

Chapter 5
Looking After Place
Defining Place-Conscious
Education



Place Making

Inherent in the local is the concept of place – a portion of land/town/cityscape seen from the inside, the resonance of a specific location that is known and familiar ... Place is latitudinal and longitudinal within the map of a person's life. It is temporal and spatial, personal and political. A layered location replete with human histories and memories, place has width as well as depth. It is about connections, what surrounds it, what formed it, what happened there, what will happen there. (L Lippard, quoted in Cresswell 2004:40)

Chapter heading photo: Western view of the Administration building through the wetland regrowth.

The early drafts of this chapter sought to explore the concept of place and initially took the form of a literature review. During the editing process of this work, I discovered that theorising and philosophical discourse led to an erasure of place and a loss of immediacy in the text. I then decided to integrate the story of place making at Shearwater, which was initially written as a separate chapter. Place was important in the establishment the Free Waldorf School in Stuttgart, and the Lorien Novalis School where I commenced my journey as a teacher. As a contributor to the founding of Shearwater The Mullumbimby Steiner School, consideration of place and its relationship to education was fundamental to its development. The story of the school not only attempts to illuminate research into place making and place conscious learning but also serves as data from which further understandings of place making and place conscious learning can evolve.

By integrating the two chapters I also sought to ignite the immediacy of place as an important element of the writing.

As I am rereading and editing this chapter, I gaze out into the night. The weather has cooled. It's the season of 'Djeran', the season the Nyoongar, the local Indigenous people identify with the coming of the cooler Sou'Westerlies (Bill Webb 2012, pers. comm. 4 April). The full moon hangs majestically in a cloudless sky, reflecting its silvery light over the calm waters of Geographe Bay. The town lights of Dunsborough flicker through the trees in the distance and I feel myself merging with the beauty of this place in the far southwest corner of Australia.

My writing calls me back from my reverie and I consider my good fortunate in having been able to live in so many beautiful places throughout Australia. Perhaps, because of MY good fortune, I am realising that I have come to love places and the stories they tell and I am curious about the ones that are kept hidden. I find myself once more

contemplating the mystery of place; its timeless presence and, as if in contrast, the restless dance of life that weaves through it, bringing change.

Place

Interest in place and in the meaning of place is universal. (Tuan 1974:211)

‘Place’ is a word that is in common and daily use in the English language. The origin of the word is as old as mankind itself, being traced back via Latin and Greek to Sanskrit (*Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*). It would seem to be a taken for granted, common sense type of word and at first reflection, not the kind of word that one would think would become the focus of specialised academic study, and a hotly contested one at that. However, when consciously trying to define it, we immediately find the concept of place, rather than having a fixed meaning, is a word, slipping from one context to another through a complex network of associations.

The *Encarta World English Dictionary* lists fifteen definitions of place as a noun and nine as a verb. None of these include the myriad compound words that include place (e.g. place-name, place-conscious, hiding-place, place-of-birth). The renowned philosopher of place, Edward Casey, suggests that the ‘... philosophy of place remains obscure just because it so ... commonplace’ (cited in Gruenewald 2003:623). It can also very easily slip out of consciousness as we become involved with the routine of everyday life, and this observation has led to the great debate over the time-space continuum and the suppression of place in the face of the reification (abstraction) of space.

Out of this contemplation of place has come a vast array of multi-disciplinary studies, including: Geography, Philosophy, Ecology, Architecture, Anthropology, Literary Theory, Theology, Psychology and Sociology. Place, because of its simplicity and universality is an appealing study that has not only stimulated our interest and

imagination with comparative geographical insights but has become part of the philosopher's dialogue and revealed the profound nature of its role in defining identity and understanding who we are. Conceding this as a given, with its far-reaching implications, consciousness of place is assured of having much to contribute to a meaningful and healthy education.

One of my first memories is deeply entwined with place. I am standing at the front window of the living room of my home that was built into the side of a steep hill. I am looking across the Gawler Road onto a panoramic view of a creek with its fine stand of willows and follow its snaking course north towards the town of Ulverstone. It has been raining incessantly all day and all that is left for me to do was watch out for the Bluebird, the blue two-tone school bus that would return my older brother home from school. As I waited, the creek floods across the paddocks.

Casey (1997) argues that place is the site of all experience and the foundation of all knowledge and wisdom. We experience the world in place. While we are alive we find ourselves in one place or another and even in death we find a place of repose and this place can have meaning, for example, Jim Morrison's Paris grave continues to attract thousands of pilgrims. Places can be intimate, such as one's bed, where we spend a third of our day, or a favourite armchair (Tuan 1977:149). For many Australian men, the 'shed' is often a place of refuge where personal identity is sought and realised away from life's pressures (Griffiths 2014). An example of a more public place is a preferred café where one can meet socially on neutral ground with friends (and adversaries). Place is also the local supermarket, one's hometown, the nearest city or an overseas destination.

As Tuan (1975) identifies, these places all have something in common: they are centres of meaning. We all identify place with other conscious and unconscious

experiences: the wind in the trees, the smell of night jasmine, happy social occasions, accidents, the heat of the midday sun, the squelch of mud under your feet. These common experiences accumulate to provide a personal and meaningful sense of place. Without people there are no places. We would not know about *le Vallage* in the Champagne with its willow-shaded streams without Bachelard (Cited in Schama 1995:244). The Canadian geographer Edward Relph talks of an authentic sense of place as being an 'I – You' relationship, in which subject and object, person and place are replaced by the relationship itself.

Childscapes

No environment is devoid of the power to gain the allegiance of its residents. (Brierley 1998:43)

Childhood and place are inseparable. As children we are curious about our environment and are motivated to explore it. It stimulates us to form a unique image of the world and this does much to determine our singular identity. This image of the world needs to be integrated with bodily awareness, in order for us to know who we are and where we are. It is what William Wordsworth (2004), in his ode *Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*, coined: 'The world we half create and half perceive.'

Whether we hail from the flood plains of the coastal fringes of the Northern Territory, the hazardous sