sidewalks took on the role of school hallways as students and teachers travelled from one schoolhouse to another.

At the end of the day, students gathered for a class meeting where forms to go home were handed out and reminders for the next day were made. The students were dismissed in small groups to retrieve their coats, boots and knapsacks from the cloakroom (Figure 20), and meet their parents or gaurdians in the courtyard at the back of the school.

Figure 20. Students' cloakroom downstairs in Maple
Montessori School.

Before departing, the students shook one teacher's hand good-bye (M, O, p. 15). For

additional care beyond school hours, students attended programs in the Community

room in the lower level of the central location.

Pine School

Pine Public School took place in a newly opened facility. Newly constructed

houses made up its immediate neighbourhood, which was about a fifteen-minute drive

from the centre of a western Ontario city. The school's name appeared in silver-

coloured letters on the front of the red brick and concrete building, as well as on a

bright, free-standing message board. As I walked up to the school, I became aware that

it was a large elementary school, stretching two-stories above me. I felt intimidated.

And at the same time, as I became aware of this feeling, I realized I did not want to pass

on this trepidation to the students I would be interviewing.

Most invitational were the front doors, situated so that they opened directly onto

the neighbourhood's winding sidewalk (Figure 21). The many rectangular, glossy

windows also reflected images of oneself and the neighbourhood, which made the

90

building seem modern and distinct from the other buildings that surrounded it.

Figure 21. Sidewalk at the front of Pine Public School.

Figure 22. Student entrance and pavement at the back of Pine Public School.

The school served 620 students from kindergarten to Grade 8 who lived in the

immediate neighbourhood. Two students from the study discussed how they could see

the school's Canadian flag from their houses and steered their bikes toward it when they

rode to class in the morning. After locking their bikes at the front of the school, the

students walked to the playground and used entrance doors at the back of the school (Figure 22). School design and history, as well as classroom design and routines are discussed further in this section.

School Design and History

The school was the first new public school built in the city since 1993. It was constructed upon the recommendation of the city's Accommodation Review Committee. The school cost 13 million dollars to build and included two-stories with 26 classrooms, a general arts room, double gymnasium, stage, library resource centre, developmental centre, learning support room; and, an administrative area (Fader, 2010). The facility, according to the official announcement from the school board, "incorporates a number of measures to address environmental sustainability and energy efficiency with features such as high-quality window systems that reduce heat loss, upgraded insulation, and energy-efficient heat pump technology" (Fader, 2010).

On the school website, the Principal's message stated that the school's guiding question was: "What kind of school do we want to create?" He continued: "[the school board] has provided us with a beautiful building for learning, and we are turning it into a school. The people who enter the doors of the building are creating the school; we are the school. Together we are making [our school] a wonderful place to learn." The Principal's message was evident in the students' role in determining the school's mascot. The students submitted ideas and voted for their mascot, which was determined in November 2010 to be a Stallion. An in-depth description of the classroom design and routines follows.

Classroom Design and Routines

At the beginning of the day, the Principal and Vice-Principal were often out in the front of the school directing traffic and greeting students as they arrived (P, O, p. 9). The front glass doors led into a two-story atrium that was lit with daylight from the front wall of windows and skylights above (Figure 23). A banner across the atrium announced "RESPECT" in bold, computer-printed letters (p. 6). The atrium showed open doors to the school office on the right and the library on the left.

Figure 23. Atrium in Pine Public School.

Students formed a queue with their classmates and entered through the back doors of the school from the playground (p. 28). They followed their teacher up the back stairs, through two hallways to their hooks outside of their classroom (Figure 24; Figure 25). After hanging up their outdoor clothing and exchanging outdoor shoes for indoor ones, the students took their lunch bags into the classroom and put them on hooks along one wall.

Bright colourful posters and diagrams covered white brick walls, bulletin boards and chalkboards. The central focus of the classroom seemed to be an interactive whiteboard and chalkboards. A blue rectangular carpet marked out an open space

93

distinct from the desks and shelves on a beige linoleum floor (P, O, p. 19).

Figure 24. Junior/Intermediate hallway at Pine Public School.
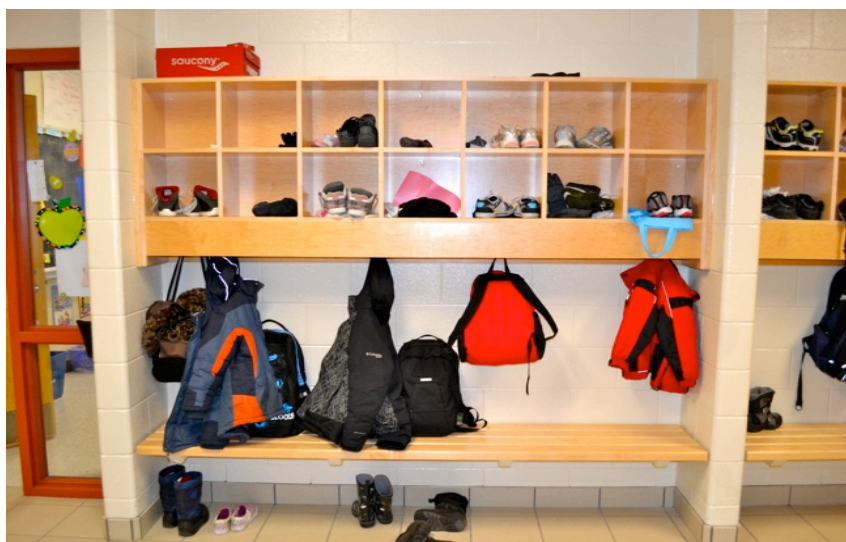
Figure 25. Students' hooks in the hallway outside their classroom at Pine Public School.

The teacher's desk looked out from the front, right corner of the room by the window and hosted stacks of papers and a computer (p. 30; Figure 26). Students' desks were arranged in groups of four with their names printed on rectangular cardstock and displayed in clear, plastic pockets (p. 3; Figure 27). A counter, sink and paper towel dispenser stood in one corner at the back of the room but were blocked by chairs (p. 7).

94

Figure 26. Front boards, carpet and teacher's desk in Pine Public School Grade 2/3 classroom.

Figure 27. Students' desk in a Grade 2/3 classroom at Pine Public School.

A horseshoe-shaped blue table also stood at the back of the room and was called the literacy table (P, O, p. 6; Figure 28). Colourful plastic bins, behind the table on shelves, organized readers according to the type of fiction (p. 16). Clear plastic bins

offered colourful math manipulatives and games—two-dimensional, geometric shapes

for patterning; popsicle sticks and beads for counting or computation; Lego^{TM}, and

Snakes and Ladders^{TM} for using during free-time (p. 16).

Figure 28. Literacy table, readers and math manipulatives at the back of the
Grade 2/3 classroom at Pine Public School.

After hanging their knapsacks on hooks, the students sat cross-legged on the blue

carpet in front of the interactive whiteboard and waited for morning announcements.

During the study, the school hosted a dance to raise funds for additional play equipment

and, for one week, the announcements began with dance music. Throughout the week

as I observed in the school and in the classroom, I noticed the receptionists danced at

their desks during the musical interlude (p. 9) and the students, in the participating class,

bobbed their heads to the beat while they waited for announcements to begin (p. 2).

Lessons began after the announcements. The school was on a balanced day

schedule, which offered three 100-minute "work blocks" and two nutrition breaks: one

lasting 40 minutes and the other 50 minutes (P, O, p.1). Students attended lessons in

Language and Literacy, Mathematics, Science and Social sciences. The entire class

attended all lessons and typically, all students sat on the carpet during instruction. The class consisted of Grade 2 and Grade 3 students at varying academic levels.

The teacher engaged all students by presenting information on the interactive whiteboard, asking questions and inviting students to complete tasks on the board. For example, literacy lessons each afternoon focused on developing reading and comprehension skills in preparation for the provincial literacy test that would take place in the next month (pp. 20–23). The teacher showed a three-page narrative on the interactive whiteboard and guided the students through the text with a pointer stick.

After reading the narrative together, the teacher asked questions about the parts of the story. Students were invited to circle or write answers on the interactive whiteboard then resume their place on the carpet. The students then were arranged into small groups to focus on parts of the story. The classroom teacher called these "cooperative learning strategies" (P, O, p.17). Each student was assigned a role within the group to complete including: (a) reading the words/short sentences, (b) cutting and gluing them on the chart, and (c) directing discussion about the text. All supplies came from the supply table (Figure 29). The sink, after the chairs were moved, was used to rinse gluey hands (p. 22).

Figure 29. Supply table with basic tools for students to use in a Grade 2/3 classroom at Pine Public School.

The groups of students settled within the classroom on chairs and some would squat or sit on the floor. Only one group sat at the group of four desks and chairs, even though the arrangement of the desks was believed (as stated in the schoolboard's cooperative learning handout) to support this type of learning (p. 20). The bean bag chairs were also free to be moved around. On one occasion, the two bean bags were stacked to make more floor space while on another occasion, one bean bag was carried from the corner to the middle of the carpet for one child to sit on and read during independent reading time (p. 24).

Mrs. Cats[4] focused students' attention by asking "Give me five," which, as she explained, refered to five behaviours: "hands are still, feet are quiet, lips are sealed, ears are listening, and eyes are on me" (p. 28). She also used actions to gather students' attention, calling out: "if you can hear me, clap twice" (p. 19).

Students also had some free-time when they completed their work before the alotted time. During free-time, students were seen sitting in the reading corner (p. 23, 24; Figure 30). Two brightly coloured bean bag chairs were nestled in one corner by a bookshelf, computer, locked cabinet and desk. The window above the bean bag chairs offered a ledge that students leaned on to look out or admire their butterfly artwork that was taped on the glass surface (p. 3).

After lessons and at the sounding of a tone on a school-wide public address system, students were dismissed for their nutrition breaks, retrieved their lunch bags (some had two sides to their lunch bags labeled for each nutrition break) and ate at their desks in their classroom (p. 25). Additional snacks were available at the office and once

---

[4] The teacher in the public school was addressed by her surname, which I have replaced with a pseudonym.

every two weeks a hot lunch was provided for an additional fee (p. 33).

Figure 30. Reading corner in the Grade 2/3 classroom at Pine Public School.

Figure 31. Gravel pathway from pavement to play structure in the playground at Pine Public School.

As a part of each nutrition break, students went outside for recess. The first recess lasted 20 minutes and the second recess lasted 30 minutes (p. 8). Students played in the playground located behind the school that was encircled by residential houses and partly bordered by a fence, though walking paths led outward into the neighbourhood. It was the school's first spring and a gravel pathway was laid from the paved area across the

99

grass field to the colourful play structure, including climbing bars and slides

(Figure 31).

Figure 32. Pavement and field in the playground at Pine Public School.

Young trees framed a soccer field (Figure 32). A fenced area on the pavement

was provided for kindergarten students while primary students played to the left of the

field and on the paved area with hopscotch and basketball hoops (p. 13). Intermediate

students largely used the soccer field. Yard staff were recognizable by neon vests and

often were accompanied by primary students who stretched to hold their hands (p. 17).

The neighbouring houses could be seen from the playground and a few students in the

study pointed to their houses and the pathways they took to get to school.

Library visits, and computer, music and physical education lessons rotated

according to a 10-day schedule. Students, as a class, visited the library where they

listened to a story in the reading circle (Figure 33), read independently throughout the

space and lined up for their teacher to sign out their books (p. 11). The computer lab

was in one corner of the library separated by three walls with windows that permitted one to see both spaces simultaneously (Figure 34). Rows of monitors lined the space with one instructional computer at the front next to two whiteboards. Students often described playing math games on the computers.

Figure 33. Reading circle in the library at Pine Public School.
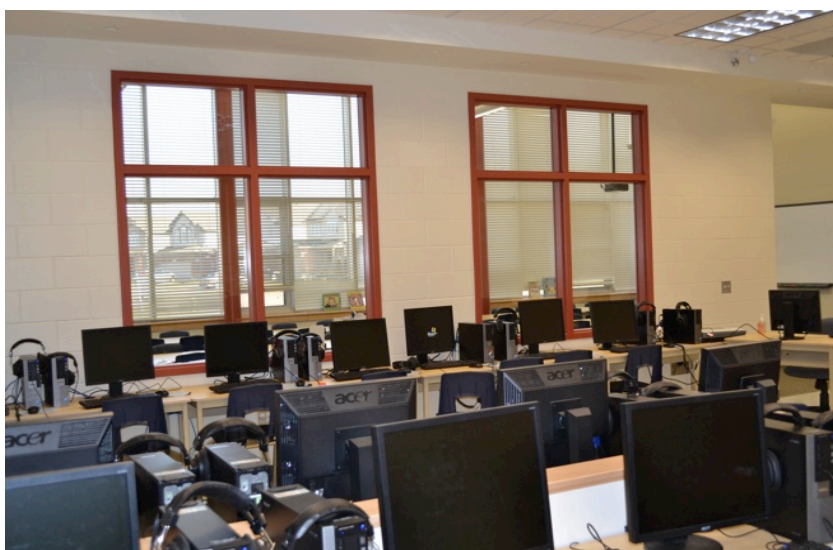
Figure 34. Computer lab in the library at Pine Public School.

Music occurred in the students' classrooms, which were decorated with colourful, laminated posters, props, puppets and lined chart paper that the specialty teachers unpacked from their carts (p. 23). On one occasion, the class attended music lessons in the music room down the hallway that shelved new instruments in black, velvet-lined cases, stacks of chairs and music stands (p. 26; Figure 35).

Figure 35. Shelves of instruments in the back of the music room at Pine Public School.

The physical education teacher walked the students from their classroom, down the front stairs, through the atrium and to one side of the double gym called the South gym (Figure 36). The dividing wall could be folded back to create one large space that was used for school assemblies (p. 5). Students in the study spoke about the stage in the North gym, though they said most gym classes occurred in the South gym.

At the end of the day, students collected their knapsacks from their hooks in the classroom and their outdoor shoes and jackets from in the hallway and weaved their way through the intermediate students to the playground (p. 28). Their teacher made sure they left two minutes early to walk through the crowd safely and efficiently (p. 27).

Figure 36. Back of the South gym at Pine Public School.

Summary

Context played an important role for understanding students' special places. At Maple School, Alicia, Lily, Luke, Petunia, Rocky, and Viola attended lessons in several Victorian houses and played in an adopted city park during recess. The structure of the school day as two, three-hour work cycles permitted them to visit the library, washroom, office, kitchen and other classrooms as necessary. It permitted me to observe them in different places throughout the day. Observing the students walk along the sidewalk from their lower elementary classroom in one house to their French or music class in another house helped me to organize their special places into identifiable categories (e.g., indoor and outdoor) and give meaning to others that were not immediately noticeable, such as the value of the sidewalk as a hallway.

At Pine School, Jessica, Kaleb, Hal, Mason and Christina attended lessons in one large, new facility and played in a newly developing playground behind the school. The building and community seemed to be taking shape over the course of the study as the students had their first experiences of Spring on the playground. The balanced day

103

program and 10-day schedule permitted students as a class to attend lessons in the music room and gymnasium, or visit the library within the building. Although the schedule made some places difficult to visit, observing the students follow their teacher down the L-shaped hallways, and front or back staircases, helped me to organize their special places and understand the meaning that different students attributed to the same special places.

Both cases provided distinct learning environments for this study about Grade 2 students' special places. In the next chapter, *Chapter 5: Presentation of Data,* students from Maple School and Pine School use their own voices and photographs to describe their special places at school.

CHAPTER 5

PRESENTATION OF DATA

The current study explored Grade 2 students' special places at their learning environments. In the study, I sought to determine (a) where these special places were in two schools, (b) what made them special, and (c) what behaviours and activities occurred in-place. Qualitative research methods were used to obtain data from students and facilitate their active participation. Specifically, I asked students to show and reflect upon their special places—those specific spaces in which they enjoyed spending time—to the best of their abilities. Six Grade 2 students from a Montessori school and five Grade 2 students from a public school took photographs of places that were special to them. After I conducted observations at each site, the students shared their perceptions of the characteristics that defined their special places in one-on-one photo elicitation interviews, one-on-one walking tours and a focus group at each school. The methods yielded rich data in the form of participant-made photographs and discussions.

This chapter is organized into three sections. In the first section, I report data from students at the Montessori school (Maple). In the second section, I report data from students at the public school (Pine). The data for each case includes (a) significant school spaces from participant-made photographs, (b) special places from participant-selected photographs, and (c) types of places that students discussed as special. In the third section, I provide a detailed description of one special place at each school. These two descriptions offer the reader an intimate experience.

Maple School

I have organized this section into two subsections that will lead the reader

through the journey of the students' photographs and discussions about spaces and

special places at Maple Montessori School. The subsections include (a) *photographs*,

which summarizes the spaces and places that were described as special, and (b) *places*,

which reports on the types of places that emerged from a thematic analysis of the data.

The two subsections report data from the (a) one-on-one photo elicitation interviews, (b)

one-on-one walking tours, and (c) one focus group interview.

Photographs

One of the qualitative research methods used in this study produced visual data:

colourful portrait and landscape photographs. In order to address the research

questions, it is necessary to consider the students' photographs as well as their dialogue.

First, I describe the process of printing, sorting and discussing photographs with the

students. Next, I report on all student-made photographs, which show important school

spaces. Then, I report on the photographs selected by the students for their photo

elicitation interviews and walking tours. The selected photographs show students'

special places. I used students' dialogue to determine why spaces and places were

special. The dialogue, which I transcribed verbatim from audio-recordings of the photo

elicitation interviews, walking tours and focus group interviews, is described

thematically in the next section of this chapter: Places.

Specific instances of data will be referred to by codes. The code M identifies the

data as a part of Maple School. Next, the initial(s) of the participants' pseudonym

follow to identify to whom the quotation belongs. Lily and Luke are distinguished by a

second letter (e.g., L for Lily and Lu for Luke). Then, the method which generated the

quotation is identified, including photo elicitation interview (PEI), walking tour (WT)

and focus group (FG) as well as a page number from the transcripts. For example, (M,

Lu, WT, p. 3) provides a citation for Maple School, Luke, Walking Tour, page 3.

Printing, sorting and discussing the photographs. The students had agreed to

take their photographs within one week of receiving their disposable cameras.

Throughout the week, the cameras were kept in a red box in one of the teacher's storage

closets. Students were permitted to take their camera as desired; however, the

stipulation was that each camera must be returned to the box at the end of each day.

The students returned their disposable cameras to me once they had finished taking

photographs. For this case, five out of six students completed taking their photographs

before the agreed-upon deadline.

I printed all available photographs from each disposable camera. The number of

photographs ranged from 26 to 39. All were printed in colour with matte finishes in 4 x

6 format. Each set of photographs came with an index print, one set of negatives and

one photograph disc. I took the photographs, index cards and negatives to the photo

elicitation interviews. Five students met with me for one-on-one photo elicitation

interviews at a round table in the library. A sixth student met with me at a rectangular

table in the community (before- and after-school care program) room at a later date

because he was absent and the previous room was not available.

At the beginning of each photo elicitation interview, the student was asked to

sort through his or her photographs and choose six that best represented his or her

special places at school. Next, the student used permanent markers to assign a number

to each photograph. The assigned number determined the order in which they would

talk about them. Each student set photograph #1 to the side for the walking tour.

Students expressed excitement to see their photographs and gratitude to me for printing

them. Upon taking them out of the developing envelope, all students immediately

began describing their photographs and some burst into laughter as they flipped from

one to another. Luke exclaimed, "Let's see them!" (M, Lu, PEI, p. 1). Alicia thanked

me for printing her photographs.

The photo elicitation interviews totaled 2 hours 20 minutes and 5 seconds of

audio-recordings. The walking tours totaled 37 minutes and 35 seconds. Table 2

displays the duration of the photo elicitation interview and the walking tours for each

student.

Table 2

Duration of Photo Elicitation Interviews and Walking Tours for Six Grade 2 Students at Maple School (Montessori)

Participants		Duration of Photo Elicitation Interviews	Duration of Walking Tours
Alicia		24m 42s	5m 17s
Lily		16m 10s	8m 50s
Luke		35m 30s	3m 15s
Petunia		17m 58s	2m 35s
Rocky		15m 44s	3m 59s
Viola		33m 1s	13m 39s
	Total:	2h 20m 5s	37m 35s

Note. h = hour(s); m = minute(s); s = second(s).

It was often necessary to remind students that we did not have enough time to

talk about all of their photographs and, therefore, they must choose six that showed their

special places: five to talk about in the photo elicitation interview and one to visit in the

walking tour. One student, Luke, chose more than six, talking about six photographs in

his photo elicitation interview and two in his walking tour. I permitted him to select

more than six when choosing his photographs because he appeared to become anxious about eliminating two of them.

Table 3 displays the total number of photographs taken and total number of photographs selected for photo elicitation interviews and walking tours. Students took a total of 217 photographs of school spaces. Each student took between 26 and 39 photographs and selected six for their photo elicitation interviews and walking tours at Maple School. In the next section, I further organize the participant-made photographs according to indoor and outdoor spaces that the six students identified as significant.

Table 3

Total and Average Number of Participant-taken Photographs for Photo Elicitation Interviews and Walking Tours by Six Grade 2 Students at Maple School (Montessori)

Task	Number of Participant-Made Photographs	Average Number of Photographs Per Participant
Total number of photographs	217	36
Total number of photographs selected for PEI and WT	39	6

Significant school spaces from participant-made photographs. School spaces were commonly identified by their purpose and could be readily recognized in photographs from my in-field observations. Some of these school spaces were represented in students' photographs. One hundred forty-six photographs were of indoor spaces and 60 were of outdoor spaces. Eleven photographs were not interpretable due to improper exposure (over, under, double) or were blocked by fingers. Students often laughed to see the tip of their finger in the corner of their photograph. Table 4 shows the distribution of photographs for each school space that students represented in their photographs and selected in their photo elicitation interviews, walking tours and focus groups.

109

Table 4

Total Photographs Taken and Selected for Photo Elicitation Interviews and Walking Tours with Six Grade 2 Students at Maple School (Montessori)

Space	Total Photographs Made	Photographs Selected for PEI and WT
Indoor		
Classroom	47	8
Library	36	8
Community room	2	1
French room	19	2
Music room	9	4
Kitchen	2	1
Cloakroom	4	0
Hallways	25	1
Washroom	2	1
Outdoor		
Front of School	2	1
Back of School "Courtyard"	17	3
Sidewalk/street	12	1
Playground (city park)	29	8
Totals	206	39

The Maple School students identified nine indoor school spaces (146 photos) and four outdoor school spaces (60 photos). The indoor school spaces were more frequently photographed than outdoor spaces. In particular, the most frequently photographed indoor school space was the students' classroom (47 photos). The library was the second most photographed space (40 photos). The most frequently photographed outdoor school space was the playground (29 photos).

Within each school space, students identified their special places. This task proved more difficult to complete than identifying school spaces: students' special places were not delineated by walls nor were they called by a standardized name.

Furthermore, students' attachment to places varied depending on their personal experiences and purpose for using the place, which, in some instances, made

standardizing a name for the place difficult. For example, students often used furniture

or design elements to distinguish specific locations of their special places. Alicia

explained in her photo elicitation interview that there were "three playgrounds" (M, A,

PEI, p. 5). She separated the open space according to the objects in it, including (a)

tennis courts marked by the nets and pavement, (b) open area with benches, rocks and

trees, and (c) play equipment with the climbing pyramid, slides and swings. Thus, I

relied on transcripts from photo elicitation interviews, walking tours and focus groups to

identify and name each special place, which are described in the next section.

Special places from participant-made and selected photographs. Students

identified their special places within significant school spaces. The analysis focused on

37 photographs that students selected and discussed in their photo elicitation interviews,

walking tours and focus groups. Table 5 shows that the Maple School students

photographed and discussed 30 indoor special places and eight outdoor special places.

Figure 37. Most photographed indoor place: topic-specific shelf in the
library at Maple Montessori School. Photographed and selected by Petunia
(P#1).

Table 5

Special Places Identified by Six Grade 2 Students in Photo Elicitation Interviews and Walking Tours at Maple School (Montessori)

Space	Place	Photographs selected for PEI and WT	Discussed but not selected
Indoor			
Classroom	Table–single	1	
	Table–group	2	
	Bulletin board	1	
	Window–front	1	
	Window–side	1	
	Subject specific materials–math, geography,	3	
	Cubbies		•
	Computer		•
Library	Topic specific shelf	3	
	Nook	1	
	Armchairs–two brown leathers by window	2	
	Armchairs–one blue by entrance	1	
	Winter mural	1	
	Computers and listening station	1	
	Interview location (round table)		•
Community room	Sign in table	1	
	Toy shelf		•
French room	Front	1	
	Back	1	
Music room	Front	3	
	Back	1	
Kitchen	Sink in front of window	1	
	Counter		•
Cloakroom			•
Hallways	Specialty building entrance hall–coat hooks		•
	Specialty building entrance hall–door		•
	To other classrooms–"walkway"		•
	To other classrooms–stairwells		•
Gymnasium			•
Washroom		1	
Outdoor			
Front of School	Profile of school houses		•
	Sign		•
Back of School	Profile of school houses		•
"Courtyard"	Gate and entrance	2	
	Parking lot		•
Sidewalk/street		2	
Playground (city park)	Tennis courts (pavement)	1	
	Open area (field-like, benches & rocks surrounded by trees)	4	
	Play equipment	1	

There were three most frequently selected indoor special places: (a) subject-specific materials in the classroom, (b) topic-specific shelves in library (Figure 37), and

(c) the front of the music room. The most frequently selected outdoor special place was the open area in the playground (Figure 38). Some special places were not photographed but were discussed during the photo elicitation interviews, walking tours and focus group interview, including the cubbies (personal storage areas) and a computer in the classroom, the interview location in the community room, the kitchen counter, gymnasium and office. As a result of the students' discussions, they are included in the analysis.

Figure 38. Most photographed outdoor place: open area in the playground at Maple Montessori School. Photographed and selected by Lily (P#1).

To further investigate special places in this case, I considered the students' photographs alongside the descriptions from photo elicitation interviews, walking tours and focus group. Only reporting on the most photographed school spaces and places excludes the students' dialogue, transcribed from the audio-recordings, and a thematic understanding of special places. The next section will report on the students' dialogue and identify different types of places that emerged from the data.

Places

The photographs acted as visual prompts and guides for the students to "show and tell" their special places to me in one-on-one photo elicitation interviews, walking tours and focus groups (Collier, 1967). I transcribed the audio-recordings verbatim and carefully read them alongside the students' photographs.

A thematic analysis of the data allowed me to group students' special places according to four types of interactions: (a) placeness, (b) play, (c) friendship, and (c) solitude and tranquility. I define each type of place for the purpose of this study, using the students' photographs and descriptions from the photo elicitation interviews, walking tours and focus groups transcripts. Examples involve special places from indoor and outdoor spaces.

Placeness. Places were special due to students' experiences at particular locations. Through experience in a space, students developed a sense of belonging and attachment to certain spaces. Table 6 displays the spaces and places that the Montessori students suggested were special for the development of placeness.

Students expressed emotional attachment by demonstrating their place knowledge. They explained (a) rules for the use of the place, (b) their spatial sense and location in relation to other places, (c) seasonal changes to the landscape, and (d) their familiarity with each place. In the next section, I will use the students' photographs and dialogue to describe each expression of placeness as they occurred in special school places.

Table 6

Spaces and Places Identified by Grade 2 Students as Special for Developing Placeness in Maple School (Montessori)

Spaces	Special Places for Placeness
Library	Topic specific shelf
Classroom	Window–front: frog fountain, single desk, biology and research material
	Window–side: round group table, rectangular two-person table, Chinese lantern hanging
Hallways	To other classrooms –"walkway": second story, joins lower elementary schoolhouse to upper elementary schoolhouse
Kitchen	Sink in front of window
French room	Front
Music room	Front
Back of School	Profile of school houses: courtyard with basketball hoops, benches, bike racks, and entrance to school
Playground	Tennis court: pavement and nets surrounded by hedge
	Open area: field-like, benches, pathways, surrounded by trees
	Play equipment
Sidewalk/street	Identified

Rules. Throughout photo elicitation interviews, walking tours and focus group, students demonstrated their use and understanding of school procedures and appropriate conduct. Lily, Alicia, Viola, Luke and Petunia described the steps involved in borrowing books from the school library. The following exerpt from Petunia's walking tour exemplified the five students' place knowledge that focused on how many books they were permitted to sign out and the process of using the scanner independently:

P: We're allowed to take out five [books].

KM: Five, and you can sign it [*sic*] out yourself?

P: Yeah.

KM: That's pretty neat.

P: There's a scanner over there, I can show you [how to use it].

(M, P, WT, p. 1)

Along with the front of the library, special places on the playground also had rules to be followed. Lily, Alicia and Petunia described the yard staff's safety rules for playing on the tennis courts. Petunia summarized the rules and expressed her adherence to and understanding of them in her photo elicitation interview (Figure 38):

> P: We're not suppose[d] to be behind the bushes and especially not to run
>
> back there. . . . Some of the younger boys were running behind there with
>
> the older boys.
>
> KM: What happened to them?
>
> P: I told on them . . . and they got in trouble.
>
> KM: Why do you think you're not allowed to run behind there?
>
> P: You're not allowed to run behind there because um this is um a town
>
> park . . . and people could get kidnapped (M, P, PEI, p. 5–6).

Figure 39. Tennis courts in the playground at Maple Montessori School.
Photographed and selected by Petunia (P#3).

Lily, during her walking tour, challenged a playground rule. She leaned on one of the tennis court nets. I asked "Do you like leaning on it?" and she responded "well I lean on it when the yard staff are not looking (laughs)" (M, L, WT, p. 3). Luke and Rocky both photographed the courtyard in the back of the school and described the place as significant, in part, due to their weekly practice of waiting in line to go to French class in the specialty building. Students' knowledge and practice of school space rules seemed to shape their interactions with their special places.

Spatial sense and location in relation to other places. Through experiences in places, students developed a sense of where they were in relation to other spaces and places. In part, spatial sense and location were described as having a bird's eye view of the place within a space. Luke clarified that his special place was seen from the courtyard: "THIS (loud, emphatic voice) is us going to specialties. I stood back from my teacher, so I could get a BIG VIEW of the school" (M, Lu, PEI, p. 7). Luke admitted to standing on a bench in the back of the courtyard to capture the entire profile of the schoolhouses. He continued to describe other special places in the photograph (Figure 40):

Lu: Right here, you can barely see it, is the hallway. The hallway is one of my FAVOURITE places. It leads to the um school over here, [the] upper elementary [classrooms] and . . . also the kitchen, right here.

KM: I see, so the hallway connects the two buildings?

Lu: Yes, it does.

KM: What do you like about it?

Lu: It's very cool when I get to walk through it and look down. You have a

whole view of the driveway and the school. (M, Lu, PEI, p. 7)

Figure 40. Profile of the schoolhouses from the back courtyard at Maple Montessori School. Photographed and selected by Luke (P#4).

Alicia also described the walkway as a special place for her to visit friends in different classes and to look down upon the school courtyard. Lily took in the view of the playground from her special place atop the monkey bars. She said, "I like the monkey bars because when I climb up to the top, I can see, like, out in the town. I can see like restaurants, aka the Keg (laughs). I went there one time. . . . I can also see um the train tracks. I get a beautiful view at the top. . . . I also just like to climb it (laughs)" (M, L, PEI, p. 3).

A view from above created a sense of place by locating the students and their special places in the immediate surroundings. A sense of place and attachment to it was also demonstrated by the students' knowledge of how to move from one place to another. Viola exclaimed as we approached the specialities' building on her walking tour: "I already see the music room! (laughs). I asked her, "You can see it [already]

118

through the front window?" and she replied: "Yep! . . . Can you see it? It's right there" (M, V, WT, p. 2). Lily and Alicia also described the special place as we approached it on the walking tours. For instance, Lily pointed out from the top of the snow bank "from here, you can see the fence of the tennis court" (M, L, WT, p. 1).

Students elaborated on the location of their special places by arranging their photographs. In her photo elicitation interview, I asked Lily: "Is there anything else you want to tell me about that picture or place?" She replied: "Well, um, this is outside in the play area and you turn over a bit further, the monkey bars would be there. . . . They are further that way. . . Anyway . . . if you go a little bit further over here, the playground will be there" (M, L, PEI, p. 6). The spatial location seemed to be an important aspect of her special place. At the end of Rocky's photo elicitation interview, he arranged his selected photographs to demonstrate moving from one place to another: in a way, composing a map or spatial panorama made by the photographs. He and I described it as he moved them into place (Figure 41 and Figure 42):

KM: So you have to walk to French?

R: Yes, we walk across [and] we go up here.

KM: Through the gate?

R: We walk here, [and] cross the street.

KM: Past the school.

R: And we go here! (M, R, PEI, p. 8)

119

Figure 41. Gate and entrance in the back courtyard at Maple Montessori School. Photographed and selected by Rocky (P#2).

Figure 42. Sidewalk and street used to move from one building to another in Maple Montessori School. Photographed and selected by Rocky (P#4).

Seasonal changes to the landscape. Some spatial locations, however, changed depending on the seasons. The study took place during a cold Canadian winter, which the students seemed to take into consideration as they interacted with their learning environment and took photographs. In the classroom, Luke selected the frog water

120

fountain "located near a window that I like to look out of. . . . In springtime and

summer, I like to stick my fingers in the water" (M, Lu, PEI, p. 8; Figure 43). The

dialogue continued as follows:

> KM: Why do you do that?
>
> Lu: Oh, I just do it (laughs).
>
> KM: But not in the winter?
>
> Lu: No, not in the winter. It's way too cold (laughs). (M, Lu, PEI, p. 8)

Figure 43. Frog fountain in the front window of a lower
elementary classroom in Maple Montessori School.
Photographed and selected by Luke (P#4).

The seasons may have influenced which special places could be photographed for the

study. Viola selected a photograph of the open area on the playground that showed

Petunia and Lily holding their cameras. Viola explained:

> It was so cold, we have to go inside and well, we really wanted to get our
>
> hands warmer. You can see [the camera] right there. So, we went inside
>
> "do do do" (song-like, as her fingers walked in the air), asked Kathryn
>
> [the librarian supervising the playground] and she said "quickly" and
>
> then we went quickly and came back out. (M, V, PEI, p. 9).

121

Alicia also selected the open area of the playground. It showed Viola dressed in her pink snowsuit and matching hat with bare hands holding her camera to take a photograph. Lily selected a similar photograph of Viola holding her camera in the open area of the playground. All six Montessori students selected photographs of outdoor special places that showed snow and winter clothing.

Familiarity. Students often expressed the number of visits or frequency of experiences in places as a part of what made them special and known intimately. Familiarity was demonstrated by students' awareness of their class schedules (which were posted on classroom bulletin boards), and their perceived meaning of places that they attended for daily purposes and seemingly in contrast, places they attended for occasional purposes. Instances of familiarity occurred in all data from the six Montessori students.

Figure 44. A street and sidewalk are special because they are familiar: they are used to move from one building to another at Maple Montessori School. Photographed and selected by Luke (P#7).

Petunia detailed when she attended music and gym classes: "Yeah, on Tuesday no just on Wednesdays, on Tuesdays we just go to gym . . . so like in the afternoon one hour passes [and] the year ones go, two hours past the hour, [the] year threes go, and

third hour, WE go!" (M, P, PEI, p. 6) Viola explained that there are no specialty classes

on Fridays, including French, music and physical education, so the crossing guard

would not be waiting at the lights for us on our walking tour.

Places were special for their daily use. Luke described the sidewalk in front of

the school and reasoned that it was special to him because he walked down it every

single day (Figure 44):

> Lu: This is a curb, well, not really a curb, it's the sidewalk that I walk down
>
> every day. As you see, I'm trailing behind the group to get a picture.
>
> This right here is the Toddler building: my first school that I went to.
>
> Right here, that's the big hydro pole right next to Dr. Brown's office.
>
> He's my doctor that I go to sometimes. . . . These are the houses along
>
> the side. You can see there's the hydro dudes.
>
> KM: But what's special about this curb?
>
> Lu: I walk over it every single day (M, Lu, PEI, p. 11)

Rocky also selected the sidewalk and street as one of his special places, "Probably

because that's where you walk everyday" (M, FG, p. 10).

In contrast, places were also described as special due to the infrequency of visits.

Students attributed value to the places that they attended on occasion or only a few

times each week rather than every day. While Rocky identified the music room as

special as a place to create music with instruments, the room was also important

because he only visited it once a week:

> KM: So what's special about the music room?
>
> R: Because we go there every um Thursday.

123

KM: And that's the special part?

R: Yep. (M, R, PEI, p. 7)

The seasonal classroom decorations were significant for determining special places to sit. Luke described, "Now this is my favourite: it's the Chinese lantern we have for Chinese new year, EVERY single Chinese new year after winter after Christmas" (M, Lu, PEI, p. 9). The students seemed to express a familiarity with most school spaces. An exception was one space that Viola mentioned. She described the supply room behind the magenta door in the community room.

V: It looks like a magenta door and it has lots of books and stuff in it. . . .
      It's very messy [but] I've been in there before with Sandy.

KM: So you're not allowed to go in there by yourself?

V: Yeah because Sandy really needed some uh books or something like that,
      and then she asked me if I wanted to go down (laughs). I was the only
      one. (M, V, PEI, p. 8)

Other than this instance, students seemed to frequent each school space a minimum of once per week. Experiences in-place were frequently due, in part, to the school's scheduling of specialty classes. It is signficant to note that the six Montessori students had a large number of experiences in school spaces and places as a result of their attendance: the students attended Grade 1 in the same classroom. Luke, furthermore, described attending Toddler classes at the same school, though in a separate schoolhouse.

Play. Places for play were also evident in the students' photographs and transcripts. Elsely (2011) articulated students' play on playgrounds as "an activity,

which is freely chosen and inclusive" (Play England, 2009 as cited by Elsley, 2011, p. 105). In the current study, students discussed eight places for play. Table 7 displays the special places for Maple School. Throughout these special places, play took on many forms, though all forms were grounded in free choice and participation. I will report on play as it emerged from the data as (a) pretending, (b) moving, (c) creating, (d) gaming, and (e) hiding.

Table 7

Spaces and Places Identified by Grade 2 Students as Special for Permitting Play in Maple School (Montessori)

Spaces	Special Places
Library	Computers and listening station
Music room	Front (bay window, stained glass, instruments on shelf, class meeting area)
	Back (whiteboard, ukuleles, choir stadium seating)
Extended care room	Community room
Gymnasium	Gymnasium
Playground	Tennis courts
	Open area
	Play equipment

Pretending. Students described how their special places permitted them to use their imagination and engage in pretend play. Viola explained that in the open area of the playground "usually we hang out there and uh we like uh look out and play fairies" (M, V, PEI, p. 10). On the tennis courts, Viola, Petunia and Lily described pretending to be secret agents and spies.

Pretend play also occurred in students' classrooms. Luke described a topic-specific shelf that was special because of how he and a friend pretended to use the geography materials: "There's a globe here which me and my friend Rocky like to pretend it's [a] mini world and we pretend to smash it but we don't actually like pow [explosion sound] we just think and pretend to kill mini dudes" (M, Lu, PEI, p. 6).

125

Moving. Places that allowed physical movement were described as special. Luke identified the courtyard as a special place that he enjoyed playing games that involved movement, including basketball and tag on the pavement, regardless of the season:

Lu: We play in it everyday before we go out to the yard. It's really fun.

KM: What's fun about it? What do you do?

Lu: [I play with] the basketball nets in the summer and spring and [in the] fall (laughs).

KM: Do you like basketball?

Lu: Um no, I don't really play it. I play soccer but I don't play it at playtime.

KM: Is there anything else that happens here besides waiting to go to specialities and maybe, playing some basketball?

Lu: In the snowtime, we chase down people and make snowballs and do snow angels. (M, Lu, PEI, p. 7)

Lily also associated her most special place, the tennis court, with the movement it permitted: "There are some lines here, you can't really see them though [because they're under the snow]. . . . They're green and red on this tennis court, and there's some white lines [too]. In the summer and spring, we like to play tag on here" (M, L, WT, p. 3). She also described "slippery rock," a rock in the open area of the playground for climbing (Figure 45):

126

Figure 45. "Slippery rock" in the open area of the playground at Maple Montessori School. Photographed by the researcher.

L: I climb it, well, I try and climb it, and I slide. . . . There's a little lump on it,

so I climb the lump.

KM: Why is it special for you?

L: Because it's out in the open and its very fun (laughs) to slide down.

(M, L, PEI, p. 5)

Lily used existing objects in her special places to move, including lines for tag and an irregular-shaped rock for climbing and sliding. Other students associated similar movements with play equipment, including swings, slides, and monkey bars. Alicia showed a photograph of herself standing in the open area of the playground. She emphasized, however, that she preferred to play on the play equipment due to the physical movement they permitted:

A: I like to play on the actually playground part.

KM: What's the actually playground part?

127

A: Like where there's [a] ladybug that swings back and forth and the

caterpillars, [and] three slides: one that goes swirly and two that just go

straight down like a twirly thing, you can either sit on it or climb up it, so

you can sit on it and it goes twirly twirly all the way down. . . . And we

like to go on the swings but apparently the snow has been really high so

it's kind of hard to go on the swing for me because I have really long

legs (laughs). (M, A, PEI, p. 4–5)

Snow and cold temperatures prevented students at Maple School from going

outside for gym class and lunch recess on one occasion during the study, though play

seemed to continue indoors. Petunia identified the gymnasium as a place where she

would "get to run around and run your steam off" (M, P, PEI, p. 7). Luke identified a

group table by the side window in his classroom as a place to play during indoor recess:

Lu: Most of my Year 3 friends sit at this table that I really like talking to.

[We] sit at this table during playtime. I always play with them.

KM: For an indoor recess?

Lu: Yes.

KM: Do you sit at a table or put out a mat on the floor?

Lu: I do pictures and then, I play with Lego$_{TM}$ and sometimes the straws.

(M, Lu, PEI, p. 11)

Play took place indoors when seasons prevented students from going outdoors for

recess. Play seemed to change from physical movement to using objects for creating.

The next section will discuss creating as a form of play that occurred in special places at

Maple School.

Creating. Play that focused on constructing and building often incorporated aspects of pretend play and movement. The students' descriptions, however, primarily concentrated on the use of their hands to physically construct something, including plastic straw pyramids, and Lego™ houses and ships. Viola identified building during the after-school care program by the toy shelf in the community room. She described a pyramid structure that her friend had fixed:

KM: Why did you choose this as your special place?

V: Because I usually hang out there with Petunia and Brian. . . . [He] made that. He's in upper elementary. He made that all by himself but somebody, [named] Alexander, wrecked it. Alexander wrecked it and then Brian fixed it. It is fixed now. It's a tower thing that he likes.

KM: Do you know what it's made out of?

V: Uh sticks and stuff.

KM: It almost looks like a pyramid.

V: Yeah.

KM: It's fairly large.

V: Yeah, when I duck down like this (she knelt on the carpet beside the round table in the library and gestured where her neck meets her chest). [It] is about that tall.

KM: Almost over your head?

V: Yeah, like this. It's about this tall, like this.

KM: To your chest?

V: Not that tall. Not even to my eyes, not under my eyes. (M, V, PEI, p. 8)

Luke described using Lego^{TM} during indoor recess or free-time. Students also described

special places that allowed them to create music. All Montessori students identified

places within the music room as special due to the opportunity it provided for creating

music with their voices and school instruments. Music lessons occurred each week.

One lesson occurred in their classroom when the music teacher instructed the class and

one occurred in the music room in the specialties' building down the street. Viola

identified the back of the music room as her most special place and guided me on a

walking tour (Figure 46).

Figure 46. Front of the music room at Maple Montessori School. Photographed
and selected by Viola (P#1).

In addition to music classes, Viola explained she attended choir practice before

school a couple mornings each week. She described creating vocal and instrumental

music: "I like to sing and there's a lot of instruments here" (M, V, WT, p. 3). Rocky

selected a photograph of the front of the music room that showed a music staff printed

on a mat (Figure 47). He said it was "for ringing bells" (M, R, PEI, p. 7). Bean bags or

note cards were placed on the music staff mat and students sounded hand bells to play

130

the song. Experiences creating music in the music room seemed to make it a special

place.

Figure 47. Music staff in the music room at Maple
Montessori School. Photographed and selected by
Rocky (P#5).

Experience, however, did not seem to be necessary for students to express an

attachment to the music room. Viola described the music room for the instruments in it

and admitted that she did not touch nor play them all. She attributed the specialness of

the music room to the instruments and "stuff I haven't seen" (M, V, WT, p. 3). Viola

described them as special despite not knowing what the instruments were or having any

experience playing them:

> V: Not all of them.

> KM: Not until you've had a lesson?

> V: Yeah, we don't know how to use that stuff [over] there.

> KM: They look like colourful tubes.

> V: Yeah, I don't know how to use them, maybe they go "bong bong bong."

> KM: (laughs) So you like to sing?

> V: Yeah, and [to] play instruments.

> KM: You were in choir this morning and [also] played instruments?

V: Yeah.

KM: What instruments in the room do you like to play?

V: I would say uh the ukulele but I don't really play it. (M, V, WT, p. 3)

She indicated that they used wooden sticks to practice rhythm and had learned a few songs using the xylophones, though she could not remember what the instruments were called. Rocky was unable to name the music staff he showed in one of his selected photographs. He described using the music staff when ringing bells.

Despite instances that Viola and Rocky acknowledged about not knowing or remembering how to use a particular instrument or music material, most Montessori students associated attachment with places in which they had experiences creating music. Petunia emphasized the playing aspect of her attachment to the music room. She said: "We get to play music. We get to do lots of fun stuff, read stories . . . . hmmm and have fun (laughs)" (M, P, PEI, p. 6). The Montessori students described the music room as special for its instruments, their experiences creating music and the potential for more experiences to create music. In summation, Luke exclaimed in the focus group, because, "I love everything about music" (M, FG, p. 8).

Gaming. Special places that involved gaming were also described with similar attachment to the use of new instruments and infrequent visits. Games are organized activities and exercises that involve actions, which are not overtly physical, to achieve a desired outcome (Oxford English Dictionary). Students seemed to distinguish between sports played during recess, including basketball and tag, and games played in the gymnasium and those executed on the computer. Luke noted that he used the computer for work and gaming:

132

Lu: I type my creative writing after my rough copy, which is the writing in my book.

KM: You like using the computer?

Lu: Of course I do! And if you finished you can do a puzzle, go to the library, read a book or best of all, play a game on the computer. (M, Lu, PEI, p. 10)

During the photo elicitation interview with Alicia, a boy interrupted to ask for help printing his assignment. Alicia responded: "I know how to print it" (M, A, PEI, p. 3). She also noted that Viola was working at the computer next to us during the interview. Students seemed to use the computers in the library (Figure 48) more than the one in their classroom as evident by the increased number of instances that students discussed them. Only Lily selected a photograph of the computers in the library, though she focused on the listening station.

Figure 48. Computers in the library at Maple Montessori School. Photographed by the researcher.

Hiding. Places that offered opportunities for hiding were also considered special. The Montessori students described special places indoors and outdoors that

133

were significant to them because of their ability to conceal and camouflage themselves from their friends. Places to hide included a space near the toy shelf in the community room and the tennis courts on the playground.

Viola described the community room as special because "there's a lot of games and uh there's a lot of pictures we can draw and uh there's also a secret hiding place there—well not really secret, but we play there, and there's a door somewhere right there" (M, V, PEI, p. 8). Petunia, Viola, and Lily identified the tennis courts as a special place for their version of hide-chase-kiss. Petunia described chasing boys from their hiding spots. I asked, "what do you do when you catch them?" to which she replied, "We try to kiss them! (laughs) (M, P, PEI, p. 5). In Viola's words:

> V: We really like to chase the boys. . . . They're very scared of us. I would just "walk walk walk", [and say] "Hi Charles." [He would scream] "AHHH!" [and I would call after him] "Hey, wait up!"
>
> KM: And he'd run away?
>
> V: Yeah! 'Cause he's so scared of us. I usually find them there in the tennis court. (M, V, PEI, p. 10)

Lily further described hiding in the tennis courts. It was a crisp, cold morning in February and the snow sparkled and crunched under our footsteps as she guided me on the walking tour. The playground, although located in the local city park, appeared to be empty and still. Lily and I had arrived at her special place to hide:

> L: I like it because it's an open space and it's a great hiding place also (laughs).
>
> KM: Where do you like to hide?

L: I like to camouflage (laughs, jumps back against the fence with her arms

and legs stretched out). I run and stand against the fence (laughs).

(M, L, WT, p. 2)

Students described their special places according to their experiences and potential

experiences for play. The next section will discuss places that were significant for

friendship as revealed in the data.

Friendship. Places were often described as special for the engagement with

others and relationships that they fostered. Friendship occurred between peers, with

younger and older students (students from different grades), with teachers and nature.

Students identified ten special places for friendships (Table 8).

Table 8

*Spaces and Places Identified by Grade 2 Students as Special for Enabling Friendship in Maple
School (Montessori*

Space	Special Places
Library	Topic specific shelf
	Armchairs: two leathers by windows
	Winter mural
Classroom	Table–group
Hallways	To other classrooms–stairwells
Kitchen	Sink in front of window
	Counter
Front of School	Profile of school houses
Playground	Open area: field-like, surrounded by trees
Sidewalk/street	Identified

These ten places shared similar characteristics and are grouped according to the

following properties: (a) comforting, (b) reflective, (c) inclusive. I will refer to the data

to describe each concept in this section.

Comforting. The Montessori students often associated positive feelings with

being with others in their special places. Alicia called the winter mural with the word

peace below it in the library "friend" (M, A, PEI, p. 8; Figure 49):

A: I like this picture because it's like FRIEND.

135

KM: It's like what?

A: I just like it because I like the word "peace" a lot. To me, it just means

        happiness because there's always peace in our library.

Figure 49. Mural in the library at Maple Montessori School that is
special for friendship. Photographed and selected by Alicia (P#6).

Alicia was the only student to directly associate the mural with the feeling of friendship.

All Montessori students, however, pointed out their own art work and that of their

friends in the library and their classroom. The presence of friends was evident in the

characteristics that students associated with their special places. An excerpt from

Luke's photo elicitation interview is representative (Figure 50):

Lu: This is um a great view of the classroom. These are all the Year 2's

        [art work on wall].

KM: The Year 2's what?

Lu: The Year 2's art, including mine.

KM: Which one's yours?

Lu: Mine is this one.

KM: Right in the middle?

136

Lu: Yeah.

KM: At the bottom?

Lu: Yeah, this one here. Mine is that one.

KM: Is that why this place is special to you?

Lu: Yes. (M, Lu, PEI, p. 10)

Figure 50. Artwork in the Library at the Montessori school. Photographed and selected by Luke (P#6).

An excerpt from Luke's walking tour is representative of special places in the classroom that have friend's artwork:

KM: Is there anything else you want to tell me about your favourite books and this spot in the library?

Lu: This is also my favourite place for reading. There's some art up there which is Year 1 art not my art. (M, Lu, WT, p. 2)

Comfort, for some, came from nature on the school playground. Petunia described her friendship with a tree on the edge of an open area on Maple School's playground (Figure 51):

KM: What's special about this tree, special to you?

P: That I always hug it.

KM: Do you?

P: Yep.

KM: That's very nice, why do you hug it?

P: Because I love trees. (M, P, PEI, pp. 7–8)

Figure 51. Tree that is comforting, found in the open area of the playground at Maple Montessori School. Photographed and selected by Petunia (P#5).

Reflective. Landmarks were also identified as special due to the memories that they evoked. Students at Montessori pointed out their first school building (Casa preschool program) and one noted his doctor's office along the street and sidewalk by the school (M, Lu, PEI). I asked Rocky: "What's special about the front of your school?" referring to his photograph that he has selected. He responded: "Hmm! Let me

see. Well the most important thing is it's our school" (M, R, PEI, p. 6). Students at Maple School described their history at the school and for some, it stretched back to when they were three years of age.

 Inclusive. Sometimes a place was special because best friends were sitting in it and invited you to join. Luke described a group table in his classroom at which he liked to work:

  Lu: My favourite is the two table beside the window because there's a window and a Chinese lantern hanging over it. I have two friends here, Rocky and Parker, sitting in the distance. I always like to sit with them. They're very special friends.

  KM: What makes them special?

  Lu: They like talking with me and um, I like talking with them. We like making jokes (laughs). (M, Lu, PEI, p. 6)

Alicia also described how her favourite place to read was sitting in one of the two leather armchairs in the library. Space in her place is not a concern as Alicia said that she would share her chair so that her friend could still sit beside her (Figure 52):

  A: Yeah, we would just start reading and we would go to dead silence or sometimes, if someone else is on that chair like a lady or Kathryn or something. We can fit two people 'cause me and her are small. She always gets the far seat because she loves the window.

  KM: You don't mind sitting in the other one?

  A: No, no.

  KM: You don't love the window?

A: I like the window, it's just she likes to sit there more, so I let her sit there

because I don't really sit at the window much. I always sit in that one.

(M, A, PEI, p. 7)

Figure 52. Friends sat in two brown
leather armchairs by windows in the
library at Maple Montessori School.
Photographed and selected by the Alicia
(P#5).

Books were described as friends. In the focus group at Maple School, Rocky

asked Petunia, "Why did you take a picture of books?" to which she replied, "Because I

love books" (M, FG, p. 6). The selected photograph (Figure 53) showed a new book

sitting on a blue armchair in the library.

Students also described special places where they developed friendships with

younger students and teachers. In the open area of Maple School's playground, Viola

was mindful of Grade 1 students: "We usually see the Year One girls. . . . We usually

say hi to them and they're right here" (M, V, PEI, p. 10).

Figure 53. Blue armchair with a novel in the library at Maple Montessori
School. Photographed and selected by Petunia (P#2).

Some instances revealed that specialness was attached to teachers' places. Viola

exclaimed that her special place in the music room was beside the teacher, sitting on the

carpet for lessons (M, V, WT). Alicia selected the sink area in the school kitchen as her

most special place because "it's really cool because like it always has like teachers'

stuff and it's just really cool I just like it here because this where we come up when

we're having hot chocolate with Victoria [the Head of School], we get out mugs and we

get the water from that thingy [hot water dispenser]" (M, A, WT, p. 1; Figure 54).

Figure 54. Sink and window in the kitchen at Maple
Montessori School. Photographed and selected by Alicia

One student, however, identified a group table in his classroom as one of his special places, not because of its positive attributes but because of the negative associations of another place. The table became special due to a negative experience he had at another table. Rocky explained he never wanted to sit there (Figure 55):

R: I always sit here.

KM: Why do you like sitting there?

R: Mostly all the time, I sit here but I never sit there. I never want to sit there in my life.

KM: Why?

R: Because last year, when somebody was in Grade 3, they spit on this chair and now, I want to sit here, so I never sit on it. [to A] Remember, Jake's spit chair?

A: Ewww!

KM: [to A] You shouldn't be listening please.

A: Yeah, I've heard of the spit chair. (M, R, PEI, p. 4)

Figure 55. Group table by cubbies and arithmetic shelves in a lower elementary classroom at Maple Montessori School. Photographed and selected by Rocky (P#3).

Solitude and tranquility. Students described seeking out places free from noise and away from others. They selected places that were alone and quiet as their special places to discuss in their photo elicitation interviews, walking tours and focus groups (Table 9). Alone and quiet places were often identified as having similar characteristics, including (a) away from noise, (b) conducive for reading and working, and (c) privacy.

Table 9

Spaces and Places Identified by Grade 2 Students as Special for Enabling Students to have solitude and tranquility in Maple School (Montessori)

Space	Special Places
Library	Topic specific shelf
	Armchairs: two leathers by windows
	Armchairs: blue by entrance
	Computers and listening station
	Nook: pillows and blankets between shelves
Classroom	Table–single
	Subject–specific shelf
Playground	Open area: field-like, surrounded by trees

Away from noise. Students identified places within the library that were free from talking. Alicia described sitting with her friend and reading in the two brown leather armchairs by windows in the Library because, "that's where I most like to read because it's really comfy and it's really quiet in this area . . . . It's really quiet (M, A, PEI, p. 6). She continued: "This part is quiet but over there (she points to the library entrance) is like a mansion, like a giant mansion full of party poopers" (M, A, PEI, p. 8). Lily described sitting at the listening station with headphones on, which played books on CD and in turn, blocked out the library noise (M, L, PEI). Similar places were identified as special for reading and working.

Conducive for reading and working. The students at Maple School communicated strong attachment to places that were conducive for reading and

143

working. Books seemed to be a part of their sense of identity. Alicia, Luke and Petunia selected at least two photographs that showed books they liked to read (Figure 56). Alicia exclaimed: "I like to read dictionaries because my main thing is books, so I try to come [to the library] every day. I love reading chapter books" (M, A, PEI, p. 6).

Figure 56. Favourite book in the library at Maple Montessori School. Photographed and selected by Luke (P#1).

Figure 57. Single table in a lower elementary classroom at Maple Montessori School. Photographed and selected by Lily (P#3).

Some students associated desks and tables with getting work done purposefully and quietly. The students at Maple School moved freely from table to table according to their work and seating was often determined by the size of material and group of students necessary to complete it. Luke described one group table in his classroom adjacent to the arithmetic shelf as "a quiet place most of the time (laughs) where people sit down and do spelling and math and all sorts of neat work" (O, Lu, PEI, p. 5). Lily selected a single table by the front window (Figure 57). She explained: "This brown part is a single table. . . . I like to work at single tables because they have the window and because I get all my work done (M, L, PEI, p. 3).

Figure 58. Reading nook in the library at Maple Montessori
School. Photographed and selected by Lily (P#2).

Privacy. Some students attributed their special places to the feeling of space:

they were not necessarily alone in the space but perceived that they were the only ones

within that particular place. Lily identified a reading nook in the library (Figure 58): "I

like this area too. It's nice and private and comfy because it's made of pillows" (M, L,

PEI, p. 2). The dialogue continued:

L: This is a nice, comfy, private area that I like to read in, in the library.

KM: It looks like you have a pillow in there.

L: Well, there's actually a bunch of pillows [but] it's just covered by this

        red blanket.

KM: Did you make this place or is it always like that?

L: It's always like that (laugh).

KM: What do you do in that space?

L: I just read (laugh).

KM: Do you like to read?

L: Yes, and I make like a little fort in the tiny space and that's all I have to

say about this space. (M, L, PEI, p. 3)

The nook consisted of a stack of pillows in between a shelf and the wall, and resembled a fort, though the construction of it was not significant to Lily. Alicia found her own space in the open area of the playground. She explained: "It's just I really like open space sometimes because sometimes, I really want to be alone instead of like with other people. It's a good place because its really big and you can find spaces that you can be alone and its quiet, so that's why I really like this picture" (M, A, PEI, p. 5). Alicia described both her attachment to the place (open area of the playground) as well as the photograph itself: "That's why I really like this picture" (M, A, PEI, p. 5).

Summary

The students' photographs and dialogue about special places at Maple Montessori School demonstrated an abundance of diverse experiences with unique physical spaces, objects within places and social activities. The types of places were grouped according to the opportunities they offerred students for play, friendships, and solitude. Types of special places also emerged from the photographs and dialogue with the Grade 2 students from the public school (Pine). In the second section of this chapter, I describe Pine School in its entirety and report on the students' photographs and special places.

Pine School

In this section of the results chapter, I report on the five Grade 2 students' photographs and dialogues generated from photo elicitation interviews, walking tours, and one focus group at a public school. First, I report on the significant school spaces

shown in participant-made photographs. Second, I report on the special places shown in participant-selected photographs, as well as the types of special places that emerged from the selected photographs and dialogue.

Photographs

In this section of the thesis, I report on student-made photographs and the dialogue, transcribed from interview, walking tour and focus group audio-recordings, which accompanied them. First, I describe the process that occurred for printing, sorting and discussing photographs with students, and review the constraints for students that occurred during this process and details about an additional camera that was used by the class. Next, I report on significant school spaces that appeared in student-made photographs. Then, I report on the photographs that students selected and used to identify their special places. In the next section, "Places," I describe the types of places that emerged from a thematic analysis of the photographs and dialogue.

I use codes to refer to specific instances of data for Pine School. Participants are identified as Jessica (J), Kaleb (K), Hal (H), Mason (M) and Christina (C). The researcher is identified by her initials (KM). The following codes are used to identify the methods: photo elicitation interview (PEI), walking tour (WT) and focus group (FG). For example, (P, K, PEI, p. 6) is the citation for Pine School (public school), Kaleb (participant), photo elicitation interview (method), page six (page number).

Printing, sorting and discussing photographs. Students agreed to take at least six photographs within one week, using disposable cameras that I provided. They also agreed to return them to a designated shoebox on a bookshelf in their classroom throughout each day to keep them safe and dry while they were not using them. Four

147

out of the five students at the public school completed the task before the agreed-upon deadline. Christina did not finish her camera and left two undeveloped photographs, which I took to allow the film to be developed and disregarded both from the analysis of data. Once they had finished taking photographs, the students returned their disposable cameras to me.

I subsequently printed all available photographs from each disposable camera. The number of photographs ranged from 37 to 39. Each set of photographs included 4 x 6 colour photographs with matte finishes, an index card, one set of negatives and one photograph disc. I took the photographs, index cards and negatives to the photo elicitation interviews. All participating Pine School students met with me one-on-one at a hexagonal table in the literacy room to discuss their photographs. The room consisted of bookshelves, chalkboards, three hexagonal tables and a rocking chair by the window.

Teachers and classes used the room daily to exchange their leveled readers[5]. The interruptions seemed to impact the length of the interview (e.g., interrupting our dialogue for a few minutes due to noise) and the quality of the audio-recordings in some instances (e.g., overlapping of shuffling, students talking and the interview dialogue) though this did not seem to negatively influence students' ability to sort and discuss their photographs (e.g., they paused for a few seconds and continued with the task).

I asked the students to sort their photographs and select six that best represented their special places at school for the photo elicitation interviews. Students used coloured markers to assign a number to each photograph, which determined the order in

---

[5] Students' reading ability was evaluated at the beginning of the school year to determine which stage or level they were reading independently while still being challenged to further develop their literacy. These levels correspond to sets of books called leveled readers. Readers are assigned levels according to the complexity of sentence structure and number of phonemes in each word.

which they would talk about them. The most special place was assigned Photograph #1

and it was set to the side for the walking tour. Sorting photographs took between 6 and

12 minutes.

All students expressed excitement to see their photographs. Kaleb, in the focus

group, searched through his photograph album and said, laughing, "I want to show Hal,

and, Hal, look at this picture, you gotta see this picture is looks so funny" (P, FG, p. 3).

One student admitted to being nervous. Mason, from Pine School, said, "I'm just

nervous. I'm getting really nervous" (P, M, PEI, p. 1) then opened his envelope of

photographs and began to sort through them.

The photo elicitation interviews totaled 2 hours 26 minutes and 32 seconds of

audio-recordings while the walking tours totaled 27 minutes and 59 seconds. Table 10

displays the duration of the photo elicitation interview and the walking tours, indicating

the length of time for each method for each student.

Table 10

Duration of Photo Elicitation Interviews and Walking Tours for Five Grade 2 Students at Pine School (Public)

Participants	Duration of Photo Elicitation Interviews	Duration of Walking Tours
Christina	31m 35s	8m 47s
Jessica	30m 13s	2m 37s
Kaleb	30m 52s	6m 5s
Mason	25m 16s	4m 25s
Hal	28m 36s	6m 5s
Total	2h 26m 32s	27m 59s

Note. h = hour(s); m = minute(s); s = second(s).

It was often necessary to remind the Pine School students that we did not have

enough time to talk about all of their photographs and so they must choose six that

showed places that were special to them. All students, however, seemed to struggle to

make their selections. For example, Christina was moving photographs back and forth

from the "talk about" pile to the "not talk about" pile. She said, "I like this one but I

think I already have too much pictures, I like these two but I think I already have too

much pictures" (P, C, PEI, p. 3). I permitted students to include more than six

photographs where they felt, as Christina stated, that they liked them and they best

represented special places. Thus, students, on average, selected eight photographs for

the photo elicitation interviews and walking tours (Table 11). Overall, students took a

total of 191 photographs of school spaces and, on average, took 39 photographs each.

Table 11

Total and Average Number of Participant-taken Photographs for Photo Elicitation Interviews and Walking Tours by Five Grade 2 Students at Pine School (Public)

Task	Number of Participant-made Photographs	Average Number of Photographs Per Participant
Total number of photographs	191	39
Total number of photographs selected for PEI and WT	43	8

Constraints for students. On two occasions, students seemed to express

frustration when I reminded them about taking their photographs. Christina, Mason,

Hal and Jessica replied they were saving some photographs for special places that they

had not had the opportunity to go to since receiving their cameras. They wanted to take

photographs in the library but they had missed their scheduled time because they had a

supply teacher on that day (which was also the first day of the study) and the next

library visit was not scheduled to occur until after the study.

The students also wanted to photograph the front of the school but they were not

permitted to enter or exit through those doors during school hours and thus did not have

the opportunity to take their cameras to the space. I approached the classroom teacher

with this dilemma and she readily allowed me to walk the students to the two spaces during recess. Kaleb also expressed frustration at not being able to photograph his special place on the stage in the North gym. He did not mention it to me, however, until his photo elicitation interview.

Class camera. An additional disposable camera was included in the shoebox for use by any student within the class to use. The class camera permitted non-participating students to take 3–4 photographs each. This was particularly important for one student who had signed his form but did not return it until after the study had begun. The student was visibly upset when the five students returned to the classroom with their cameras. I introduced the class camera and briefly explained how to use it. The upset student seemed to take responsibility for the class camera and gave lessons to other students who wanted to use it. The Grade 3 students in the classroom also expressed interest in the study though they were not given the opportunity to be involved because of the participant selection criteria. I printed two sets of 4 x 6 colour photographs for the class: one set was included in a class photo album and one set was attached to a bright yellow Bristol board that was displayed in the classroom at the end of the study. The photographs from the class camera were not included in the analysis.

In the next section of this chapter, I will further organize the participant-made photographs according to indoor and outdoor spaces that the five students identified as significant at Pine School.

Significant school spaces from participant-made photographs. One hundred and sixty photographs were of indoor spaces while 31 were of outdoor spaces. One photograph was not interpretable due to overexposure. Ten additional photographs

showed improper exposure (e.g., bright orange lines through the image) and dark

shadows from students' fingers. The spaces and places, however, were visible. In some

instances, students selected these photographs for the interviews and hence were

included in the analysis. Table 12 shows the distribution of photographs for each school

space that students represented in their photographs and selected in their photo

elicitation interviews, walking tours and focus groups.

Table 12

Total Photographs Taken and Selected for Photo Elicitation Interviews and Walking Tours with Five Grade 2 Students at Pine School (Public)

Space	Total Photographs taken	Photographs selected for PEI and WT
Indoor		
Classroom	57	8
Library	40	12
Before/after school care room	6	2
Music room	12	2
Atrium	6	0
Hallways	18	2
Gymnasium	16	7
Office	5	1
Outdoor		
Front of School	13	3
Playground	18	6
Totals	191	43

The Pine School students identified eight indoor school spaces (160 photos) and

two outdoor school spaces (31 photos). The indoor school spaces were photographed

four times more frequently than the outdoor spaces. The most frequently photographed

indoor school space was the students' classroom (57 photos), with the library as the

second most photographed space (40 photos). The most frequently photographed

outdoor school space was the playground (18 photos) while the front of school was

pictured in five fewer photographs (13).

Boundaries and attachments varied among students and, thus, furniture or design elements were used to determine specific locations and establish a standardized name for these places. Hal, for example, explained in his photo elicitation interview that there were two "quiet reading spots" (P, H, PEI, p. 9): one distinguished by the black leather couches, armchairs and side tables, and a second was "by the door" (P, H, PEI, p. 10). Therefore, I relied on transcripts from photo elicitation interviews, walking tours and focus groups to identify and name each special place. In the next section, I report on the special places that were evident in the data.

Special places from participant-made and selected photographs. Students selected photographs to show and describe their special places within school spaces. For the analysis, I focused on the 43 photographs that the five students selected and discussed in their photo elicitation interviews, walking tours and focus groups (Table 13).

The public school students identified 32 indoor special places and nine outdoor special places. The most frequently selected indoor special place was the gymnasium (Figure 59). The most frequently selected outdoor special place was the pavement in the playground (Figure 60), which offered basketball hoops, painted hopscotch and numbered squares, and the wall.

To further investigate special places at Pine School, I report on the results of a thematic analysis of the photographs and dialogue from the photo elicitation interviews, walking tours and focus group interview.

153

Table 13

Special Places Identified by Five Grade 2 Students in Photo Elicitation Interviews and Walking Tours at Pine School (Public)

Space	Place	Photographs selected for PEI and WT	Discussed but not selected
Indoor			
Classroom	Desk (single)		•
	Literacy table (table–group)		•
	Bulletin board	1	
	Reading corner (bean bags, book shelf, computer)	3	
	Front of classroom (Interactive whiteboard, carpet, chalkboard)	2	
	Subject specific materials (math manipulatives readers)	2	
	Lunch bag hooks		•
	Teacher's desk		•
Library	Topic specific shelf (pets, trucks, Dr. Seuss)	3	
	Reading circle (bean bags, rocking chair, curved shelves)	3	
	Couches–two black leathers, armchair, table by	2	
	Focus group location–board, tables, encyclopedias		•
	Computer lab	3	
	Sign in &out desk/entrance		•
Before/After school room	Desks	1	
	Carpet	1	
Music room	Front	1	
	Back	2	
Hallways	Stairwells–front	1	
	Stairwells–back		•
	Coat hooks		•
	"wall of windows" (second-story, above atrium)	1	
	Water fountains	1	
Gymnasium	North (stage, mats)		•
	South (storage room, mats, basketball hoops)	4	
Office	Secretaries' desks (attendance box, sign in/out)	1	
	Seating area (chairs, telephone)		•
	Kitchen (refrigerator, cot, desk)		•
	Principal's Office		•
Washroom			•
Atrium	Seating (couches, flag, television screen)		•
	Walls (staff and student portraits)	1	
Outdoor			
Front of School	Sign		•
	Bike racks	1	
	Flag	1	
	Garden	1	
Playground (Back of School)	Pavement (basketball hoops, hopscotch, wall)	5	
	Field (trees, soccer field)		•
	Play equipment	2	
Sidewalk/street			•
Parking lot			•

Figure 59. Most photographed indoor place: south gymnasium at Pine Public School. Photographed and selected by Kaleb (P#10).

Figure 60. Most photographed outdoor place: pavement in the playground at Pine Public School. Photographed and selected by Jessica (P#6).

155

Places

The Pine School students described places according to the types of interactions that occurred in-place. A thematic analysis of the students' photographs and verbatim transcripts from five photo elicitation interviews and walking tours, and one focus group revealed four types of places, including: (a) placeness, (b) play, (c) friendship, and (c) solitude and tranquility. I review definitions of each type of place where necessary and use the students' photographs and descriptions from the transcripts to illustrate special indoor and outdoor places at the public school.

Placeness. Students described having a sense of place within special school spaces. They often expressed their placeness—emotional bonding or attachment to specific spaces—by demonstrating their knowledge of the place. Public students described (a) rules for the use of the place, (b) their spatial sense and location in relation to other places, (c) seasonal changes to the landscape, and (d) unfamiliarity.

Placeness was associated with five school spaces, including 10 special places within them. In particular, all places—pavement, field and play equipment—within the playground were identified as special for their sense of place that seemed to come from the change from winter to spring rules of conduct, placement in their neighbourhood, physical changes to the landscape and frequent experiences in-place. Table 14 shows the places that were associated with placeness at Pine School. In the next section, I will demonstrate how a sense of place is evident in the students' photographs and transcribed audio-recordings.

Table 14

Spaces and Places Identified by Grade 2 Students as Special for Developing Placeness in Pine School (Public)

Spaces	Special Places for Placeness
Library	Topic specific shelf
	Reading circle: bean bag chairs, rocking chair, shelves along curved wall
	Computer lab
Hallways	Water fountain: near classroom and washroom, student-height
Office	Seating area (chairs, telephone)
	Kitchen (refrigerator, cot, desk)
Gymnasium	South
Playground	Pavement (tarmac, basket ball hoops, painted hopscotch and squares)
	Field (soccer field, groupings of trees along one side)
	Play equipment (climbers and slides)

Rules. Students demonstrated an awareness and adherence to school procedures as a part of expressing experience and place knowledge. Mason, Jessica, and Hal characterized bookshelves that held their favourite books as special, in part, because they knew where to find them (Figure 61; Figure 62).

Figure 61. Favourite books in the library at Pine Public
School. Photographed and selected by Jessica (P#9).

Christina, Hal, Jessica and Kaleb described typical visits to the library. They explained that their teacher read a book to the class and then invited students to choose books to borrow. Jessica said, "you'd sign out the book and then we'd go to our classrooms and then put it in our backpacks to take home" (P, J, PEI, p. 10).

Figure 62. Favourite books in the library at Pine Public School.
Photographed and selected by Hal (P#4).

Hal elaborated on what happened when his class visited the library. Hal would use a

paint stick to mark a book's place so that he can return it correctly if he did not want to

take it home:

KM: What do you do there?

H: We read. Mrs. Cats reads us a book [that] someone picks out and then,

once we're done we go sign out our books. We get a [paint] stick and go

find our books. We sign them out and then, we line up and go back to

class.

KM: You get a [paint] stick?

H: Yeah, just in case you don't like the book [the paint stick holds it's place

so you can put it back] (P, H, PEI, p. 9)

During the focus group, Christina described the reading circle as one of her

favourite places, which provoked a further discussion about the rules surrounding the

bean bag chairs within the reading circle at the library (Figure 63). The students seemed

to understand how to follow the rules (e.g, walk quietly in the hallway to sit on the bean

158

bag chair) but sometimes special treatment for an occasion (e.g., birthday) also played a role in their interaction with the environment:

C: I get picked a lot to sit on the bean bags because I'm really quiet walking in the line.

H: You're not always picked, not very much!

KM: She says she gets picked a lot?

C: Not all the time.

K: Well barely, like you get to do it like once a week.

KM: Once a week?

J: Or if it's your birthday, you get to sit on the bean bags.

All: Yeah. (P, FG, p. 18)

Figure 63. Reading circle in the library that has distinct rules and gives students placeness at Pine Public School. Photographed and selected by Christina (P#7).

Library visits were organized according to a 10-day schedule and did not occur weekly, as Kaleb suggested in the focus group interview. Mason did not seem to know when he visited the library: "I think we go there once a week. I'm pretty sure. We read a book. I think it's [at] different times [and] different dates but I don't know" (P, M, PEI,

159

p. 10). The procedures, despite misunderstanding weekly schedules, appeared to be significant to most of the students who discussed special places in the library.

Students also often discussed rules for the playground. In part, students' interests in the appropriate conduct for using the play equipment, pavement and field may be due to the changes that occurred during the study. The school introduced new spring rules that the classroom teacher reviewed with students. She then answered questions and took them outside to practice. Christina, Jessica, Mason, and Hal described the new playground rules. Mason explained, "the climbers opened yesterday, [during the] but first nutrition break, the kindergartens go on, then [during the] second [nutrition break] we get to go on" (P, M, PEI, p. 8). Jessica described taking turns on the play equipment with kindergarten students (Figure 64):

Figure 64. Play equipment in the playground that has distinct
rules and gives students placeness at Pine Public School.
Photographed and selected by Jessica (P#8).

J: Every other day we go on the playground and then [the kindergarten

students] do, and this way, we could have our own [turn]. We can't go

together a lot because the big kids could push the little kids down off or

they could fall or something.

160

KM: How does that make you feel?

J: (laughs) I don't think it's very safe, you could hurt a little kid.

(P, J, PEI, p. 7)

An additional rule prohibited students from using the play equipment and playing on the field when it rained because the surfaces were slippery. I asked Jessica: "How does that make you feel when you can't go on the play equipment?" to which she responded, "Um I feel a bit sad and I feel bit bored, but I still like playing hopscotch but I didn't take a picture of that" (P, J, PEI, p. 9). Christina also described restrictions to playground play when she identified her special place on the pavement. Christina explained: "No one could play on [the climbing structure and slide] because it was all wet on the grass and it was slippery on the climbers so someone could fall and get hurt" (P, C, PEI, p. 9). The playground rules shaped the students' interactions with their special places on the play equipment, pavement and field.

Spatial sense and location in relation to other places. Students often physically pointed out where their places were in relation to where we were in the interview, walking tour and focus group. Mason selected the bike racks at the front of the school as one of his special places. He stood up from the table during his photo elicitation interview and went to the window: "It's over there like by the window. You could see it by the window. . . . It's in front of the school" (P, M, PEI, p. 5). Mason selected the Canadian flag at the front of the school as another special place (Figure 65). It acted as a landmark: "like sometimes I'm far away from the school, I can see the Canadian flag so I know it's the school" (P, M, PEI, p. 7).

Figure 65. Flag in front of the school that provides placeness at Pine Public School. Photographed and selected by Mason (P#4).

Christina also noted aspects of the landscape that were familiar to her and surrounded her special place on the pavement in the playground. As we walked down the stairs on the walking tour, Christina called me over to the window. I said, "You can see the sunny playground" and she replied "[Yes], you can see my house too" (P, C, WT, p. 1). Jessica navigated her way from the literacy room to the computer lab for her walking tour. She said, "I'll take you the short cut way" (P, J, WT, p. 1) and noted that students usually use the back stairway instead of the front stairway that we walked down.

In the focus group, Mason showed a photograph of the encyclopedias beside the computer lab in the library. Kaleb readily identified the special place, saying, "um uh Mason, I know where that is, that's at the computer, no the other one, remember the one with the green books? (P, FG, p. 9). Mason set off to the shelf beside the interview location, stating, "That one, wait I know where that is, I have the picture" (P, FG, p. 10).

Seasonal changes to the landscape. The study took place during spring, a season of changeable weather and, for this year in particular, excessive rainfall that made the play equipment and field wet. Special places, in turn, seemed to change with the season. Jessica and Christina described a special place on the pavement that changed due to the seasonal landscape (Figure 66). I asked Jessica, "what do you do in the corner?" and she responded "um we had a snow fort there and um now we just like sitting there and talking" (P, J, PEI, p. 7). I asked Christina, "what do you do in the corner when its spring like this?" and she responded differently than Jessica stating, "I don't come here anymore" (P, C, WT, p. 2).

Figure 66. A corner for building snow houses on pavement in the playground at Pine Public School. Photographed and selected by Christina (P#1).

Christina also described a place by the trees on the field that was special during the winter for the experiences of pretend play and friendships that occurred in a different way than those that could develop during the spring:

C: Me and Jessica also built a snow fort right there when there was snow on the ground.

KM: You and Jessica built a snow fort by the trees?

C: Yeah, around this tree.

KM: But we don't have any snow anymore?

C: I think it was this tree, the first tree, right there, but we don't have any

        snow to build it [with now].

KM: (laughs) So what do you do in the summer or spring?

C: Maybe [we will] run around on the grass or something. (P, C, PEI, p. 9)

Mason recognized the bike racks at the front of the school for their seasonal use:

M: In the summer, we sometimes ride our bikes. We put our bikes on this

        bike rack.

KM: Where's the bike rack?

M: The bike rack thing is right here (Figure 67).

KM: [Do you mean] in the middle of the picture, but at school? Where is it?

M: It's over there like by the window. You could see it by the window. It's

        in front of the school (P, M, PEI, p. 5)

Figure 67. Bike rack in front of Pine Public School. Photographed and
selected by Mason (P#3).

Places were associated with different environmental conditions that appeared to foster students' sense of place. In some instances, weather negatively affected the students' attachment to place and forced them to find and create another special place. Time acted in a similar way: students' placeness was influenced by the frequency of their experiences in-place.

Unfamiliarity. Places were often expressed as significant due to the infrequent visits and fewer experiences in them, which seemed to influence the students' place knowledge and attachment. Students seemed to be vaguely aware of their weekly schedules, though they were not posted in the classroom. In the focus group, students discussed when gym class would occur:

M: Do we have gym today? I'm pretty sure we have gym today.

H: Yeah, we do.

J: I think we do because I'm not wearing shorts. (P, FG, p. 8)

In spaces where students had fewer experiences, they described returning to the same place from an earlier experience, perhaps developing a sense of place. Hal identified a computer station in the computer lab as special, though he admitted that they appeared the same (Figure 68):

KM: Where do you like to sit?

H: [I like to sit at] that one right there, back there.

KM: [At] the far side?

H: It would be that one right there behind this one and there.

KM: Oh ok, [it is] on the right side of the picture. Are you told which

        computer to use or you just like that one?

H: No, I just like that one.

KM: Now, they sort of look the same to me. What do you like about

        it?

H: I like it because I just sat there the first time (laughs).

        (P, H, PEI, p. 4)

Figure 68. Computer lab in the library at Pine Public School
that is special because it is unfamiliar. Photographed and
selected by Hal (P#2).

Christina expressed a similar experience in the computer lab. She explained: "I

did have a computer that was by the wall that was because I only played on the

computers once and that was the computer that I played on, so that's my favourite" (P,

C, PEI, p. 9). Students returned to the same computers with each visit to the computer

lab, which created a certain familiarity with, and knowledge about, that particular place.

One exception occurred in the data. In contrast to infrequent experiences, Kaleb

selected the water fountain (Figure 69) as a special place because of the frequent

number of experiences he had: Kaleb liked the water fountain because he used it every

day. He explained: "This would be the water fountain and it's my favourite place

because my parents usually never send me drinks but I get milk [from the school milk

order program]. I like this place because I knew it was going to be a cool picture and I like drinking from the water fountain" (P, K, PEI, p. 5).

Figure 69. Water fountain in the hallway at Pine Public
School. Photographed and selected by Kaleb (P#2).

In summary, students expressed their place knowledge, their sense of placeness, by describing the procedure and conduct rules for their special places. Along with rules, landmarks and the ability to see one place from another also appeared to be significant aspects of place. Seasonal changes to the landscape as well as the unfamiliarity with spaces seemed to influence how special places were used and defined. The meaning of places was further defined by how students freely interacted with them. A description of places for play follows.

Play

In the photo elicitation interview, walking tours and focus groups, students discussed nine places for play—activities that were chosen independently and provided opportunities for movement, exploration and inclusion. Table 15 displays the special places at Pine School. Play took on many forms, though all forms were grounded in free choice and participation. I will report on play as it emerged from the data as (a) moving, (b) creating, (c) gaming, and (d) hiding.

167

Table 15

Spaces and Places Identified by Grade 2 Students as Special for Permitting Play in Pine School (Public)

Spaces	Special Places
Library	Computer lab
Music room	Front (chalkboards, open linoleum floor)
	Back (shelves of instruments, music stands, sink)
Extended care room	Before/after school care classroom
Gymnasium	North gymnasium (stage, mats)
	South gymnasium (storage room, mats, posters)
Playground	Pavement
	Field
	Play equipment

Moving. Places that permitted movement were special to public school students. Mason and Hal described playing basketball and tag on the pavement and field during the nutrition breaks. Mason explained (Figure 70):

> M: We play basketball there. Sometimes, when we play basketball, it's
>
> usually that one [basketball net].
>
> KM: It's usually that one? Why that one?
>
> M: I don't know. We just play there.
>
> KM: What do you do when you don't play basketball?
>
> M: I don't know. I play tag or something or . . . sometimes [I go] on the
>
> climbers. (P, M, PEI, p. 8)

Hal preferred to play tag in the field rather than on the pavement in the playground:

> Its funner when there's lots of obstacles. . . . We just run through the kids. I
>
> jumped over a little kid (laughs) [but] I didn't mean too. I didn't see him
>
> there [because] he was like laying in the grass. . . . Then, I finally saw him
>
> because there was red [from his jacket], and [I thought] why would the grass
>
> be red. . . . I had to juuuuump [over him]. Smash! (laugh) It's a softer landing
>
> there [on the grass] too. (P, H, PEI, p. 6)

168

Figure 70. Pavement in the playground for different forms of play at Pine Public
School. Photographed and selected by Mason (P#5).

Jessica, Christina, Mason and Hal reported that they liked going on the climber and

down the slides on the play equipment. Over the course of the study, the school hosted

a dance to fundraise for more outdoor play equipment (P, O, p. 2). Students'

anticipation was evident. Jessica described, "This is the playground. You see all that

space? That's where they're going to put it [the new play equipment from the dance

fundraiser]. . . . I like playing on the slide and climbing up. There's other littler slides on

the other side [of the climber], and you can play underneath [it too]" (P, J, PEI, p. 9).

Creating. Students described creating: (a) using objects to construct structures

and (b) using instruments to produce music. Mason showed a picture of Kaleb and his

Lego[TM] castle during the focus group (Figure 71). Kaleb stated:

K: I love to play with Lego[TM].

H: [Yes] Lego[TM].

K: Right, Hal, remember when we played with it this morning?

169

KM: You were playing this morning?

H: Mhmm we play with it everyday [in the before- and after-school

program]. (P, FG, p. 11)

Figure 71. Places for play in the before- and after-school care program at Pine
Public School. Photographed by Mason.

Building with Lego™ in the before- and after-school care program pervaded Kaleb's

photo elicitation interview and walking tour so that five out of ten photographs

represented special places during the program. Hal and Mason also admitted to playing

Lego™ during free-time.

All five students described the music room as special, though they had visited it

for one week only and usually attended music lessons in their classroom. On one

occasion that I observed, the music teacher brought posters to the classroom, played

music from a CD that she followed along with a picture book, and showed some

instruments from the story. However, the lessons in the classroom were not associated

with the special places within the space. Instead, students described one week that they

170

had visited the music room for a drumming circle. Mason recalled: "For one week, I don't know, we went there a lot. Every music class, we went to practice drums, like [the teacher] had all these different kinds of drums. I took a picture of the music room because I play violin (P, M, PEI, p. 10). Mason admitted that the school did not have violins for students to use and the place would be even more special if there were violins for him to practice. Christina also valued the music room for her experience in the drumming circle:

C: This is the music room and I like it because its one of my favourite

        classes.

KM: What makes it special to you?

C: It's fun there because there's like drums there. We don't go there

        anymore because Mrs. Leclair doesn't have the drums anymore. It was

        really fun [so] that's why it's special to me. (P, C, PEI, p. 7)

Figure 72. Music room for novel activities at Pine Public
School. Photographed and selected by Kaleb (P#6).

Novel experiences to create music in the music room made it a special place. Students expressed a desire to return to the music room, perhaps recognizing the potential for

171

more new experiences to create music. Kaleb stated, "this would be my special place

for music [and] to go to for a music place" (P, K, PEI, p. 9; Figure 72).

Gaming. Games—activities that involve certain types of actions to achieve a

desired outcome—were significant aspects of special places. Students differentiated

gaming by (a) sports, including basketball and tag, played during recess, (b) games

played in the gymnasium, and (c) those executed on the computer. Mason described

why the South gymnasium was special to him:

KM: What's special about the gym to you?

M: It's where we play all the games.

KM: It's where you play all the games? Oh! What kind of games?

M: I don't know, like dodge ball and stuff. I like dodge ball.

        (P, M, WT, p. 2)

Hal also selected the South gymnasium "because you play games [there]. You can play

dodge ball, tag, toilet tag, [and] TV tag" (P, H, PEI, p. 11).

Furthermore, gaming was identified as an important aspect of the computer lab

located in the libraries. Part of the specialness of computer gaming seemed to come

from the privilege of leaving the classroom to go to another room. The students at Pine

School admitted that the computers in the computer lab "are pretty much the same" as

the one in their classroom (P, J, WT, p. 1). Jessica explained visiting the computer lab:

J: I like playing games on here.

KM: How does it feel when you get to come here?

J: I feel like I [can] concentrate on the game and it helps me learn

        stuff when I go on the math games. Sometimes, if we do the

172

math games, and we're done, and we still have a bit more time,

then we can do a normal fun game, not math games.

(P, J, WT, p. 1–2)

Hiding. Places for concealing oneself were special to some students. The freedom to hide, however, seemed to be limited to the before-and-after-school care program. The game hide-and-go-seek took place in the North gymnasium's stage. Kaleb selected the stage as his most special place at school, although he had not photographed it. He explained during the focus group, "I love playing hide-and-go-seek with my friends in the stage 'cause there's lots of good hiding spots and its all dark" (P, K, PEI, p. 4). One student, Hal, shared a similar experience of hiding on the stage whereas the others in the focus group had only been to the stage for an organized event:

H: I know you can definitely fit in the box [on the stage].

KM: [What do you mean] "definitely" you can fit in the box?

H: There's a box in there, and I can't really fit (laughs).

KM: Have you played hide-and-go-seek on the stage?

K: Yep.

KM: Anybody else?

J & C: No

M: Nah, I've never gone on the stage.

K: What do you mean? Hal and Kevin?

J: I have.

M: Yeah, [I guess] once when we had the winter [dance].

(P, FG, p. 13)

Furthermore, in his photo elicitation interview, Kaleb explained that he liked the North gymnasium better than the South gymnasium "because we get to play hide-and-go-seek and it's harder to hide" (P, K, PEI, p. 11). Students at Pine School described their special places according to their experiences and potential experiences for play in the forms of moving, creating, gaming and hiding.

One exception within the data, however, challenges the significance of place for play. Christina argued that play happened anywhere: "We play anywhere really. Yea, sometimes we go over there too [by the tree, but not on the soccer field] 'cause that's where the big kids are" (P, C, WT, p. 3). In this example, the place was significant for the friendships that occurred in-place instead of the opportunities it provided for play. The next section will discuss the theme of friendship as it was revealed in the data.

Friendship

All five public school students attributed significance to places that permitted relationships to develop. Friendship occurred between peers, with younger and with older students, and with teachers. Table 16 displays nine special places that students valued for friendships.

Table 16

Spaces and Places Identified by Grade 2 Students as Special for Permitting Friendship in Pine School (Public)

Space	Special Places
Library	Couches: two black leathers, armchair, table surrounded by bookshelves
	Reading circle: bean bag chairs, rocking chair, shelves along curved wall
Classroom	Front of classroom: interactive whiteboard, carpet, chalkboard
	Reading corner: bean bags, book shelf, and computer
Hallways	Stairwells –back
Atrium	Couches, flag, staff portraits, "Respect" banner
Front of School	Garden
Playground	Field
	Pavement

Places may be grouped according to similar purposes, including: (a) reflective, and (b) inclusive. I will refer to the data to describe each concept in this section.

Reflective. Students described special places for the memories of friendships they contained. Gardens, fields, and atriums were associated with positive past experiences that students had with peers and teachers. The students in the study were removed from one classroom and placed in a new classroom with a new teacher after the first three weeks of school. All five students described this classroom change, which seemed to emphasize the quality or intensity of the experience.

Christina, Jessica and Hal specifically noted that the classroom change separated them from friends, though due to the design of the school, they had the potential to encounter their friends in the hallways or on the playground. The following excerpt from Christina's walking tour is an example. The following discussion occurred while in transit between the interview location in the literacy room, and Christina's special place on the pavement, in the playground:

KM: Did you wave to a friend?

C: Yep, that was my friend that I had to move classes [away from.

      She was] my best friend.

KM: That's funny because we were just talking about her!

C: Yeah. (P, C, WT, p. 1)

Mason, although he did not describe missing friends, also reported on the classroom switch: "They just needed another teacher 'cause there were too many people in our other class so we got switched" (P, M, PEI, p. 6). I asked, "How do you like being in

175

this class?" and he replied, "I like it better than the other class that I was in" (P, M, PEI, p. 6). The new teacher, Mrs. Cats, seemed to ease the switch and perhaps made the classroom a special place.

Christina characterized the staff photographs in the school atrium (Figure 73) as special and explained, "this is special because some of my old teachers are on here . . . . I got moved classes because there was too much people in the last classroom so this is my last teacher but this is my last grades teacher" (P, C, PEI, p. 5). I asked, "how did that make you feel?" Christina responded: "Sad, because my best friend was in that class" (P, C, PEI, p. 5). The change of place from one classroom to another influenced Christina's choice of special places.

Figure 73. Places to reflect: staff photograph in the atrium at Pine Public School. Photographed and selected by Christina (P#3).

Hal also reflected on missing a friend when he described the pavement and field in the Playground: "When I had my friend here it was super fun, we had like a gang of people playing with us (laughs) like a huge pack. It was fun then" (P, H, PEI, p. 7). Hal explained that his friend left the school because his sister was being bullied. I asked, "is that something that worries you?" and Hal replied, "No, I don't care I don't get bullied

176

anymore. I used to but I said I don't like it and then he quit 'cause I haven't been getting

bullied in a long time now" (P, H, PEI, p. 7).

Outdoor special places also triggered positive memories. Christina described the

gardens at the front of the school as special because, "This reminds me when me and

my mom always garden together" (P, C, PEI, p. 4; Figure 74). The garden seemed to

be significant to Christina for experiences with her mother that occurred last spring at

their house, though perhaps, the potential to garden at school also made this place

special.

Figure 74. Places to reflect: garden in the front of Pine Public
School. Photographed and selected by Christina (P#2).

In summary, special places were significant for the memories of special

friendships. Dialogue about missing friends, however, was often followed by talking

about including new friends in other special places. The role that special places played

as inclusive places is reported in the next section of this chapter.

Inclusive. Special places often were places that students were able to hang out

or spend time with friends. The students described the playground boundaries

according to age groups. Hal noted the places in the playground where the "big kids"

(P, H, PEI, p. 6) and the Kindergarten students play:

177

H: [They play] soccer over there. Some big kids let us play soccer
        [too].

KM: [You get to play] on the soccer field? Ok, [do] you like soccer?

H: Yeah and over there, we get to talk to the Kindergartens.

KM: Are you supposed to be on those yards?

H: It's ok [because] we're old enough.

KM: How does that make you feel when the big kids ask you to play?

H: Good.

KM: Do you ask them to play with you?

H: No, they just like playing with the rocks and stuff. They tried to
        make a tower out of rocks. It works sometimes. I've seen like a
        square one they made. They had to use sticks to keep it up. It
        looked very complicated (laughs). (P, H, PEI, p. 7)

Jessica and Christina chose their special places at the couches and the reading circle for being with friends. The following excerpt emphasizes Jessica's desire to hang out and read with her friends (Figure 75):

Figure 75. Places for friendships: couches in library at Pine Public
School. Photographed and selected by Jessica (P#5).

J: This one is my favourite 'cause there's like couches you can read

        your books at in the library. It has a table you [can] sit on and it

        has pretty flowers. I like relaxing there.

KM: Where do you sit?

J: I normally sit on the big couch: [the] two–person couch. A person

        can sit on either side, so it's a two–person couch.

KM: What do you do there?

J: We sit down and read books. Um, that's pretty much what we do

        there.

KM: Why don't you sit on the chair?

J: 'Cause I like sitting with a friend on the couch and reading a

        book with them.

KM: How does that make you feel?

J: I feel pretty good sitting beside somebody. (P, J, PEI, p. 5)

Jessica appeared in two of Christina's selected photographs: one showed Jessica

sitting on the bean bag chairs and the second showed her standing in the back of the

classroom. For the first photograph, I asked: "What special place do you have here [in

the library]?" and Christina responded: "Um, my favourite bean bag because its one of

my favourite colours and one of my best friends is sitting on it" (P, C, PEI, p. 8).

Christina described the second photograph (the back of the classroom) similarly: "This

is the back you can see that Jessica is my friend because I wouldn't have taken a picture

of her if she wasn't my friend" (P, C, PEI, p. 6). It is significant to note that all students

photographed and selected bean bag chairs as a part of their special places: Kaleb

photographed and selected the reading corner in the classroom, Hal showed the reading

circle in the library, and Christina and Jessica described both places.

In contrast to the girls, Hal and Kaleb associated bean bag chairs and couches

with being alone and quiet. I report on alone and quiet places that provide opportunities

for solitude and transquility are evident in the data in the next section of this thesis.

Solitude and tranquility. Places were described as special for the opportunities

they provided for students to be alone and quiet: to experience solitude and tranquility.

They were reported as (a) away from noise, (b) conducive for reading and working, and

(c) comfortable. Students, as Table 17 displays, identified four special places that

permitted them to experience less noise, to read and work independently and to have

privacy.

Table 17

Places Identified by Grade 2 Students as Special for Enabling Students to have Solitude and Tranquility in Pine School (Public)

Space	Special Places
Library	Couches: two black leathers, armchair, table surrounded by bookshelves
	Reading circle: bean bag chairs, rocking chair, shelves along curved wall
Classroom	Reading corner: bean bags, book shelf, and computer
	Desk–group (arranged in groups of four, assigned seating)

Away from noise. Students identified places that were free from talking. Away

from noise places were often enclosed or secluded from the space and surrounding

activity. The couches, according to Hal, were quieter than the bean bag chairs in the

reading circle:

KM: You like to go to the library to read and look at books?

H: Mhmm.

KM: Anything else you like to do there?

180

H: No.

KM: No, that's it? But you really like to sit in one of these bean bag
       chairs?

H: Yeah, I'm allowed to because we're alone sometimes and nobody
       else is sitting there. It's nice and quiet in this spot.

KM: This is your other picture. What would you call this spot in the
       library?

H: The quiet reading spot. It's nice and quiet in here, in <u>this</u> part of
       the room (Figure 76).

KM: "Quiet reading spot": that's a good name. Those chairs look
       pretty comfortable.

H: Yeah but this part back here isn't the quiet place because
       sometimes Roger comes up and steals the bean bag.

KM: He's kind of noisy. Is that why it's not quiet over there?

H: Yeah, so I just like sitting here. Nobody else sits here because
       they like to read near the bean bag chairs. When it gets noisy over
       there, I just go line up in the line and read over there where its
       quiet. There's not very many quiet places.

KM: In the library?

H: No [there is] just like one. This is one of them.

KM: This is one of them? Where's the other quiet place?

H: Other quiet place? Hmmm by the door [pause] because nobody
       goes over there. (P, H, PEI, p. 9–10)

Figure 76. Places for solitude and quiet: couches in library at
Pine Public School. Photographed and selected by Hal (P#6).

Hal perceived the reading circle with the bean bag chairs as noisy and thus preferred to

sit on the couches or by the door where it was quiet. He reflected:

> It would be better because, um, the people would come here [be]cause
>
> they're not using this spot very much. It would be nice if you used this
>
> spot more than this spot because sometimes, on the bean bag chairs, they
>
> want it to be quiet over there [but] Mrs. Cats has trouble over here.
>
> Everybody is loud over there but I'm the only quiet one over here.
>
> (P, H, PEI, p. 10)

In this instance, the place was special for its low noise level and was not necessarily

sought out for personal space.

Kaleb had a similar desire for his special place. He selected the bean bag chairs

in the classroom's reading corner (Figure 77). In an effort to make it quieter, Kaleb

suggested moving a bookshelf beside the cabinet to close the corner:

> The cabinet is here and um I wish it was something [else] because [this place
>
> is] kind of like a corner [but] there's a big wide open space [that] should be
>
> littler. It's too big. It's not that quiet because it's suppose[d] to be a quiet

182

corner but no [pause] I can hear everyone talking [so] if that was closed, then

I could not [hear them] (P, K, PEI, p. 8).

I asked, "and [you would] close the other side off?" and Kaleb clarified, "Yeah, but then

I'd leave a little bit of the space [open]" (P, K, PEI, p. 8). Quiet places were special for

being away from noise but also for reading.

Figure 77. Places for solitude and quiet: bean bag chairs in the classroom at
Pine Public School. Photographed and selected by Kaleb (P#4).

Conducive for reading and working. Students associated the library and

classroom as spaces for reading, although, as examples have demonstrated, different

places within them were identified as more conducive for reading than others. Hal,

Jessica and Mason preferred to read at the couches, while Christina and Kaleb reported

that they liked to read on the bean bag chairs in the reading circle at the library or in the

classroom.

The following excerpt from Jessica's photo elicitation interview illustrates some

reasons for students' preferences (other than to be away from noise). She said: "This

one is my favourite 'cause there's like couches you can read your books at in the library

and it has a table you sit on and it has pretty flowers and I like relaxing there" (P, J, PEI, p. 6). Jessica, however, admitted that, "the couches are a bit hard" (P, J, PEI, p. 6) and that she would like pillows.

The bean bag chairs in the reading corner and students' desks were also used for reading and working. Christina described the reading corner:

KM: What do you do on the bean bags in the class?

C: Nothing really, I just sit and read.

KM: Do you like to do that with a friend or by yourself?

C: Sometimes with a friend and sometimes by myself. We can move

      it when we're watching a movie to the carpet and some people

      can sit on it. Two people [can sit] on each bean bag.

      (P, C, PEI, p. 10)

Within the library and classroom, Mason, Hal and Jessica identified specific bookshelves that were special because they provided reading material. For example, Mason described one book shelf where he finds chapter books in his classroom: "It's a place in the classroom where I read my first chapter book so I wanted to take a picture of that" (P, M, PEI, p. 4; Figure 78). I asked, "Where do you read your chapter books?" and he explained, "At my desk . . . and at nighttime I read, um, I read it in my bed or on my bed" (P, M, PEI, p. 5). Students at Pine School were assigned desks that were arranged in groups of four to support, according to Mrs. Cats, "cooperative learning" (P, O, p. 16).

Along with Mason, Kaleb described his desk as special place where "I sit down, I do work and colour, and stuff like that" (P, K, PEI, p. 11; Figure 79). Places for

reading and working also offered comfort as students described that they could be alone and quiet.

Figure 78. Places for reading: readers in the classroom at Pine Public School. Photographed and selected by Mason (P#2).

Figure 79. Places for working: assigned desk in the classroom at Pine Public School. Photographed and selected by Kaleb (P#9).

Physical comfort. Physical comfort was often associated with tranquil places. Jessica described the same reading corner as Christina and Hal, emphasizing, however, how agreeable it was. She explained that it is "[c]omfy! At the bean bag, it feels nice and comfy and relaxed" though to make it more comfy she suggested, "Hmmm, maybe if there was like a chair or if it had like a thing so you could lean on it" (P, J, PEI, p. 3). Kaleb also noted how the bean bags in the classroom reading corner felt when he sat on them:

K: These are the bean bag chairs that are in my class. When we are done our work, we get to read and sometimes, we get to sit um on the bean bag chairs. I like sitting on the bean bag chairs.

KM: Which one do you like the best?

K: The red [one] 'cause if you sit on one of the sides, it bulges up but with this one, you sink into it cause it goes kind of like up over you. It feels weird on your back. (P, K, PEI, p. 7)

Places that afforded opportunities for students to get away from noise, to independently read and work, and to find comfort were special to Grade 2 students in the current study.

Spotlighting Two Special Places

Students in the current study photographed and discussed numerous special places at their schools. In the next section, I place a spotlight on one special place from each school, describing students' emotional and physical experiences within it. First, I describe the walkway at Maple School. Second, I describe the reading corner in the classroom at Pine School.

186

Students at Maple School characterized the walkway connecting one house to the other as special. It acted as a transitional place between the kitchen and elementary classrooms, and between additional elementary classrooms. Part of the walkway's specialness was attributed to its design: the walkway was two-stories above ground and could be closed off by a door at each end. Windows lined the top halves of each wall, while a blue, gray and purple speckled carpet stretched from one door to the other. Students walked or skipped across this elevated threshold, each one careful to pause in the middle and peer out the window down upon the courtyard and parking lot at the back of the school, then down upon the street and railway tracks in the front of the school. When students described visiting their friends during lunch or borrowing materials from other classrooms, they reflected on seeing the whole view of the school from the walkway and feeling proud that they were not afraid of heights. As they traversed the walkway, students often stretched their arms out towards the window ledges, as if walking on a tight rope. Upon reaching the door at the end of the walkway, they would knock and await permission to enter the classroom.

At Pine School, students characterized the reading corner in their classroom as special. The corner resembled a burrow: the arrangement of a desk, filing cabinet and bookshelves created a hollow where one soft, fire engine red and one egg yolk yellow beanbag chair were positioned. As soon as they had completed their assigned work, students would take their novels to this reading corner and escape into this new place to read quietly. This private, cozy place was special because of the physical and emotional comfort it afforded students. They described the weight of their bodies sinking into one of the beanbag chairs and resting their backs and their heads on the soft cushioning.

They described the corner as quiet, even when the classroom was not, as if it had imaginary walls that protected it from unwanted sounds.

Summary

Six Grade 2 students at a Montessori school and five Grade 2 students at a Public school were given cameras to photograph their special places at their learning environments. They selected a minimum of six photographs to discuss in photo elicitation interviews, walking tours and focus groups. Analysis of the data revealed four themes about Grade 2 students' special places. Places were described as special for the opportunities they created for students to (a) develop a sense of place, (b) engage in different forms of play, (c) foster friendships, and (d) find space to be alone and quiet.

Overall, students took a total of 408 photographs (Maple: 217; Pine: 191) of school spaces. Students, on average, took 36 photographs at Maple School and 39 photographs at Pine School. Table 18 shows the distribution of photographs for each school space.

Three hundred and six (Maple: 146; Pine: 160) photographs were of indoor spaces while ninety and one (Maple: 60; Pine: 31) were of outdoor spaces. Twelve photographs were not interpretable due to improper exposure (over, under, double) or were blocked by fingers (Maple: 11; Pine: 1). Students at Maple School identified nine indoor school spaces (146 photos) and four outdoor school spaces (60 photos). Students at Pine School identified eight indoor school spaces (160 photos) and two outdoor school spaces (31 photos). Overall, indoor spaces were photographed more frequently than outdoor spaces.

Table 18

Photographs Taken and Selected for Photo Elicitation Interviews (PEI) and Walking Tours (WT) by Grade 2 students at Maple School (Montessori) and Pine School (Public)

Space	Maple School		Pine School	
	Total Photos Taken	Photos Selected	Total Photos Taken	Photos Selected
Indoor				
Classroom	47	8	57	8
Library	36	8	40	12
Before/after school care room	2	1	6	2
French room	19	2	n/a	n/a
Music room	9	4	12	2
Kitchen	2	1	n/a	n/a
Atrium	n/a	n/a	6	0
Hallways	25	1	18	2
Gymnasium	0	0	16	7
Office	0	0	5	1
Washroom	2	1	0	0
Outdoor				
Front of School	2	1	13	3
Back of School	2	1	0	0
Sidewalk/street	12	1	0	0
Playground	29	8	18	6
Totals	206	39	191	43

Note: n/a represents instances where one space was not applicable (e.g., did not exist or was not accessible to students).

For both cases, the most frequently photographed indoor school space was the students' classroom (Maple: 47 photos; Pine: 57). The library was the second most photographed space (Maple: 40 photos; Pine: 40). The most frequently photographed outdoor space was the playground (Maple: 29 photos; Pine: 18).

The analysis focused on 83 (Maple: 39; Pine: 44) photographs that students selected and discussed in their photo elicitation interviews, walking tours and focus groups. Table 19 shows the selected special places in both cases. Specifically, six Maple School students selected photographs of 20 indoor special places and 4 outdoor special places. The most frequently selected indoor special places were topic-specific

shelves in the library (3 photos were selected) and the front of the music room (3 photos). The most frequently selected outdoor special place was the open area in the playground (4 photos).

At Pine School, five students selected photographs of 17 indoor special places and 5 outdoor special places. The most frequently selected indoor special place was the south side of the gymnasium (4 photos were selected in total). The topic-specific shelves and the reading circle in the library followed second (3 photos were selected for each place). The most frequently selected outdoor special place was the pavement in the playground (5 photos). In comparison, some photographs that students selected to discuss their special places appeared in both cases. Within the classroom, bulletin boards and subject-specific materials were selected by students at Maple School and Pine School.

Within the library, four places were similar between the two cases. First, students selected topic-specific shelves in both cases. At Maple School, a student selected a photograph of her reading "nook," which was similar to the reading circle that some students at Pine School selected. Students at Maple School selected photographs of leather armchairs, which were comparable to the armchairs and couches identified in students' photographs from Pine School. The back and front of the music room were selected in both cases.

Table 19

Special Places Identified by Grade 2 Students in Photo Elicitation Interviews (PEI) and Walking Tours (WT) at Maple School (Montessori) and Pine School (Public).

	Maple School		Pine School	
Space	Place	n	Place	n
Indoor				
Classroom	Table–single	1	Reading corner	3
	Table–group	2	Bulletin Board	1
	Bulletin board	1	Front of classroom	2
	Window–front	1	Subject specific materials	2
	Window–side	1		
	Subject specific materials	3		
Library	Topic specific shelf	3	Topic specific shelf	3
	Nook	1	Reading circle	3
	Armchairs–two brown	2	Couches–two black & armchair	2
	Armchairs–one blue	1	Computer lab	3
	Winter mural	1		
	Computers and listening station	1		
Before/after school program room	Sign in table	1	Desks	1
			Carpet	1
French room	Front	1	Not applicable	
	Back	1		
Music room	Front	3	Front	1
	Back	1	Back	2
Kitchen	Sink in front of window Counter	1	Not applicable	
Hallways	Not photographed		Stairwells–front	1
			"wall of windows"	1
			Water fountains	1
Gymnasium	Not photographed		South	4
Office	Not photographed		Secretaries' desks	1
Washroom	Toilet & sink	1	Not photographed	
Atrium	Not applicable		Walls (portraits)	1
Outdoor				
Front of School			Bike racks	1
			Flag	1
			Garden	1
Back of School "Courtyard"	Gate and entrance	2	Not photographed	
Sidewalk/street		2	Not photographed	
Playground	Tennis courts (pavement)	1	Pavement	5
	Open area (field-like)	4	Play equipment	2
	Play equipment	1		

Note: n = number of photographs selected for PEI and WT.

Students also selected photographs of similar outdoor spaces. The playground was selected for the paved areas. Specifically, students at Maple School selected photographs of the tennis courts with nets, painted lines and hedge while students in Pine School selected photographs of the pavement with basketball nets, hopscotch and building corners). Students in both cases also selected photographs of the play equipment.

Despite these similarities, the photographs selected by students also differed between cases. Students from Pine School selected photographs of the hallways whereas students from Maple School did not. At Maple School, students selected photographs of the street and sidewalk, although students at Pine School did not take any photographs of that space. Students at Maple School also photographed tables within their classroom, including single and group, while students at Pine School, who were assigned desks, did not select any photographs of their desks (and only one student talked about his desk).

To understand the similarities and differences among the types of special places that emerged from Maple School and Pine School, I compare them thematically in *Chapter 6: Cross-Case Analysis*.

CHAPTER 6

CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS

The potential of the learning environment to shape students' experiences, physically and socially, positively or negatively, is empirically significant and well documented in the research literature (Dudek, 2000; Fraser, 1998; Frumkin, Geller, & Rubin, 2006; Holloway & Valentine, 2000; Spencer & Blades, 2006). How students interact with their learning environments and what situational attributes they seek out are lesser known, but are being investigated from different disciplines and perspectives. Social geographers (Chawla, 2000; Holloway & Valentine, 2000; Tuan, 1977/2008), educational researchers (Einarsdottir, 2005; Rasmussen, 2004; Sobel, 1993/2002; Upitis, 2007, 2010) and learning environment researchers (Fraser, 1986, 1989; Moos, 1979) have included students in interviews, group walking tours, questionnaires, and design discussions about their learning environments. There are gaps in the learning environment literature, however, that this study, with its focus on Grade 2 student voices and indoor spaces at school, takes first steps to fill.

The study described in this thesis, conducted with 11 Grade 2 students in two distinct learning environments, explored their special places. This allowed the results to be compared among students and between cases. The unit of analysis was students' special places. In the context of the current study, "space" is an area free from meaning whereas "place" is an area that is attributed meaning (Tuan, 1977/2008). Special places are places that are associated with significant meaning (Chawla, 1992, 2000; Sobel, 1993/2002). The holistic descriptions of Maple School and Pine School, including their

contexts, students, and places, provided the data for a thematic analysis (Creswell, 2003) with a focus on a description of similarities and differences.

The context of each school, including the age of the facilities and population totals, classroom layouts, daily routines, and the teachers' instructions and lessons, varied significantly. Maple School consists of a series of Victorian houses renovated to accommodate classrooms and administrative offices. The overall architecture of the houses has been maintained, displaying crown molding, bay windows, insulated sunrooms and peaked roofs. Overhead florescent lighting and emergency exit signs were added to meet building regulations. Maple School offers a Montessori program for students aged 16 months to 14 years. Four hundred students and staff circulate the hallways and move from house to house, according to daily schedules and specialty lessons. Classrooms display Montessori materials for students to use throughout the two, three-hour work cycles. Students attend lessons in small groups or, upon invitation by one of the classroom teachers, as an individual. Observing in one of the lower elementary Montessori classrooms, one would note that teachers do not have their own desks, but conduct lessons and take materials to the students who are working throughout the room at a variety of tables and on floor mats.

Pine School is a large modern building that was purposefully built as an elementary school. Floor-to-ceiling windows allow daylight into the library and into classrooms along the front of the school, while two wings stretch out to the opposite side, housing additional classrooms and administrative offices. In its first year of operation, over 680 students and staff circulate the hallways, moving from classrooms to specialty rooms, including a double gymnasium and a computer lab. Classrooms

display interactive whiteboards and chalkboards. Students' desks are arranged in groups of four opposite to the boards. Observing in one of the primary classrooms, one would note that the teacher leads lessons from the front of the class, but students complete their work at their desks in small groups. On some occasions, students played with math games while sitting on the carpet. The teacher was able to oversee the class from her desk at the front corner of the room, though she spent most of her time sitting in a chair at the front of the room or moving from desk to desk, answering questions and working individually with the students.

Despite the physical differences between the schools, students, for the most part, described parallel places and associated them with similar meanings. Students' special places were locations that permitted them to make choices and to interact in interdependent and independent ways. The balance between interdependence and independence was expressed by the students' presentations of special places that permitted them to choose where and with whom (if with anyone) they sat, played, and read.

Interdependence and independence, as themes, provide the framework for the cross-case analysis. The analysis addresses the following three revised research questions, which combine the current study's initial four research questions: (a) Where do Grade 2 students create their special places in learning environments? (b) What defines Grade 2 students' special places in learning environments? and (c) How do Grade 2 students use their special places in learning environments?

In the next section of this chapter, I discuss special places that fostered interdependence: the relationships with people and a feeling of community. This is

followed by a discussion of independence: the sense of freedom experienced by students that afforded them choice and exploration. For each of the two themes, indoor and outdoor spaces are discussed because, with one exception, all students described creating or finding special places in both spaces (the exception being Kaleb, a student at Pine School, who identified only indoor special places). The analysis demonstrates that the three most photographed and discussed spaces were characterized as special places that afforded both interdependence and independence.

Interdependence

One theme to emerge from an analysis of data was interdependence. As the Principal's message at Pine School described, *people*, not bricks, create a school. In other words, it was not the rooms, facilities and special features that were important, but how people, including students and teachers, used the places, and how the people interacted with one another.

Specific locations within the classroom, library, office, atrium, front of school, back of school, sidewalk and playground were places that supported students' interdependence. These places were valued for the opportunities they created for students to engage with friends in different ways. This is reflected in the significant number of photographs taken of people by the participating students despite their assigned task, which asked students, in the preliminary meeting, to take at least six photographs of their special places at school.

In this section, the significant role that people played in students' special places is discussed. Friends and self-portraits were included in students' selected photographs of their special places. Next, the significant role that community played in students'

special places is discussed. School symbols, including signs, logos and flags,

represented students' association with the local and broader communities.

People

Places were special because of the relationships that they enabled. Ten of the

eleven students included friends and self-portraits within their special places in indoor

and outdoor spaces. The opportunities to sit, work, read, play and spend time with

friends were prominent aspects of students' special places. First, indoor places that

were characterized as special due to the people within them are discussed. Second,

outdoor places that characterized as special due to the people within them are discussed.

Indoor. Two spaces were characterized as having special places that permitted

social interactions: classrooms and libraries. In classrooms, places were special that

facilitated group work (e.g., group table, front of classroom). In libraries, places were

special that facilitated group reading (e.g., armchairs and couches). In the following

sections of this chapter, each space is discussed, identifying the locations of students'

special places and addressing the types of activities occurring in them. Some special

places within classrooms and libraries were valued for people, while other special

places were valued for engendering a feeling of community.

Classrooms. In the classroom, six students (four from Maple School and two

from Pine School) photographed and discussed specific areas of the classroom where

they preferred to sit with friends so that they were able to talk while doing their work

(Maple) or participate in lessons while sitting together on the carpet (Pine). Both the

group tables in Maple School and the carpet at the front of the classroom in Pine School

enabled students' desire to socialize.

197

Libraries. Five students (one from Maple and four from Pine) characterized places in the library as special because they afforded opportunities to sit and read quietly with friends. The significance of people in students' special places within the libraries was evident in the selected photographs that focused on friends and the students themselves. At Maple School, special places were a pair of two armchairs side-by-side in front of windows and hanging plants. One student, Alicia, asked a friend to photograph her sitting beside another friend on one leather armchair in the library. She also included a photograph of the same friend pointing to the armchair. For Lily, sitting and listening to audio books with a friend made the computers and listening station within the library special.

At Pine School, special places included couches and armchairs grouped around small tables within the library. Although Jessica remarked that the couches could be softer, she enjoyed having the space to sit beside her friends. Beanbag chairs in the reading circle were special for their size and arrangement, which afforded friends to sit with each other.

Outdoor. Students associated special places within the playgrounds with people and social interactions that they afforded. According to Gibson (1982), "the meaning or value of a thing consists of what it affords" (p. 407). The concept of affordances states that the environment has "action possibilities" (Gibson, p. 407). In the current study, outdoor special places afforded different types of play where people were essential players that were able to navigate and incorporate the physical elements of the spaces in their play (e.g., cedar hedges or painted squares on paved surfaces).

Playgrounds. Eight students (Maple: 5; Pine: 3) characterized one or more places on the playground as special because of the social interactions that occurred. The presence of people in the students' photographs indicated the social nature of special places on the playground. Although some photographs (Maple: 2; Pine: 1) showed special places on the playground without people (i.e., empty tennis courts or fields), students described how the places were special because they were able to play with their friends.

At Maple School, students posed (with cameras in hand and smiles on their faces) in front of cedar hedges. Two (of five) students specified that they also liked to sit by themselves, which special places in the open area of the playground permitted. Additionally, one student photographed a tree and described hugging it each day in a way that she would treat a friend.

At Pine School, three students captured their friends in special places on the pavement in front of basketball hoops and painted squares, however, these students were not facing the camera. One exception is a photograph taken by Christina of her two friends on the pavement in a corner that was used for snow houses.

Although students may not have included explicit photographs of friends, the implicit message from the crowd and rain boots in the playground was that these are social places. Students in both cases characterized places in their classrooms, libraries and playgrounds as special due to the friendships that developed and social interactions that occurred. Interdependence was also demonstrated by the sense of community that students attributed to their special places. The role of community in students' special places is discussed in the next section.

Community

A sense of community was a second attribute of special places that encouraged interdependence. Six students described aspects of locations that were associated with their communities. Special places were located indoors in classrooms, hallways, atriums, offices, and outdoors in fronts and backs of schools, and sidewalks. They included bulletin boards within students' classroom, winter murals and reading circles within the libraries, administration offices and portraits posted in the atrium, and gates and entrances. The following section of this chapter describes the indoor special places that created a sense of community.

Indoor. Classroom bulletin boards and displays in the library or atrium were special places for three students because of the sense of community they exhibited. At Maple School, Viola described the Chinese banner that she had brought and posted in the classroom. Luke described the Chinese lantern that hung over one of his favourite tables. Alicia described the winter mural in the library as giving her the feeling of friendship (M, PEI, A, p. 8).

At Pine School, Christina characterized the class message board at the front of the classroom as a special place. The purpose of the message board, as Christina described, was for students to write kind messages to each other and attach them to the board. Christina also described the photographs of the teachers in the atrium as a special place because it included her academic community: she pointed out that both her current teacher and her previous teacher were in the photograph.

Outdoor. A feeling of community in outdoor special places was also associated with displays and previous experiences. At Maple School, one student, Rocky, focused

on the wooden gate that students, teachers and parents entered through each day as one special place. The gate had a carving of the school logo, which Rocky pointed out first in his photo elicitation interview. Rocky, Violet and Luke gave significance to the sidewalk and street in front of the school, which showed the school signs. Rocky most directly reasoned that the front of the school was a special place because "the most important thing is it's our school" (M, PEI, R, p. 6).

At Pine School, three students described the front of the school, focusing on a garden, and a flag that they associated with their communities. Christina described the garden as a reminder of caring for a garden with her mother. Mason described the Canadian flag as a marker of the school's location that was visible throughout the immediate neighbourhood. Mason commented that he liked that he was able to see the flag from his house within the neighbourhood.

Friends, self-images, and school signs, logos and flags were special aspects of students' special places. The people and community within these places, as evidence from the photographs of friends, self-portraits and school signs, logos and flags, created, in part, their specialness. Places were characterized as special that facilitated positive interactions with selected friends and communities.

Independence

A second theme to emerge from an analysis of the data was independence. Students' positive interactions with places at their learning environments seemed to come, in part, from freely chosen and independent experiences. At the same time, students expressed a sense of independence when they were able to participate in specific routines in their special places.

201

Choice

Students often characterized places as special because they afforded choices. In their schools, students' choices were somewhat limited by classroom and school rules and routines. Within their special places, however, students' knowledge and practice of these routines seemed to make them feel responsible and secure. How the special place was used was a focus of most of the students' descriptions. Choices often included where one sits for working and reading, and with whom. Additionally, the novel activities associated with places added to their specialness. Special places that were associated with choice were located in indoor and outdoor spaces. They included classrooms, libraries, before and after school care rooms and gymnasiums, French and Music rooms, kitchen, washroom, and playgrounds. Indoor special places that enabled choices are discussed first, then outdoor special places are discussed.

Indoor. Seven students described special places that permitted them to work or read independently. Acting independently from others took place in classrooms, libraries, before-and-after-school-care rooms and in gymnasiums, a kitchen and washrooms. Each indoor space is described further in the following sections.

Classrooms. Seven students described special places that permitted them to work or read independently. At Maple School, students were not assigned desks like the students who attended Pine School. Despite being free to choose their desks, students often referred to two or three special places within the classroom in which they preferred to work. Four students discussed particular tables that were special to get work done: one at which to work by herself, while the other three preferred tables with friends to complete their assignments.

In comparison, not one student at Pine School identified their desks as special places for working. One student agreed that he often did work at his desk when a corner of it appeared in one of his photographs of the math manipulatives and building blocks. All six students at Pine School, however, identified the reading corner as a special place for reading independently.

The reading corner at Pine School was identified by all students for sitting quietly, often alone, on a beanbag chair when assigned work had been completed. This special place was partially enclosed by two bookshelves, a cabinet, desk and wall, and seemed to offer a smaller, private place (though remaining visible) within the classroom. Students at Maple School described special places within the library for similar purposes.

In addition to choosing to work independently, students exercised choice by determining the materials and books that they used within their special places. Five students described the significance of and preference for the location because it was close to specific materials. In both schools, areas beside specific shelves within the classrooms were special due to the favourite materials and books, which they stowed or displayed. At Maple School, students specifically designated the math and geography shelves as well as their personal storage areas (called cubbies) within their classroom as special places.

At Pine School, special places were between desks and math manipulative shelves where students were able to play freely with colourful blocks and shapes during math games and free time. For both schools, students described where their favourite novels were kept as special places.

Libraries. Special places for independence were valued for a variety of reasons, including for reading independently, selecting one's own books, and engaging in book-borrowing routines. At Maple School, special places for reading independently were quiet niches encircled by pillows, bookshelves and the library walls. At Pine School, one student, Hal, identified a grouping of couches and armchairs for reading independently because it was quieter than the reading circle.

Special places for selecting one's own books were described by six students. For both cases, students described where their favourite novels and research books were kept as special places. At Maple School, topics included fictional mouse characters, atlases, and the Titanic. At Pine School, topics included pets, animals, skateboards and Monster trucks.

Special places for borrowing books from the school library were described by all students except one (Kaleb at Pine School did not select a special place within the library). In both Maple School and Pine School, students described browsing the bookshelves and picking out books, based on their interests, to take home. At Maple School, students signed out their own books (which Petunia described in detail) whereas at Pine School, the classroom teacher or librarian scanned the students' books (which Hal and Mason described in detail). Ten students (all except for Rocky) explained that they enjoyed reading.

Before- and after-school care rooms and gymnasiums. In contrast to classrooms and libraries, the before- and after-school care rooms and gymnasiums were associated with different choices for play. Students from both schools selected their activities based upon the resources in the before- and after-school care rooms (which

was an open, carpeted space in the lower level of the school called the community room at Maple School, and a classroom at Pine School), including building blocks, straws and various crafts. Students described what materials they had chosen, what they constructed, who they had invited to play with them and what their friends had chosen to do during the program.

Five students discussed the gymnasiums, though only three photographs were selected (all from students from Pine School) because two students (one from each case) were unable to take their photographs due to schedules that kept them from their special places. The gymnasium was associated with choices for movement. Although physical play was structured, including dodgeball and hide-and-go-seek in the north and south gymnasiums, students decided their own movements within those structures. Students described liking the gymnasium because they could choose to run around, stand back behind a line, or step forward and throw a ball.

Kitchen and washroom. The kitchen and washroom were only photographed and discussed by two students at Maple School. Both students reported that they liked these places because of the adult-like routines in which they engaged, including food preparation in the kitchen and personal hygiene in the washroom.

Outdoor. Students photographed and described open areas and play equipment as places for specific routines of play that permitted them to act independently. In the next section of this chapter, special places that permitted choice in the playgrounds are discussed.

Playgrounds. The playgrounds, places where most free-play occurred, were associated with the most routines. At Maple School, Petunia described how she

reported a few students for hiding in cedar hedges while Lily admitted to hiding there and leaning on the tennis nets, even though this was not allowed.

At Pine School, all students described the routine for recesses, which included being dismissed by their teacher after a tone sounded on the public announcement system, dressing in their outdoor clothing, exiting the building through the back doors, then playing within the right side of the school playground. During the first nutrition break, only kindergarten students were permitted to play on the equipment while primary students were permitted during second nutrition break. Students also described staying on the paved areas of the playground when it had been raining. Two students described a type of free-play, including building snow houses on the playground and gaming and emailing in the computer lab.

Exploration

Independence also took the form of exploration; experiences that were not associated with routines but novel activities. This type of exploration took place indoors. The next section of the current study describes indoor places that students characterized as special for their exploration.

Indoor. The classroom, and French and music rooms were spaces that some students found special places for exploration. Each space is described further in the following sections.

Classroom. One student, Luke, described two instances of exploration within his classroom. One involved placing his hands in the frog water fountain and looking out the front window for traffic and trains. Another involved looking at the clock that "me and my friends like watching it, watching the time go by" (M, PEI, L, p. 6). Both

206

the fountain and clock functioned in unique ways for Luke that the other students did not describe, which supported his independent exploration of these special places.

French and music rooms. Exploration was evident in photographs and discussions about the materials and activities that were available in both cases' French and music rooms. Three students from each school identified the music room as special due to the instruments present. The students discussed playing different instruments and singing with their teachers, though they had very different experiences from each other.

At Maple School, three students described and showed in their photographs music materials, including baskets with note cards, instruments and wooden rhythm sticks, and a mat with treble and bass clef staffs. Students also described (one student in particular, Viola, discussed in great detail during her walking tour) sitting in a circle on the floor of the music room and selecting their own places.

At Pine School, three students described and selected photographs of the music room. One photograph showed instruments in boxes at the back of the music room, one photograph showed a French horn that the teacher was holding, and a third photograph showed interactive whiteboards at the front of the music room. The students described the music room as special because of the one experience they had participating in a drumming circle. Besides this one experience, the students participated in music lessons while they sat in their assigned rows on the classroom carpet. Students selected their most special places in locations where they were afforded choice.

Summary

Analysis of the data made evident that two themes weave their way throughout the students' descriptions of special places: (a) Interdependence; Grade 2 students become attached to places in which people, and community are evident; and (b) Independence: students perceive places as special when they are permitted to act freely, to interact with selected friends and engage in independent experiences. Notably, special places for interdependence and independence were often within the same space. Next, *Chapter 7: Discussion, Implications and Reflections* situates the cross-case analysis within relevant literature and discusses the implications, limitations, and contributions of the study.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND REFLECTIONS

The purpose of the current study was to investigate Grade 2 students' special places in two learning environments. Data were collected in two schools in a western Ontario city: one Montessori school (Maple) and one public school (Pine). Eleven students, six from Maple School and five from Pine School, aged 7 and 8, were involved in the data collection process. Analysis of the data made evident that two themes weave their way throughout the students' descriptions of special places: (a) Interdependence: Grade 2 students become attached to places in which people and community are evident; and (b) Independence: Grade 2 students perceive places as special when they are permitted to act freely, explore and engage in independent experiences.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the relationship of findings to previous research that focuses on students' associations of special places with their experiences of interdependence and independence. For each of these two themes, I discuss how students attribute significance to indoor and outdoor places within their learning environment, with reference to relevant literature. The second section of this chapter describes the implications of the study for practice and implications for future research. The final section reports the researcher's reflections on the research experience.

Relationship of Findings to Previous Research

The descriptive nature of the current study touches on social geography, developmental psychology, theories of play and theories of imagination in learning environments. As in the present study, previous studies have shown that students

engage in place-making activities (Hart, 1979; Sobel, 1993/2002) and have distinct preferences for specific places over other ones (Holloway & Valentine, 2000; Horton, Kraftl & Tucker, 2011). Students use special places to meet a variety of needs, including social and physical exploration (Derr, 2002, 2006; O'Dell, 2011; Sobel 1993/2002).

In an effort to understand the role of place in students' daily lives, researchers advocate for students' active participation in research (Greig & Taylor, 1999; Holloway & Valentine, 2000; Morrow, 2011). Student involvement in place research is essential for understanding their unique "child's eye view" (Horton, Kraftl, & Tucker, 2011, p. 47) in an adult-designed and organized world. Furthermore, students are "active agents who shape the structures and processes around them (at least at a micro-level) and whose social relationships are worthy of study in their own right" (Morrow, 2011, p. 59). Practice can be changed by considering children's lives and by listening to their views of their spaces (O'Dell, 2011).

Despite the diversity of the two learning environments in the current study, students described similar special places and emphasized common characteristics that enabled friendships, different forms of play, solitude and tranquility. Sobel (1993/2002) noted parallels between students' dens in Devon, United Kingdom and students' bushhouses on Carriacou Island, Grenada despite the distinct physical landscapes, building materials, social climates and cultures. The current study has further explored students' relationships with space by asking eleven students to photograph, discuss and guide the researcher through their special places.

Special places were in both indoor and outdoor spaces, predominantly in classrooms, libraries and playgrounds. The indoor and outdoor distinction is common in place literature: however, this was not a useful categorization for the analysis of data in the current study. Students did not characterize their special places by indoor or outdoor unless prompted. They described their special places as parts of their schools, which fit together to make two distinct learning environments. The distinction is maintained in the following sections to provide structure and does not suggest that special places should be compared in this way.

This section of the thesis is organized according to the two themes that emerged from an analysis of data. First, I discuss interdependence, which was expressed by the students' sense of relating to and relying on their peers and their community within their learning environment. Second, I discuss independence, which was expressed by the students' sense of acting as an individual according to their desire to explore and to be independent. For both themes, I consider how students attribute significance within their learning environments to indoor places and outdoor places. The discussion addresses the three principal research questions of the current study by identifying where students' special places are located, what defines them and how are they used.

Interdependence

The types of places that emerged from a thematic analysis of the data were predominantly distinguished for the social activities they permitted. Students valued special places for the people they brought together and the feeling of community that they created. This section of the thesis discusses these findings in relation to relevant literature.

211

People. Although the research task asked students to photograph their special places, students often included people in their photographs and discussions. Indoor and outdoor places were attributed significance for the relationships that they facilitated. Other researchers (Derr, 2006; Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001; Kylin, 2003; Morrow, 2011; Rasmussen, 2004) have reported similar results, noting that social attributes can be valued more than physical attributes. First, indoor special places are discussed and situated in relevant literature, then, outdoor special places are discussed and situated in relevant literature.

How students used indoor special places with friends. In the current study, classrooms and libraries were characterized as having special places that permitted students to work and to read in peer groups. While students' attachment to specific elements of their learning environments focuses predominantly on the student-teacher relationships (Bergin & Bergin, 2009), the student-student relationship has also been noted as significant (Rasmussen, 2004; Rathunde, 2003) for creating positive attachment to indoor places. Rasmussen (2004) concluded that most students "primarily relate to their schoolmates and teachers" (p. 168). Derr (2006) reported that the "*act* of place-making" was not as "universal" as others (Derr cited Sobel, 1993 for his claim of universal place-making) had suggested. Derr (2006) concluded from her study with 89 students, ages 9–11, from northern Mexico, involving 12 case studies, that "social experience with friends and family were more important than physical places" (p. 115) that they had constructed themselves.

Students described special places that allowed them to sit at group tables or on the carpet at the front of the classroom. Studies that investigated students' perspectives

212

on seating arrangements (McCorskey & McVetta, 1978) and the effects of different seating arrangements on student behaviour (Maxwell, 2006; Rosenfield, Lambert & Black, 1985; Wannarka & Ruhl, 2008) demonstrated that the seating arrangement, whether circular, semi-circular, rows or clusters, needed to match the activity for it to encourage on-task behaviour. Overall, researchers recommended, from students' perspectives, to give students choices (McCorskey & McVetta, 1978; Wannarka & Ruhl, 2008). Whether or not the seating arrangement encourages students' development and perception of interdependence has yet to appear in place literature with young students.

One study by Holley and Steiner (2005) took steps to investigate students' perceptions of interdependence by asking them to describe safe and unsafe classroom environments. The researchers reported results from 121 surveys completed by baccalaureate and master of social work students (average age 29) at a university which suggested that students perceive the seating arrangement as an influential physical characteristic of their classrooms. Students offered 190 responses when asked to describe the aspects of the physical environment that contributed to the creation of a safe space. According to Holley and Steiner, the students "overwhelmingly indicated that seating arrangements that allowed class members to see everyone (e.g., sitting in a circle or square) contributed to the creation of such a space" (p. 57). Conversely, students most often said that row-style seating was a characteristic of an unsafe classroom.

Holley and Steiner's (2005) results also included an increased number of descriptors about instructors' behaviours in comparison to the number of descriptors that students

used for peers, themselves or the physical environment. From this finding, Holley and Steiner suggest:

> Students place most of the responsibility for classroom environment on instructors, and may not be aware of their roles and responsibilities in creating or hindering the development of safe spaces. More effort might need to be invested in working with students to develop an understanding and appreciation of shared responsibility for classroom climates. (p. 61)

Although the students in Holley and Steiner's study were older and at different levels of education than the students in the current study, they shared similar perspectives: seating arrangements that permitted students to see each other and sit together positively influenced how they felt within their classrooms.

When Coles (1969) asked elementary school students what they would do to make schools better, couches and comfortable places to sit figured prominently in their responses. Peterson (2009) described Grade 10 students "hanging out" with their friends on couches in one hallway between classes. An emotional and physical comfort seemed to be associated with these clusters of furniture. In the current study, students also characterized armchairs and couches that were positioned in small groups as special places. Although the students in these studies were at least eight years older than the participants in this study, there were similarities in how they valued places within their classrooms and libraries for creating opportunities to interact with others.

How students used outdoor special places with friends. Outdoor special places were largely used for different types of play, where people were essential players who were able to navigate and incorporate the physical elements of the spaces in their play

(e.g., cedar hedges or painted squares on paved surfaces). Play, as a sensorial and emotional experience, can be an experience of embodied knowledge. Bowman (2004) described human knowledge as "inextricably biological and embodied; what it can know is always grounded in the material and experiential world" (p. 30). Gradle (2008) discussed the ways in which "place" is more than a physical location: it is the evocation of memory, imagination, and embodied experience. In the current study, the acts of hiding or chasing were prominent types of play that evoked memories of former friends who used to play but have since left the school. Imaginations were also developed in special places for play by hiding, as Viola and Petunia described themselves as spies.

The dens and bushhouses that Sobel (1993/2002) encountered, the *kjors* (Danish for forts) that Kylin (2003) noted, and the schoolyard forts and social hierarchies that Powel (2002) and Punch (2000) documented were largely absent from the two cases in the current study. The absence (except for one student's acknowledgement of building a snow house) is perhaps due to the age of the participants, as they had not reached the "height of interest" in special places (Sobel, 1993/2002, p. 33). Sobel observed that, "These places seem to become significant beginning around age six or seven and reach their height of importance around age ten or eleven" (p. 20). He later identified the "height of interest" (p. 33) for these types of places occurred during ages 8–11. Alternately, as Elsley (2011) reported, perhaps the students perceive an implicit boundary, perceiving building forts as an activity for younger students.

In the current study, students at Pine School expressed boundaries for younger and older students: the play equipment was explicitly for kindergarten students as dictated by the Principal of the school while the soccer field was for Intermediate

students as perceived by the participating students. This is an example of what Elsely (2011) identified as "implicit boundaries" (p. 108). In Elsley's (2011) study, students perceived the play equipment at a recreation centre as being for younger students.

Physical boundaries were significant characteristics of special places on the playground for defining and containing desired social interactions. At both Maple School and Pine School, students referred to the paved surfaces and trees as borders that delineated their special places for chasing games. At Maple School, students referred to the cedar hedges and park fences as important for hiding games. Dudek (2011) described physical boundaries as, "walls, hedges and fences [that] are important design features to create the right ambience" (p. 82). The playgrounds offered a variety of places that were special for chasing and hiding games among friends. Friends and teachers were significant aspects of special places in indoor and outdoor learning environments. The interactions that took place and the relationships that developed also fostered a sense of community. Community was reinforced by a variety of physical elements within indoor and outdoor special places. In the next section of the thesis, I discuss the sense of community that students attributed to indoor and outdoor special places.

Community. While students valued special places for the opportunities they afforded them to exercise their interdependence by playing, working and spending time with friends and teachers, students also demonstrated their interdependence by attributing a sense of community to their special places. Chawla (1992) drew similar conclusions when she argued that security, social affiliation, and creative expression

and exploration were three components of place attachment. Security and social affiliation are feelings of belonging to a community.

Bergin and Bergin (2009) referred to school bonding as "a sense of belonging at school and having a network of relationships with peers and teachers" (p. 156). School bonding fosters positive attachments among students and the physical and social environments because "it can make children feel secure and valued, which can liberate them to take on intellectual and social challenges and explore new ideas" (Bergin & Bergin, 2009, p. 156). Bergin and Bergin stated that a student who is bonded to school has a sense that "people at school like me" (p. 156) whereas a student who is not bonded to school "feels lonely, out-casted, and alienated" (p. 156).

In the current study, a sense of community, that is, belonging, feeling included, and bonding with a group who share responsibilities and similar attitudes, was a significant attribute of indoor and outdoor special places. This section of the chapter addresses two research questions: where are Grade 2 students' special places? and what characterises their special places at school? The locations of special places are identified throughout this section. First, the characteristics of indoor special places that fostered a sense of community are discussed. Second, characteristics of outdoor special places that fostered a sense of community are discussed.

Characteristics of indoor special places that fostered a sense of community. Students associated a sense of community, belonging and connectedness, with special places in their classrooms and libraries that included personal bulletin boards and displays. At Maple School, Viola, Luke, Alicia, and Rocky valued places that displayed seasonal decorations (e.g., Chinese banner, and red lantern) that they had brought into

217

class and artwork (e.g., spring paintings, and snowmen mural) that they made and posted on the bulletin boards.

In these special places, students made a point of describing their classmates' contributions in relation to their own, suggesting a sense of community that comes from working together and sharing similar art projects and cultural celebrations. For example, Luke and Viola noted that their paintings were posted in the middle of the Year 2's pieces of artwork on the classroom bulletin board. Additionally, a winter mural and "peace" word art, displayed in the library, were special to Alicia for what she described as the feeling of friendship she had when in her special place.

Some students associated school signs and portraits with memories of former teachers and classmates, as well as their previous experiences in different classrooms and school buildings. Luke and Viola from Maple School commented on attending classes in the Casa (preschool/kindergarten) building when they were younger and first started at the Montessori school. Hal, Mason and Christina from Pine School reflected on photographs of teachers and class portraits that were posted in the atrium, and their experience of moving from one classroom to another at the beginning of the school year and how much they liked their new teacher now that they have been with her for most of the year. For these students, a sense of community was evident in their special places by the bulletin board decorations, artwork and school photographs that were displayed in their classrooms and atriums.

Some of the characteristics that students in the current study valued appear in other research for supporting building a sense of community or school bonding (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Dudek, 2011; O'Farrell & Morrison, 2003). For example, students from

both schools discussed their history of attending school, whether as in Maple School, students had attended the same school since age three or, as in Pine School, students had attended the school for the first time that year. This is an example of what Bergin and Bergin (2009) recommended for promoting school bonding, including providing "continuity of people and place" (p. 163).

Attachment, Bergin and Bergin (2009) argued, takes time to develop and "requires that teachers and students stay together long enough to form relationships" (p. 163). They further suggested that schools should strive to (a) keep students together so peer groups are stable, (b) keep children in the same building for several years, and (c) keep children with the same teacher or team of teachers for multiple years. Steiner (1964) also believed it was important for students to remain with one teacher for multiple years. As a result, he arranged that Waldorf schools have one teacher conduct main lessons for a particular group of students for the entirety of their elementary education, which was typically eight years.

In the current study, students reflected on working with specific teachers, athough the experiences in the two cases differed. At Maple School, students had been with their teachers for sixteen months and reflected on the continuity of their own roles within the classroom (e.g., Year 2 students have artwork posted together: the next year their artwork as Year 3 students would be posted together). At Pine School, students reflected on change: they had spent one month with one teacher, but had then spent six months with their current teacher. Change is an example of one of the seven design principles that Dudek (2011) attributes to children's spaces. The remaining six are: character, context, connectivity, change, clarity and challenge (Dudek, p. 82). Dudek

emphasized the importance of changeability within a space to reflect the constant change of the community within it. Despite these differences in school structures, students' assigned significance to characteristics of places (e.g., banners, lanterns, artwork and photographs) that demonstrated community within their learning environments.

Dudek's (2011) principles were also evident in outdoor special places. Students' outdoor special places that were valued for the feeling of community they provided are discussed in the next section of this thesis.

Characteristics of outdoor special places that fostered a sense of community. Outdoor places included symbols and artefacts that acted to shape community by providing students with context as well as connectivity within their learning environments. Students in the current study photographed school signs, logos, flags and "big view" perspectives from elevated points as significant characteristics of their special places. Signs, logos and flags visually displayed the identity of school by using words and symbols to identify it (e.g., the school has a name). For example, after Rocky at Maple School had pointed out the school sign hanging on the front porch, I asked him: "What's special about the front of your school?" He responded: "Hmm! Let me see. Well the most important thing is it's our school" (M, R, PEI, p. 6). This is an example of what Dudek (2011) labelled "context."

Contexts and connectivity are essential, according to Dudek (2011), for students' outdoor spaces. Context is developed by views that, according to Dudek (2011), "give children a meaningful sense of their position within the world" (p. 84). Luke at Maple School, for example, described one photograph of his special place in the

220

school courtyard: "THIS (loud, emphatic voice) is us going to specialties. I stood back from my teacher, so I could get a BIG VIEW of the school" (M, Lu, PEI, p. 7). Luke admitted to standing on a bench in the back of the courtyard to capture the entire profile of the schoolhouses. Kaleb, Mason, and Jessica at Pine School described taking in a view of their school from windows, looking from the hallway down to the atrium or from their classroom to the front of the school. For example, I asked Mason, "What is special about the flag place?" and he responded, "Sometimes I'm far away from the school, [but] I can see the Canadian flag so I know it's the school" (P, PEI, M, p. 7).

Students in the current study attributed meaning to indoor and outdoor places that provided opportunities for interdependence: people and community were significant characteristics of students' special places in the Montessori school and the Public school. Along with their desire for places that supported friendships and belonging, students also desired places for choice and exploration.

In the next section of this thesis, I discuss special places that students valued for because they afforded independent experiences.

Independence

While school climate (e.g., seminal Learning Environment Research by Moos, 1979 and by Fraser, 1986; 1998) and bonding (e.g., Bergin & Bergin, 2009) are widely studied, the role of independence is often over looked in school programming (Hopkins, 2011). Schools control time, allocation of resources, and, to some extent, assignment of where students spend their time and how they should use the space (Hopkins, 2011; McGregor, 2004). Maria Montessori argued for the significance of choice in learning: "Children [in Montessori classrooms] have free choice all day long. Life is based on

221

choice, so they learn to make their own decisions. They must decide and choose for themselves all the time. . . . They cannot learn through obedience to the commands of another" (1989, p. 26).

In the current study, students in both cases designated places as "special" when they were able to act according to their own desires by engaging with selected friends and in new activities. Although students were under adult supervision at their schools, they perceived specific locations as permitting them choice and exploration. In this section of the thesis, I discuss special places that afforded choice. Next, I discuss special places that afforded exploration. The following discussion of places for independence addresses three principal research questions, including where students' special places are located, what defines them and how they are used.

Choice. Students' ability or potential to make decisions throughout their day depended on school and classroom routines and schedules, as well as in which spaces they were spending time. In the current study, students described exercising choice in indoor and outdoor special places. Most often, students exercised choice to determine different types of activities and with whom they interacted. In this section of this thesis, I first discuss how students attribute meaning to indoor places as a result of choice within their learning environment. I then discuss how students attribute meaning to outdoor places within their learning environment.

Indoor special places were used for making choices. Indoor special places that supported choice included classrooms, libraries, gymnasiums, and before- and after-school care rooms. Within classrooms and libraries, students privileged places that enabled them to sit with whom, if anyone, they desired. As other studies (McCorskey

222

& McVetta, 1978; Wannarka & Ruhl, 2008) have emphasized, students preferred having choices about their seating arrangements. Students in the current study also enjoyed selecting places to read. For example, Hal liked to sit on a couch in the library to read by himself because it was too noisy in the reading circle. At both Maple School and Pine School, students identified places in the classrooms and libraries that included their favourite novels.

Within the gymnasiums and before- and after-school care rooms, choice was exercised in different forms of play, which included pretending, moving, and creating. Some play centred on players' abilities to navigate obstacles such as in chasing games, while others focused on physical movement or construction without an end goal in mind. For example, at Maple School, Petunia described the gymnasium as a place where "you get to run around and run your steam off" (M, P, PEI, p. 7). At both schools, students listed games from which they were able to choose when they attended the before- and after-school care program, predominantly focusing on different materials they used for constructing houses, towers and geometric structures.

The programs were conducted in rooms that were used for other purposes. At Maple School, the program took place in the community room that was typically used for changing into snowsuits and hosting parent information sessions. At Pine School, the program took place in a classroom. In both rooms, materials, including blocks, straws, puzzles and board games, were made accessible, either by moving shelves or bringing them in into the rooms. This is an example of adapting places to fit the purposes of the users. Dudek (2011) argued that the "essential quality of any children's space [is it] quite simply must support rather than hinder the scope for play" (p. 74).

223

The school building must be "growing over time with its users" (Dudek, p. 76). In Martin's (2006) words, "the school setting should be fluid and dynamic and never be allowed to remain static in an environment where change and growth are the only constant" (p. 104). Students, in the current study, responded to the introduction of additional materials and made their own choices for play. The places were made possible because of the materials they housed.

Outdoor special places were used for making choices. Choice, in outdoor spaces, also allowed play, albeit in a different form than play that occurred indoors, including hiding on the playgrounds. In the current study, students were empowered, to some extent, by the rules in the playground as demonstrated by how they described correcting each other and regulating their own behaviour accordingly. Rules were integrated into their play, though it may be argued, as other researchers (Derr, 2006, Holloway & Valentine, 2000; Morrow, 2011; Rasmussen, 2004) reported, that students who did not feel responsible and secure in the space because of these rules would not have exercised choice to play and to act independent from supervision in their special places. Students' participation in the playground rules allowed them to exercise choice, which was a significant component of their outdoor special places at school.

Students in the current study reported using special places for escaping supervision by playing games of hide-and-seek in outdoor spaces. At Maple School, Alicia, Lily, Petunia, and Viola reported hiding on the tennis courts or in the open area by the cedar hedges on the playground.[6] However, for the most part, students were careful to remain under supervision and played within the boundaries that the teachers

---

[6] At Pine School, hiding occurred in indoor special places. Hal and Kaleb reported hiding on the stage in the north gymnasium.

and staff members established. This is in contrast to students from other studies (Derr, 2006; Rasmussen, 2004) who reported that they constructed special places away from adult supervision. In Derr's (2006) study, students, aged 10, built special places far away from home that they reached by riding their dirt bikes. In the studies reported by Rasmussen (2004), students, aged 7–14, built forts in the woods behind their houses where only their peers frequented.

Students in the current study were not only aware of the boundaries that defined their special places, but also acted according to the rules and routines within those places. Students' knowledge and practice of school routines seemed to empower them as individuals by being responsible and secure. For example, at Maple School, Petunia described how she reported some younger boys to the yard staff because the boys were hiding behind the bushes, which was prohibited. She explained further that the playground was in a city park and, therefore, the rules were in place to keep students safe from strangers who might use the park during recess. Rasmussen (2004) reported that students often described being corrected or scolded for seeking out special places, in particular while they were in the playground. She concluded that, "places for children" (p. 168) including playgrounds, courtyards, and ball courts often did not meet the children's emotional and physical needs to empower them to make these places meaningful "children's places" (p. 168). The freedom to explore was also a component of outdoor special places that empowered students in the current study. Exploration is discussed in the next section of this thesis.

Exploration. Exploration in the current study occurred in places that students visited infrequently and participated in novel activities, which promoted a sense of

independence. This section of the thesis discusses how students attribute significance to indoor places within their learning environment. Outdoor special places were not associated with exploration. For exploration, indoor places included spatial environments as well as imaginative ones.

Indoor special places that stimulated exploration. Indoor special places that stimulated exploration included rooms for French and music lessons. All eleven students in the current study, inspite of the fact that, at Pine School, all music lessons, except one, were held in the regular classroom, attributed significance to places within their music rooms. They described having freedom to explore new activities, including playing different instruments, and express themselves in different ways, using rhythm, sound, and movement. The students recognized their value as individuals when they were able to contribute to the choir or the orchestra, which took place only in the music rooms.

Leverett (2011) argued that information technologies may serve as "a bridge into adult and commercial cultures beyond the immediate control of their parents and carers as well as contribute to the development and evolution of children's culture" (p. 20). He explained:

> Children's agency can also be used to appropriate information technologies and move beyond the constraints and limitations of physical space. . . . TVs, mobile phones and the internet may be used within insularised spaces to extend children's spatial reach beyond the immediate physical environment. (p. 20)

Students at Maple School and Pines School explored imaginative places, including cyberspace. Six students described using computers at school and some associated special places with the freedom they had to explore games and online messages.

In the current study, the age of the students necessitated constant adult supervision, which may have limited their opportunities for exploration. At Maple School, students were permitted to visit the library and use the computers independently while students at Pine School visited the library and computer lab with their class as scheduled. Adult supervision was required during the school day, which, according to Rasmussen (2004) and Hart (1979) inhibits students' exploration.

Furthermore, age can impact students' use of space and how they relate to it (Lacey, 2007; Leverett, 2011; Sobel, 1993/2002). Lacey (2007)'s study in the United Kingdom reported that fifty-one percent of students aged 7–12 required adult supervision to play further than their street. The students in the current study expressed extensive awareness and knowledge of rules and routines at school, in particular, for libraries and playgrounds, which may have limited how they used and related to their special places in independent ways, including their abilities to make choices and explore.

Summary

Students attributed significance to indoor and outdoor places for the experiences of interdependence and independence they enabled. In this discussion, I have addressed the three principal research questions that underpinned the current study. First, students' special places are located in both indoor and outdoor spaces, including

227

classrooms, libraries, French and music rooms, gymnasiums before- and after-school care program rooms, atriums, and playgrounds.

Second, students characterized their special places according to the relationships and activities that occurred or had the potential to occur in them. Relationships existed between friends, or between students and materials such as books, building blocks, and computer games. Activities were social, which included different forms of play, from sport to music, and they were private, which included reading.

Third, students used special places to develop and exercise their interdependence and independence. As Morrow (2011) stated, "community, if it exists at all, appears to be located in a sense of 'belonging' that resides in relationships with other people, rather than places" (p. 70). Students expressed independence by their knowledge and practice of routines such as borrowing books that they chose from the libraries and desire for novel activities such as playing musical instruments in the music rooms. Students also exercised choice during free-play activities.

Although the study successfully addressed three principal research questions, there are three limitations to consider. The next section discusses the limitations of the study as well as the implications for practice and for future research.

Study Limitations

The current study investigated Grade 2 students' special places at a Montessori school (referred to as Maple School) and a public school (Pine School) by using qualitative research methods that facilitated students' communication. The purpose of the study was to elicit students' perspectives of their relationships with place in different learning environments. Although the results answered the research questions,

identifying where special places were located at school, what defined them and how they were used, the study was limited in three ways: time frame, camera selection, and interview protocol. The three limitations are discussed in this section of the thesis.

Time Frame

In the current study's method, I permitted students to have one week to photograph their special places. The one-week period limited their ability to photograph all of their special places. Two students at Maple School mentioned, in their photo elicitation interviews, places they would have photographed if they had visited them during the course of the study. For example, Petunia said she would have photographed the gymnasium but, during the week of the study, physical education classes were held outside and therefore she did not visit her special place.

Four students at Pine School expressed desires to photograph special places they were unable to access within the allotted time of the study. I modified the method to enable the four students from Pine School to photograph these places during one of their recesses. I accompanied them to accomplish the task.

Camera Selection

Each student was provided with a disposable camera to photograph his or her special places. The eleven students were proficient in taking photographs. The cameras also survived recess in the snow and rain. The printed photographs, however, did not meet all of the students' expectations. Upon viewing their photographs, students often forgot which places they had photographed and in what ways. Some students in the photo elicitation interviews struggled to sort their photographs when they did not have "good" photographs of the place that they wanted to discuss. For example, Christina at

Pine School selected one photograph of posters on the gymnasium wall because it was one of two photographs that she had of the space and it did not necessarily capture what she perceived as important. A digital camera with a preview screen would have addressed this limitation.

Interview Protocol

One question within the interview protocols proved to be difficult for students to answer. After each photograph, I asked: "What would make this place even more special?" This question predominantly yielded "I don't know" responses from the students. Three students, however, made some design suggestions to improve their special places. At Maple School, Alicia responded that her special place in the brown leather armchairs in the library would be even more special if there was a candy bar beside them (M, PEI, A, pp. 6–7) and foot massagers (p. 8). At Pine School, Jessica responded that additional pillows on the "hard" (P, PEI, J, p. 5) couches in the library would make the place more comfortable. Kaleb suggested making the gap between the bookshelf and bookstand by the bean bag chairs in his classroom smaller "because its suppose[d] to be a quiet corner" (P, PEI, K, p. 8).

The students may have seemed to lack imagination to provide more responses during the interviews (although in most cases, they expressed using their imagination in creative play and art activities) but perhaps, as design critic Norman (2003) described about his experience asking people what products and websites they "loved, hated, or had a love/hate relationship with. . . . People may not have reported what they truly liked because that might have been too close to them, too enmeshed in their lives.

230

Similarly, they might have missed the disliked things because they were absent"
(Epilogue, p. 1).

Despite the limitations that occurred due to the time frame, camera selection and interview protocol, the current study has implications for practice and for future research, which are discussed in the next section of the thesis.

Implications of the Study

The results of the current study suggest important findings for the arrangement of Grade 2 learning environments and inclusion of Grade 2 Canadian students' voices in ongoing research about space and place. In the next section of this chapter, I first discuss the implications of the findings for practice. Next, the implications for research are discussed. This section concludes with a discussion of the significance of the study.

Implications for Practice

The results of this study suggest five important recommendations for the arrangement of Grade 2 learning environments. First, since students valued places that had distinct rules and routines for interdependent and independent experiences, educators should establish rules and routines at the beginning of the school year and involve students in discussing and practicing them throughout the year to promote opportunities for fostering a sense of community and responsibility among students. All students in this study associated rules and routines with their special places, emphasizing how they participated in the school community (e.g., playing within playground boundaries, completing tasks in their classroom workspaces, entering and exiting each space when signaled) and how they acted as individuals (e.g., choosing places to play, work or read, knowing lesson schedules for the day or week, and

sometimes acting outside of the school rules and routines by playing in other places or using different entrances because of special circumstances). Educators may benefit from ongoing discussions with their students about classroom and school rules and routines to encourage the sense of community, responsibility, and self-sufficiency, which was expressed in this study.

Second, students valued places to which they had to travel and engage in one type of activity, which suggests that schools establish specialty rooms. For the students in the current study, the importance of the activity seemed to be elevated by the fact that it, for the most, only occurred in one space. Specialty rooms including music rooms, French rooms, gymnasiums, before and after school program rooms, kitchens, washrooms, libraries and computer labs constituted over half of the data for special places (52 out of 81 selected photographs). Conversely, activities that did not have distinct spaces were not expressed as significant. For example, students at Pine School did not discuss their music lessons that took place within their classroom, nor did they associate them with any classroom special places. Six students, across both schools, however, described special places within their music rooms. Students at Maple School expressed similar value for attending French lessons in the specialty building rather than French lessons in their classroom. School and recreational facility designers, as well as educators, may consider designating activities to distinct, separate rooms to augment students' enthusiasm, participation and enjoyment of the activities.

Third, students valued places that included books, which suggests including a variety of reading materials in all learning environments. As Dewey (1933/1989) described, in a utopian school there should be books everywhere. All 11 students in the

study attributed, on at least one occasion, value to places that permitted them to select and read books. Books, as objects that were freely chosen and viewed independently or with friends, seemed to elevate the capital of the special place. Designers of spaces for children should consider including reading material in as many locations as possible. Within classrooms, incorporating a book borrowing system for a small library would, from the results of the current study, enhance students interest in the place, and the activity of reading, as well as help them develop interdependence and independence.

Fourth, students valued a variety of places, both indoors and outdoors, which suggests including variety of places in all learning environments. Ten of the eleven participants characterized both indoor and outdoor places as special. This study suggests that students value a variety of spaces for interdependent and independent experiences. The development of outdoor education, health and nutritional programs already support this finding (Bell & Dyment, 2006; Morris & Zidenberg-Cherr, 2002; Willenberg, et al., 2010), though school and recreational facility designers, as well as educators may focus on creating different places within outdoor environments and arranging for frequent use of these places instead of only during free-time or recess.

Fifth, students valued places largely for the relationships and people within them, which strengthens the importance of creating positive social climate by helping students develop good communication, problem solving and conflict resolution skills. Although the students in the current study were young (ages seven and eight), they were able to recognize and value the social environment within their special places. Places that facilitated positive student interactions were special, including the ability to spend time with specific friends or alone. School and recreational facility designers, as well as

educators, may consider creating places that permit social interactions as demonstrated in the current study. For example, students' workspaces were single and group tables or desks arranged in small groups throughout the classrooms. Educators may consider classroom management techniques to encourage a positive social climate. For example, as at Maple School, greet students when they enter the classroom and invite them to choose where and with whom they work, or as at Pine School, adopting cooperative learning principles, including assigning roles for each student in small groups to complete an assignment.

In summary, the findings from the current study suggest five recommendations for encouraging place-making among students and learning environments. Recommendations include: (a) establishing and discussing classroom and school rules and routines with students throughout the school year, (b) creating specialty rooms for different subject areas, (c) making books widely accessible in all school spaces, (d) visiting a variety of both indoor and outdoor places, and (e) providing opportunities for positive social interactions within the learning environments. The findings of the current study have implications for future research, which are discussed in the next section of this thesis.

Implications for Research

Qualitative research methods, including photo elicitation interviews, walking tours and focus groups, facilitated an understanding of Grade 2 students' special places at their schools. Although two cases with two distinct learning environments provided the context for this study, the findings demonstrated an overall similarity: students looked for and created places that gave them opportunities for interdependence and

independence. Eleven students, aged seven and eight, were involved in all research methods and steps, based upon receiving permission from their parents, and, therefore, did not control for socio-economic status (family income or parents' education), learning abilities, general wellbeing or academic test scores. Evaluation of students' academic achievement and wellbeing were beyond the scope of this study.

Research that uses a mixed-methods approach to investigate Montessori and public elementary learning environments would be necessary to consider other variables that may have influenced this study but were beyond the scope of the current study, such as economic status, learning abilities, general wellbeing and academic test scores. Future research would also benefit from involving young students and including their child's eye view in discussions about their learning environments. Additionally, including student perspectives with those of teachers, administrators, and parents about the same learning environment would further aid understanding of the role of special places at school. Longitudinal studies that involve an ongoing collection of students' perceptions of their learning environments, their academic achievements, and their reflections on careers and home would add to space and place literature an understanding of the implications of place attachment in childhood on adult development and achievement.

Significance of the Study

The current study contributes to space and place research about learning environments with young students in two ways: (a) context, and (b) Grade 2 students as participants. First, this study took place in a medium-sized, south western city in the province of Ontario in Canada during winter and spring whereas similar studies that

235

used photo elicitation interviews and walking tours to investigate students' use of place (whether in their school or neighbourhood) took place outside of Canada during the summer (Benson, 2009; Cappello, 2005; Cele, 2006; Clark-Ibanez, 2004; Derr, 2002; Hart, 1979; Einarsdottir, 2005; Kylin, 2003; Sobel, 1993/2002).

Although social geographers (Holloway & Valentine, 2000; Rasmussen, 2004; Spencer & Blades, 2006), psychologists and health researchers (Epstein, et al., 2006; LaRocque, 2008), and educational researchers (Doppelt & Schunn, 2008; Einarsdottir, 2005; Fraser, 1986, 1998; Hart, 1979; Sobel, 1993/2002) have presented substantial data on children's interactions and relationships with a variety of environments, including neighborhoods, recreational centers, family homes and schools, research has largely focused on outdoor environments and has been predominantly generated from Denmark, Iceland and the United Kingdom (Foley & Leverett, 2011). The current study adds, for the first time, a Canadian context to the existing research, suggesting that students engage in place-making at a young age to the extent that they find and attach value to places which provide opportunities for friendships, play, solitude. The findings of the current study also suggest that special places encourage the development and exercise of interdependence and independence in Canadian learning environments.

Second, the current study involved students in Grade 2, aged seven and eight. While researchers recognize the potential of young children to act as active participants (Clark & Moss, 2001; Derr, 2006; Holloway & Valentine, 2000), their contributions to space and place research are limited (Spencer & Blades, 2006). Some researchers (e.g., Brosterman, 2002; Dudek, 2000, 2002; Einarsdottir, 2005) have worked with young students, aged 4–6. They focused, however, on the kindergarten or playschool

environments. Other researchers (e.g., Sobel, 1993/2002; Willenburg, et al., 2010) who have worked with students aged six to twelve in their studies about learning environments only partially include the younger students by excluding them in one-on-one interviews or focus groups after initial data collection methods (e.g., mapping, story-writing or brainstorming activities) were completed. The findings suggest that students aged seven and eight make worthy contributions to research about space and place.

The current study adds the Canadian context and voices of young Canadian students to the on-going, international discussion of special places at school. The current study also contributed to my development as a researcher, student and teacher. In the final section of this thesis, I offer my reflections.

Reflections

After data collection and a summer of transcribing, analyzing, re-analyzing, writing and rewriting as a full-time researcher, I stepped into a lower elementary classroom as a first-year teacher. I moved from student to researcher, then to teacher, and back again to student and researcher as I directed lessons in Muskoka during the week and returned to Kingston for meetings with my thesis supervisory committee on holidays and breaks. Due to these transitions from one position to the next, the current study was, for me, as much about investigating students' special places as about finding and exploring my own special place as a researcher, student and teacher among different learning environments. First, I reflect on my role as a researcher working with young students. Next, I reflect on my role as a teacher and a student.

Although collecting data with Grade 2 students was challenging, their unique perspectives of space and place were insightful. With young students, as Morrow (2011) reported, collecting data seemed to be a matter of finding the right question. Some questions yielded matter-of-fact, brief responses. I asked, "How would you make this place even more special?" to which students most often responded, "I don't know" with expressions that seemed to say, "Duh, Miss Researcher, it's already special." Other questions inspired detailed, enthusiastic stories. Responses to the question, "What do you like to do here?" described the game, including the boundaries and who was allowed to play the game. The visual methods helped to take the pressure off of me as the researcher to ask the right question and positioned the students in the role of experts, showing and telling what was personally significant to them.

Reflecting on my role as a researcher, I have compiled five steps that I now realize were critical to my success when working with young students in this study and may be helpful for other researchers embarking on research with a similar population. First, become familiar with the context. Prior to data collection, I arranged to observe for four days in each school. During these periods, I became familiar with the physical context of each school, as well as the routines to which students would later refer.

Second, develop rapport with the teachers and students. In this study, I contacted teachers by email, which allowed us to agree on a schedule for the data collection and also to communicate any prior concerns. For example, the teachers described the students who would be participating in the study and made suggestions on how to interact with them (e.g., "She is a bit shy, and processes information at her own pace, so try to give her more time to respond to your questions"). Teachers also told the

students when I was coming, which built anticipation for my arrival and their participation. Arranging to meet with the students as a small group, then talking to them during an observation period, worked well to develop a level of comfort between the students and me. I also made a point to greet each student by name and accept any invitations (with permission from the teacher and principal) to go to recess. At both schools, students were really excited to invite me to recess, show me around the playground and meet their friends from other classes.

Third, focus interaction during data collection with an activity. In this study, the first interactions were during the meeting. I described my special places as a student and showed some photographs, as well as gave students their disposable cameras and encouraged them to take three practice photographs. The second formal interaction was the photo elicitation interview, which focused on sorting, selecting and describing the photographs of their special places. In both interactions, the activity fostered and focused discussion.

Fourth, whenever possible use the students' language. Make note of what the students call particular places, objects and friends. In this study, I rephrased interview questions using their language. I also referred to classroom activities that resembled the focus group meetings. In Maple School, I explained that the focus group meeting was similar to the sharing circle, where one student has something special to show and describe to the class and other students may ask questions. In Pine School, I contextualized the focus group meeting by referring to their classroom activity called "star student", which followed similar procedures to the sharing circle.

Fifth, involve an artifact to which students can refer and subsequently keep once the research is complete. In this study, photographs were available for students to sort, to describe and to show their friends throughout the data collection process. I gave students photo albums containing their photographs and a hand-written "thank you" note to take home. The album symbolized the end product of our project together: the students had something tangible to represent their time and effort, and to show their teachers, friends and families.

The students' unique perspectives offered ideas that now inform my teaching practice, which are reflected in my classroom. In my daily practice as a teacher (and lifelong student), I try to see with a "child's eye view." I offer a variety of workspaces, including group tables by windows in the configuration that Luke and Rocky preferred, and individual tables set in quiet corners like Lily and Viola preferred. I encourage friends to sit with their friends by providing small group seating on carpets or on bean bag chairs like Christina, Taylor and Mason described.

I encourage students to bring in decorations and hang them throughout the classroom, as Viola's Chinese banner was posted on the bulletin board and Rocky's red lantern hung in front of the window. I had not realized the significance of including students' artifacts in classroom displays until I had participated in the discussion with these students.

I shelve as many books as can fit in the classroom library. I have always made a variety of reading material available, even bringing in one article from the newspaper each week to post and discuss, but I had not understood the significance (and sense of independence) which students attributed to borrowing books. As a result of the findings

240

of the current study, I placed a clipboard with a list of students' names on it for them to operate their own book-borrowing system by recording the date and book title, then taking the book home. When I see a new book added beside a student's name, I think of Petunia describing the library system at her school. I also think of Jessica and how much she enjoyed choosing books to bring to her classroom and to her home. I make sure to give students opportunities to visit the library, music room, and other classrooms at least once each day, reflecting on Kaleb and Hal's excitement for visiting the music room one more time.

Each day, I invite students to write their concerns in the class meeting notebook so we can sit and discuss routines and rules for indoor and outdoor places because I remember how significant they were for most of the students' sense of community, responsibility and security. I would have included students in establishing the classroom rules, but now revisit them regularly as a result of the findings from the current study.

Mainly, I take with me the understanding that place, for better or for worse, has tremendous potential to influence students' behaviour, feelings, sense of self and wellbeing. Special places let students develop and change in interdependent and independent ways.

REFERENCES

Altman, I., & Low, S. (1992). *Place attachment.* New York: Plenum Press.

Auerbach, C. F., & Silverstein, L. B. (2003). *Qualitative data: An introduction to coding and analysis*. New York: New York University Press.

Baines, M., & Snortum, J. (1973). A time-sampling analysis of Montessori versus traditional classroom interaction. *Journal of Educational Research, 66,* 313–316.

Bell, A. C., & Dyment, J. E. (2006). *Grounds for action: Promoting physical activity through school ground greening in Canada.* Toronto: Evergreen.

Bennett, C., Woodcock, A., & Tien, D. (2006). Ergonomics for students and staff. In H. Frumkin, R. Geller, & I. L. Rubin (Eds.), *Safe and healthy school environments* (pp. 58–77). New York: Oxford University Press.

Benson, C. H. (2009). *Changing places: Children's experiences of place during middle childhood*. (unpublished Master's thesis). Humboldt State University, Arcata, CA.

Bergin, C., & Bergin, D. (2009). Attachment in the classroom. *Educational Psychology Review*. *21,* 141–170. doi: 10.1007/s10648-009-9104-0.

Bowman, W. (2004). Cognition and the body: Perspective from music education. In L. Bresler (Ed.), *Knowing bodies, moving minds: Towards embodied teaching and learning* (pp. 29–50). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Brossy deDios, E., Rogic, T., & Vaughn, W. (2010). Light moves. *American School & University* (2010, February). Available from http://asumag.com/daylighting/integrate-daylight-school-design-201002/.

Brosterman, N. (2002). *Inventing kindergarten*. New York: Harry N. Abrams.

242

Bsela, W. L. N. (2009). *An investigation of student perceptions and fears of violence before and after transitioning to middle school*. (unpublished Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3325068).

Canadian Council of Montessori Administrators (2010). Montessori schools in Canada. Available from www.ccma.ca.

Cappello, M. (2005). Photo interviews: Eliciting data through conversations with children. *Field Methods, 17*(2), 170–182. doi: 10.1177/1525822X05274553.

Cele, S. (2006). *Communicating place: Methods for understanding children's experience of place.* Stockholm: Stockholm University Press.

Chawla, L. (1992). Childhood place attachments. In I. Altman & S. M. Low (Eds.), *Place attachment* (pp. 66–86). New York: Plenum Press.

Chawla, L. (2000). Special place: What is it? *Michigan Quarterly Review, 39*(2), 378–398.

Clark, A. (2004). The mosaic approach and research with young children. In A. Lewis, M. Kellett, C. Robinson, S. Fraser, & S. Ding (Eds.), *The reality of research with children and young people* (pp. 142–161). London: Sage.

Clark, A., & Moss, P. (2001). *Listening to young children*. London: National Children's Bureau and Rowntree Foundation.

Clark-Ibanez, M. (2004). Framing the social world with photo elicitation interviews. *American Behaviour Science, 47*(12), 1507–1527.

Cobb, E. (1977). *The ecology of imagination in childhood*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Coles, R. (1969). Those places they call schools. *Harvard Educational Review 39*(4), 46–57.

Collier, J. (1967). *Visual anthropology: Photography as a research method*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Conroy, H., & Harcourt, D. (2009). Informed agreement to participate: Beginning the partnership with children in research. *Early Child Development and Care, 179*, 157–165. doi: 10.1080/03004430802666973.

Council of Ministers of Education Canada (2008). Education in Canada. Available from http://www.cmec.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/64/Education-in-Canada2008.pdf.

Crabtree B., & Miller, W. (1999). Introduction. In B. Crabtree & W. Miller (Eds.), *Doing qualitative research* (2nd ed.) (pp. xi–xvii). London: Sage.

Craig, G. J., Kermis, M. D., & Digdon, N. L. (2001). *Children today* (2nd ed.). Toronto: Pearson Education Canada.

Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Cuba, L. & Hummon, D. M. (1993). A place to call home: Identification with dwelling, community, and region. *The Sociological Quarterly, 34*(1), 111–131.

De Botton, A. (2006). *The architecture of happiness.* New York: Random House.

Derr, T. (2006). Sometimes birds sound like fish: Perspectives on children's place

    experiences. In C. Spencer & M. Blades (Eds.), *Children and their environments*

    (pp. 108–123). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Derr, T. (2002). Children's sense of place in northern New Mexico. *Journal of*

    Environmental Psychology, 22, 125–137.

Dewey, J. (1933/1989). Dewey Outlines Utopian Schools. In J. Boyston (Ed.), *Volume*

    IX: The later works 1925–1953. 1933–1934 (pp. 136–140). Carbondale and

    Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press.

Dittoe, W. (2002). Innovative models of learning environments. *New Directions for*

    Teaching and Learning, 92, Winter, 81–90.

Dockett S., & Perry, B. (2007). The role of school and communities in children's school

    transition. In R. E. Tremblay, R. G. Barr, R. DeV. Peters, & M. Boivin (Eds.),

    Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development (pp. 1–7). Montreal: Centre of

    Excellence for Early Childhood Development.

Dohrmann, K., Nishida, T., Gartner, A., Lipsky, D., & Grimm, K. (2007). High school

    outcomes for students in a public Montessori program. *Journal of Research in*

    Childhood Education, 22(2), 205–217.

Doppelt, Y., & Schunn, C. (2008). Identifying students' perceptions of the important

    classroom features affecting learning aspects of a design-based learning

    environment. *Learning Environments Research, 11*(3), 195–209.

Dudek, M. (2000). *Kindergarten architecture: Space for the imagination* (2nd ed.) New

    York: Spon Press.

Dudek, M. (2002). *Architecture of schools: The new learning environments*. New York: Architectural Press.

Dudek, M. (2011). Play in an adult world: Designing spaces with children. In P. Foley, & S. Leverett (Eds.), *Children and young people's spaces* (pp. 73–88). New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Einarsdottir, J. (2005). Playschool in pictures: Children's photographs as a research method. In *Early Child Development and Care, 175*(6), 523–541.

Einarsdottir, J., Dockett, S., & Perry, B. (2009). Making meaning: Children's perspectives expressed through drawings. *Early Child Development and Care, 179*, 217–232. doi: 10.1080/03004430802666999.

Ellis, J. (2004). Researching children's place and space. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing, Spring*, 83–99.

Elsley, S. (2011). Out of the way: Children, young people and outdoor spaces. In P. Foley, & S. Leverett (Eds.)*, Children and young people's spaces* (pp. 102–115). New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Epstein, I., Stevens, B., McKeever, P., & Baruchel, S. (2006). Photo elicitation interview: Using photos to elicit children's perspectives. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 5*(3), 276–285.

Erwine, B. (2006). Lighting. In H. Frumkin, R. Geller, & I. L. Rubin (Eds.), *Safe and Healthy School Environments* (pp. 20–33). New York: Oxford University Press.

Fader, N. (2010). "Official Opening of [school name] School" *Online London.* http://onlinelondon.ca/2010/10/16/official-opening-of-[school name]/.

Foley, P., & Leverett, S. (Eds.) (2011). *Children and young people's spaces*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Fraser, B. J. (1986). *Classroom environment*. London: Croom Helm.

Fraser, B. J. (1989). Twenty years of classroom environment research: Progress and prospect. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 21*, 307–327.

Fraser, B. J. (1998). Science learning environments: Assessment, effects and determinants. In B. J. Fraser & K. G. Tobin (Eds.), *The international handbook of science education* (pp. 527–564). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer.

Fraser, B. J., Malone, J. A., & Neale, J. M. (1989). Assessing and improving the psychosocial environment of mathematics classrooms. *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education, 20*(2), 191–201.

Frumkin, H., Geller, R., & Rubin, I. L. (Eds.). (2006). *Safe and healthy school environments*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Gardner, H. (1983/2003). *Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences*. New York: BasicBooks.

Gentry, M., Gable, R., & Rizza, M. (2002). Students' perceptions of classroom activities: Are there grade-level and gender differences? *Journal of Educational Psychology, 94*(3), 539–544.

Gibson, J. J. (1982). Notes on affordances. In E. Reed, & R. Jones (Eds.), *Reasons for realism: The selected essays of James J. Gibson* (pp. 401–418). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Goh, S. C., & Fraser, B. J. (2000). Teacher interpersonal behavior and elementary students' outcomes. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 14*, 216–231.

Goh, S. C., & Khine, M. S. (Eds.). (2002). *Studies in educational learning environments: An international perspective*. Singapore: World Scientific.

Gradle, S. A. (2008). When vines talk: Community, art, and ecology. *Art Education, 6*(6), 6–12.

Greig, A., & Taylor, J. (1999). *Doing research with children*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Harper, D. (1998). An argument for visual sociology. In J. Prosser (Ed.), *Image-based research: A sourcebook for qualitative researchers* (pp. 24–41). London: Routledge Falmer.

Hart, R. (1979). *Children's experience of place*. New York: Irvington.

Heschong Mahone Group. (1999). Daylighting in schools: An investigation into the relationship between daylighting and human performance. San Francisco, CA: Pacific Gas and Electric Company. Available from http://www.pge.com/003_save_energy/003c_edu_train/pec/daylight/di_pubs/SchoolDetailed820App.PDF.

Heschong Mahone Group. (2002). Re-analysis report: Daylighting in schools, additional analysis. Sacramento, CA: California Energy Commission (CEC Contract to New Buildings Institute number 400-99-013).

Hidalgo, M. C., & Hernandez, B. (2001). Place attachment: Conceptual and empirical questions. *Journal of Environmental Pyschology, 21,* 273–281. doi: 10.1006/jevp.2001.0221.

Holm, G. (2008). Visual research methods: Where are we and where are we going? In S. N. Hesse-Biber, & P. Leavy (Eds.), *Handbook of emergent methods* (pp. 325–341). New York: Guilford Press.

Holley, L., & Steiner, S. (2005) Safe safe: Student perspectives on classroom environment. *Journal of Social Work Education, Winter,* 49–64.

Holloway, S., & Valentine, G. (2000). Children's geographies and the new social studies of childhood. In S. Holloway & G. Valentine (Eds.), *Children's geographies: Playing, living, learning* (pp. 1–28). New York: Routledge.

Hopkins, P. (2011). Young people's spaces. In P. Foley, & S. Leverett. (Eds.), *Children and young people's spaces* (pp. 25–39). New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Horton, J., Kraftl, P., & Tucker, F. (2011). Spaces-in-the-making, childhoods-on-the-move. In P. Foley, & S. Leverett (Eds.), *Children and young people's spaces* (pp. 40–57). New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Hutchison, D. (1998). *Growing up green.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Illuminating Engineering Society. (2012). "Strategic plan". Available from http://www.ies.org/pdf/strategic_plan.pdf.

Krippendorff, K. (1980). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Krueger, R., & Casey, M. (2000). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research* (3rd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Kyles, S. (2002). "Building styles: Victorian" Mohawk College. Available from http://www.ontarioarchitecture.com/Victorian.html.

Kylin, M. (2003). Children's dens. *Children, Youth and Environments, 13*(1). Available from http://colorado.edu/journals/cye.

Lacey, L. (2007). "Playday–Our streets too!" Available from http://www.playday.org.uk/Docs/Street-play-opinion-poll-summary.doc.

LaRocque, M. (2008). Assessing perceptions of the environment in elementary

classrooms: The link with achievement. *Educational Psychology in Practice
24*(4), 289–305.

Leverett, S. (2011). Children's spaces. In P. Foley, & S. Leverett (Eds.),

Children and young people's spaces (pp. 9–24). New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Lillard, A. S. (2005). *Montessori: The science behind the genius*. Toronto:

Oxford University Press.

Lillard, A. S., & Else-Quest, N. (2006). Evaluating Montessori education. *Science, 313*,

1893–1894.

Lombard, M., Snyder-Duch, J., & Bracken, C. C. (2004/2010). "Intercoder Reliability".

Available from http://matthewlombard.com/reliability/.

Lopata, C., Wallace, N., & Finn, K. (2005). Comparison of academic achievement:

Montessori and traditional education programs. *Journal of Research in Childhood
Education, 20*(1), 5–9.

Matthews, H., & Limb, M. (1999). Defining an agenda for the geography of children:

Review and prospect. *Progress in Human Geography 23*(1), 61–90.

Maxwell, L. (2006). Crowding, class size, and school size. In H. Frumkin, R. Geller, & I.

L. Rubin (Eds.), *Safe and healthy school environments* (pp. 13–19). New York:

Oxford University Press.

McCorskey, J. C., & McVetta, R. W. (1978). Classroom seating arrangements:

Instructional communication theory versus student preferences. *Communication
Education, 27*, 99–111.

McGee, T. (2008). The right fit: When buying furniture, schools and universities should consider ergonomics. *American School & University*, *80*(6), 26–30.

McGregor, J. (2004). Editorial. *Forum, 46*(1), 2–5.

McMillan, J., & Schumacher, S. (2010). *Research in education: A conceptual introduction* (4th ed.). New York: Longman.

Merton, R., Fiske, M., & Kendall, P. (1956). *The focused interview*. New York: The Free Press.

Milligan, M. J. (1998). Interactional past and potential: The social construction of place attachment. *Symbolic Interaction, 21*(1), 1–33. DOI: 10.1525/si.1998.21.1.1

Monke, L. (2007, September/October). Unplugged schools: Education can ameliorate, or exacerbate, society's ills. Which will it be? *Orion Magazine.* Retrieved from www.orionmagazine.org/index.php/articles/article/334.

Montessori, M. (1989). *To educate the human potential*. Oxford, UK: ABC Clio.

Moore, R. C. (1986). *Childhood's domain: Play and place in child development.* Berkeley, CA: MIG Communications.

Moore, R. C. (1997). The need for nature: A childhood right. *Children and the environment* (1997, Fall), 203–220.

Moore, R. C., & Wong, H. H. (1997). Natural learning: Creating environments for rediscovering nature's way of teaching. Berkeley, CA: MIG Communications.

Moos, R. H. (1979). *Evaluating educational environments: Procedures, measures, findings, and policy implications.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Morgan, D. (1996). Focus groups. *Annual Review of Sociology, 22*, 129–152.

Morgan, D., Fellows, C., & Guevara, H. (2008). Emergent approaches to focus group

  research. In S. N. Hesse-Biber, & P. Leavy (Eds.), *Handbook of emergent*

  methods (pp. 189–205). New York: Guilford Press.

Morris, J. L., Neustadter, A., & Zidenberg-Cherr, S. (2001). First-grade gardeners more

  likely to taste vegetables. *California Agriculture, 55*, 43–46.

Morris, J. L., & Zidenberg-Cherr, S. (2002). Garden-enhanced nutrition curriculum

  improves fourth grade school children's knowledge of nutrition and preferences

  for some vegetables. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, *102*(1), 91–93.

Morrow, V. (2011). Researching children and young people's perspectives on place and

  belonging. In P. Foley, & S. Leverett (Eds.), *Children and young people's spaces*

  (pp. 58–72). New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Morse, J. M., & Pooler, C. (2002). Analysis of videotaped data: Methodological

  considerations. Retrieved from

  https://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/IJQM/article/viewFile/4593/3748.

Murphy, J. M. (2003). *Education for sustainability: Findings from the evaluation of The*

  Edible Schoolyard. Berkeley, CA: The Center for Ecoliteracy.

North American Montessori Teacher's Association. (2012). "About NAMTA". Available

  from http://namta.org.

Norman, D. (2003). "Epilogue: We are all designers". Available from

  http://www.jnd.org/dn.mss/CH-Epilog.pdf.

O'Dell, L. (2011). Spaces for care and learning: A social pedagogical approach. In P.

  Foley, & S. Leverett (Eds.), *Children and Young People's Spaces* (pp. 160–175).

  New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

O'Farrell, S. L., & Morrison, G. M. (2003). A factor analysis exploring school bonding

    and related constructs among upper elementary students. *The California School*

    Psychologist, 8, 53–72.

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2004). *Good places to learn: Renewing Ontario's*

    schools. Retrieved from

    http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/reports/learn/goodplaces.pdf.

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2011a). *Elementary education.* Retrieved from

    http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/elementary.html

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2011b). *Elementary education.* Retrieved from

    http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/elementary.html

OWP/P Architects, VS Furniture and Bruce Mau Design. (2010). *The third teacher: 79*

    ways you can use design to transform teaching & learning. New York: Abrams.

Oxford English Dictionaires. "Game" (Accessed 28 Apr 2012). Available from

    http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/game?q=game.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand

    Oak, CA: Sage.

Peterson, A. (2009). *Picturing meaning: Icelandic students' perceptions of their purpose-*

    built school (unpublished Master's thesis). Queen's University, Kingston, ON.

Pillow, W. S. (2003). Confession, catharsis, or cure? Rethinking the uses of reflexivity as

    methodological power in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative*

    Studies in Education, 16(2), 175–196.

Pink, S. (2005). *The future of visual anthropology: Engaging the senses*. London:

    Routledge.

Polk Lillard, P. (1996). *Montessori today*. New York: Schocken Books.

Porcellato, L., Dughill, L., & Springett, J. (2002). Using focus groups to explore children's perceptions of smoking: reflections on practice. *Health Education, 102*(6), 310–320. doi: 10.1108/09654280210446856.

Powell, M. (2007). The hidden curriculum of recess. *Children, Youth, Environments, 17*(4), 86–106.

Prosser, J. (1998). The status of image-based research. In J. Prosser (Ed.), *Image-based research: A sourcebook for qualitative researchers* (pp. 97–112). New York: Routledge Falmer.

Punch, S. (2000). Children's strategies for creating playspaces: Negotiating independence in rural Bolivia. In S. L. Holloway and G. Valentine (Eds.), *Children's geographies: Playing, living, learning* (pp. 48–62). London: Routledge Press.

Rasmussen, K. (2004). Places for children–children's places. *Childhood, 11*(2), 155–173. doi: 10.1177/0907568204043053.

Rathunde, K. (2003). A comparison of Montessori and traditional middle schools: Motivation, quality of experience and social context. *The NAMTA Journal, 28*(3), 12–52.

Rathunde, K., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2005). The social context of middle school: Teachers, friends, and activities in Montessori and traditional school environments. *Elementary School Journal, 106*(1), 59–79.

Rosenfield, P., Lambert, N. M., & Black, A. (1985). Desk arrangement effects on pupil classroom behaviour. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 77*(1), 101–108. doi: 0022-0663/85/S00.75.

Ryniker, D. H., & Shoho, A. R. (2001). Student perceptions of their elementary classrooms: Montessori vs. traditional environments. *Montessori Life, 13*(1), 45–48.

Saldana, J. (2009). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers.* London: Sage.

Samuels, J. (2004). Breaking the ethnographer's frames: Reflections on the use of photo elicitation in understanding Sri Lankan monastic culture. *American Behavioral Scientist, 47*(12), 1528–1550.

Sarason, S. B. (1974). *The psychological sense of community: Prospects for a community psychology*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.

Scourfield, J., Dicks, B., Drakeford, M., & Davies, A. (2006). *Children, place and identity: Nation and locality in middle childhood.* New York: Routledge.

Sobel, D. (1993/2002). *Children's special places: Exploring the role of forts, dens and bush houses in middle childhood.* Tucson: Zephyr Press.

Spencer, C., & Blades, M. (2006). Introduction. In C. Spencer and M. Blades (Eds.), *Children and their environments* (pp. 1–25). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Stake, R. E. (2005). Qualitative case studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative studies* (3rd ed.) (pp. 443–466). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Stake, R. E. (2006). Cross case analysis. In R. E. Stake (Ed.), *Multiple case study analysis*. (pp. 39–77). New York: Guilford.

Steiner, R. (1965). *The education of the child in the light of anthroposophy.* Dornach, The Netherlands: The Rudolph Steiner Press.

Strong-Wilson, T., & Ellis, J. (2007). Children and place: Reggio Emilia's environment as third teacher. *Theory into Practice, 46*(1), 40–47.

Tanner, C. K., & Langford, S. (2003). *The importance of interior design elements as they relate to student outcomes.* Dalton, GA: University of Georgia.

Tuan, Y. (1977/2008). *Space and place: The perspective of experience.* Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

United Nations (1989). *Convention on the right of the child.* Available from http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2crc.html.

Upitis, R. (2007). Four strong schools: Developing a sense of place through school architecture. *International Journal of Education & the Arts, 8*(1), 1–16.

Upitis, R. (2010). *Raising a school: Foundations for school architecture.* Yarker, ON: Wintergreen Studios.

Wannarka, R., & Ruhl, K. (2008). *Seating arrangements that promote positive academic and behavioural outcomes: A review of empirical research.* Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Willenberg, L. J., Ashbolt, R., Holland, D., Gibbs, L., MacDougall C., Garrard, J., Green J. B., & Waters, E. (2010). Increasing school playground physical activity: A mixed methods study combining environmental measures and children's perspectives. *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport, 13*, 210–216. doi:10.1016/j.jsams.2009.02.011.

APPENDIX A

GREB APPROVAL

January 15, 2011

Queen's UNIVERSITY

OFFICE OF RESEARCH SERVICES

Fleming Hall - Jemmett Wing, 3rd Floor
Queen's University
Kingston, Ontario K7L 3N6
Tel   613 533-6081
Fax   613 533-6806
ors@queensu.ca
www.queensu.ca/ors

Ms. Katrina Mosscrop
Master's Student
Faculty of Education
Duncan McArthur Hall
Queen's University

Dear Ms. Mosscrop:

GREB Ref #:   GEDUC-537-10
Title: "Place Attachment: Grade 2 Students' Special Places at their Schools"

The General Research Ethics Board (GREB), by means of a delegated board review, has cleared your proposal entitled **"Place Attachment: Grade 2 Students' Special Places at their Schools"** for ethical compliance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (TCPS) and Queen's ethics policies. In accordance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (article D.1.6) and Senate Terms of Reference (article G), your project has been cleared for one year. At the end of each year, the GREB will ask if your project has been completed and if not, what changes have occurred or will occur in the next year.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB, with a copy to your unit REB, if applicable, of any adverse event(s) that occur during this one year period (details available on webpage http://www.queensu.ca/ors/researchethics/GeneralREB/forms.html – Adverse Event Report Form). An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s). You are also advised that all adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours.

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the GREB. For example you must report changes in study procedures or implementations of new aspects into the study procedures on the Ethics Change Form that can be found at http://www.queensu.ca/ors/researchethics/GeneralREB/forms.html - Research Ethics Change Form. These changes must be sent to the Ethics Coordinator, Gail Irving, at the Office of Research Services or irvingg@queensu.ca prior to implementation. Mrs. Irving will forward your request for protocol changes to the appropriate GREB reviewers and / or the GREB Chair.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research.

Yours sincerely,

Joan Stevenson, PhD
Professor and Chair
General Research Ethics Board

c.c.:   Dr. Malcolm Welch, Faculty Supervisor
          Dr. Lesly Wade-Woolley, Chair, Unit REB
          E-REB: c/o Graduate Studies & Bureau of Research, Attn.: Celina Caswell

think Research
think Queen's

JS/gi

APPENDIX B

MONTESSORI SCHOOL APPROVAL

February 8, 2011
Faculty of Education
511 Union Street
Kingston, ON
K7M 5R7

 To Whom it May Concern:

This is to acknowledge that Katrina Mosscrop had permission from both Montessori [school name] and the parents of the student's involved to do research with our students on the significance of place in education. Katrina was in the school from January 26 to February 4, 2011 conducting her research with our Junior Two Class.

Sincerely,

[name of director]
Director

APPENDIX C

SCHOOL BOARD APPROVAL

Bill Tucker, Director of Education and Secretary

February 18, 2011

Katrina Mosscrop
Faculty of Education
Queen's University
511 Union Street
Kingston, ON
K7M 5R7

Dear Katrina:

Your project, entitled "Place Attachment: Grade 2 Students' Special Places at their Schools" has been approved by Operations Services at the ▮▮▮▮▮ District School Board. You may contact the school(s) that have been identified.

As you are no doubt aware, the continued willingness of our faculty to participate in these studies is greatly enhanced by pertinent feedback of findings. I would suggest, therefore, that you make definite plans to provide the appropriate feedback to the school(s) involved. The system also expects a copy of your final report for our research files.

Best of luck with your study. If I can be of further assistance, please feel free to call me.

Sincerely,

Manager - Research and Assessment Services
▮▮▮▮▮ District School Board

/sd

cc: K. Wilkinson, Superintendent of Education

Research and Assessment

A Caring, Learning Community

APPENDIX D

LETTER OF INFORMATION

Place Attachment: Grade 2 Students' Special Places at their Schools

LETTER OF INFORMATION (Parent/Guardian)

XXXX XX XX

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Katrina Mosscrop, and I am a Master's student at the Faculty of Education at Queen's University. I would like to invite your child to participate in the research that I am conducting for my Master's thesis, entitled *Place Attachment: Grade 2 Students' Special Places at their Schools*. The research will be supervised by Dr. Malcolm Welch and has the support of your school's Principal. Also, the study was granted clearance by the General Research Ethics Board for compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans, and Queen's policies.

In this letter, I will describe the purpose, the method and your child's tasks for the research. I will also request that you and your child agree, in writing, to participate in the study. I will purposefully select six students from those who volunteer. If your child is not selected for the study, he or she will still have the opportunity to take photographs of his or her special places using a disposable camera assigned to his or her class. These photographs will be printed and included in a class photo album.

The purpose of the study is to explore which places Grade 2 students perceive as special at their school. More specifically, the study will investigate: (a) where these special places are, (b) what makes these spaces become special places, and (c) how Grade 2 students use these special places.

To achieve this purpose, the research method includes five phases. All phases will occur at school and during class time. Your child's participation will involve the following:

1. On Day 1, he or she will participate in a meeting for 20 minutes with three other students and me to discuss my special place photograph and invite him or her to photograph his or her own special places at school. I will give him or her a disposable camera at this meeting at my own expense. At this time, I will also take a photograph of your child so that later I can match his or her face with a code name.
2. During Days 2 to 5, he or she will be observed as part of the class during his or her daily school activities for four days.
3. During Days 6 to 10, he or she will take a minimum of six photographs at the school of his or her special places over one week. Once the task is complete, your child may return the camera to his or her teacher. I will make prints, scan them and give a copy to your child at my own expense.

4. On **one** of Days 6 to 10, he or she will show and discuss his or her photographs and special places with me in a photo elicitation interview and walking tour, which will take 30–45 minutes at school, during class time.
5. On Day 11, he or she will show and discuss his or her photographs and special places with me and three other participants in a focus group, which will take 30–45 minutes at school, during class time.

Total time of participation will be 80–110 minutes.

The photo elicitation interview, walking tour and focus group will be audio recorded and transcribed. The verbatim transcripts will be analyzed for data involved in the research study. The portions of the transcriptions that are used directly in the thesis will be presented with all identifying features (e.g., child's name) removed. Data will be secured in a locked filing cabinet and password–protected computer, and the transcripts will be destroyed at the end of the study.

Participating in the study involves no more risk than your child's normal school–based activities. There are no known physical, psychological, economic or social risks to your child associated with participation in this research. Agreement on your part and that of your child in no way obligates your child to remain a part of the study. Participation is voluntary, and you or your child may choose to withdraw your child from the study at any time. Should you choose to withdraw your child, you may request that all or part of your child's data be destroyed. Further, participation or non-participation will not affect your relationship or that of your child with his or her peers, teacher or Head of School/Principal.

I intend to publish the findings of the study, including your child's spoken words and photographs, in professional journals, education magazines and books, and report them at conferences. Confidentiality will be maintained to the extent possible. At no time will your child's actual identity be disclosed. Your child will be assigned a code name; any reference in publications to your child or to what your child says at any time during the study will be to the code name only.

Any questions about study participation may be directed to Katrina Mosscrop at 5km24@queensu.ca or my supervisor Dr. Malcolm Welch at 613.533.6000 x77867 or malcolm.welch@queensu.ca. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at 613-533-6081 or chair.GREB@queensu.ca

Please indicate your decision to participate in the study by signing one copy of the *Consent Form* and returning it to the school secretary. Retain the second copy for your records.

Yours sincerely,

Katrina Mosscrop

Attachments: Two (2) copies of the *Consent Form*

APPENDIX E

CONSENT FORM

Place Attachment: Grade 2 Students' Special Places at their Schools

CONSENT FORM (Parent/Guardian)

I agree that my child may participate in the study entitled *Place Attachment: Grade 2 Students' Special Places at their Schools,* directed by Katrina Mosscrop, under the supervision of Dr. Malcolm Welch and conducted through the Faculty of Education at Queen's University.

I have read and retained the *Letter of Information* and *Consent Form* and the purpose of the study is explained to my satisfaction.

I have had any questions answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that my child's participation involves:
1. On Day 1, he or she will participate in a meeting for 20 minutes with three other students and me to discuss my special place photograph and invite him or her to photograph his or her own special places at school. I will give him or her a disposable camera at this meeting at my own expense. At this time, I will also take a photograph of your child so that later I can match his or her face with a code name.
2. During Days 2 to 5, he or she will be observed as part of the class during his or her daily school activities for four days.
3. During Days 6 to 10, he or she will take a minimum of six photographs at the school of his or her special places over one week. Once the task is complete, your child may return the camera to his or her teacher. I will make prints, scan them and give a copy to your child at my own expense.
4. On **one** of Days 6 to 10, he or she will show and discuss his or her photographs and special places with me in a photo elicitation interview and walking tour, which will take 30–45 minutes at school, during class time.
5. On Day 11, he or she will show and discuss his or her photographs and special places with me and three other participants in a focus group, which will take 30–45 minutes at school, during class time.

Total participation will take approximately 80–110 minutes.

I give my consent to have my child participate in the meeting, observation, photo elicitation interview, walking tour and focus group with the understanding that the photo elicitation interview, walking tour and focus group will be audio–recorded.

I agree to allow my child to be photographed by the researcher and my child's peers.

I understand that only the researcher and her supervisor will have access to data and that my child's name will be coded to maintain confidentiality to the extent possible.

I understand that all data will be retained for five years and then destroyed according to Queen's University research policy.

I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my child from the study at any time without negative consequences. Should I decide to withdraw my child from the study, I may request that all data associated with his/her participation is destroyed.

I understand that the researcher intends to publish the findings, including spoken words and photographs from this study.

I understand that a copy of each publication resulting from the research will be emailed or mailed to me upon request.

Any questions about study participation may be directed to Katrina Mosscrop at 5km24@queensu.ca or my supervisor Dr. Malcolm Welch at 613.533.6000 x77867 or malcolm.welch@queensu.ca. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at 613-533-6081 or chair.GREB@queensu.ca.

Please sign one copy of this Consent Form and return to the school secretary. Retain the second copy for your records.

I HAVE READ AND UNDERSTOOD THIS *CONSENT FORM* AND I AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.

Parent/Guardian's name (Please Print):⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯

Parent/Guardian's Signature:⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯ Date: ⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯

Name of Child (Please Print): ⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯

Child's Signature: ⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯ Date: ⎯⎯⎯⎯
If you would like a copy of the findings please include your email or mailing address below.

PHOTO CONSENT FORM

Place Attachment: Grade 2 Students' Special Places at their Schools

Please complete either Section A (parts 1 and 2) OR Section B

Section A: Part 1

I agree to allow Katrina Mosscrop and my peers to take photographs of me to complete the research study about special places. I understand that neither the name of the student nor the name of his or her parent/guardian will be associated with the photographs.

Name of Student (PLEASE PRINT): _____

Signature of Student: _____

Signature of Parent/Guardian: _____

Date: _____

Section A: Part 2

By initialing in the box(es) below I agree to allow Katrina Mosscrop to use the photographs for the purposes indicated:

	Student's initials	Parent/Guardian initials
Publication in a Journal		
Demonstration to Students		
Presentation at a Conference		

Section B

I do not want to be photographed.

Name of Student (PLEASE PRINT): _____

Signature of Student: _____

Signature of Parent/Guardian: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX G

THANK YOU

Place Attachment: Grade 2 Students' Special Places at their Schools

THANK YOU FOR VOLUNTEERING

Thank you for volunteering for my study. Due to overwhelming participation, I have had to purposefully sample students for the photo elicitation interviews and focus group. Unfortunately, your son/daughter was not selected. Your child, however, will have the opportunity to take photographs of his or her special places using a disposable camera assigned to his or her class. These photographs will be printed and included in a class photo album.

Any questions about the study may be directed to Katrina Mosscrop at 5km24@queensu.ca or my supervisor Dr. Malcolm Welch at 613.533.6000 x77867 or malcolm.welch@queensu.ca. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at 613-533-6081 or chair.GREB@queensu.ca

Sincerely,

Katrina Mosscrop

APPENDIX H

MEETING GUIDE

Introduction
Hello my name is Ms. Mosscrop and I am a student just like you. I am working on a research project about special places in your school. (Show photograph of special place: roundtable in library) This is one of my special places from my school. It was special to me because I loved (and still do) to read. At this table, I could lay out all of my favourite books and read quietly until lunch time. Sometimes my friend Melissa would read here with me. We read twice a week and completed our first novel study together at that table. I was wondering if anyone has their own special places at school? Do you think that you would photograph them and tell me about them later?

I will give you your own camera to use. I will even put your name on the front so that everyone knows it is yours. It has a number count at the top to tell you how many photographs you have left. I only took one photograph but you can take up to 24 photographs. Make sure you have at least six to show me. If you take photographs of your friends who are not participating in this research, I will have to blur their faces so that we can't tell who they are. Remember, you can take photographs of your favourite, special places anywhere inside and outside of your school.

Thank you for listening so well. I will now answer any questions you have before I return to my school.

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction
Hello _____! My name is Ms. Mosscrop and I met with you last week and we talked about our special places at school. Today we are going to look at and talk about your photographs. I have an audio recorder to help me remember what we talk about. If you don't mind, I will turn it on (audio recorder will remain on for the duration of the interview and walking tour).

I am really excited to see your photographs. I printed them but thought we could look at them together for the first time. When you lay them out, I will ask you some questions but you are the expert about your photographs, so I want to hear what you have to say. If at any time you don't feel comfortable answering a question, remember that you don't have to. (Lay out photographs on flat surface)

Let's number your photographs so we know what order we will talk about them.

Which of the places shown in your photograph would you like to take me to on a walking tour? Let's put that one to the side.

Questions for the Photographs
Please tell me where this place is.

Please tell me what is in the photograph.

How did you come to choose this as your special place?

In what ways is this place special to you?

How do you use the space?

What would you do to this space to make it even more special?

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your special place?
(Discuss all images, except for one set aside.)

We have one left. Let's walk to your special space.
(Ask questions above while in special space.)

Wrap up
Unfortunately we are almost out of time. Let's go over the main points that you that have told me. (Identify the major themes of the students' responses and summarize them.)

Closing statement

I want to thank you for talking with me and helping me with my research project. Your photographs have really helped me to understand what places at your school are special to you. I am going to take your photographs, scan them and return them to you by the end of this week. I can answer any questions that you may have.

APPENDIX J

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction
Hello everyone! Do you remember me, _____? My name is _____ and I have my tape recorder again. If anybody does not mind, I will turn it on. I really enjoyed your pictures and thought you might want to share them with each other. Remember, just like the interview, I will have some questions but you are the experts about your pictures so I want to hear what you have to say. If at any time you don't feel comfortable answering a question, remember that you don't have to.

Questions
Would anyone like to share his or her photographs with the group?
How is this special to you?
Does anyone want to say something about this photograph?
5.I remember that you also took a photograph of this space. Would you like to share your photograph?

Wrap up
Unfortunately we are almost out to time. If I could just go over the main points that you that have told me. (Identify the major themes of the participants' responses and summarize them.)

Closing statement
I want to thank you all very much for talking with me and helping me with my project. Your photographs have really helped me to understand what places at your school are really special to you. Are there any last questions?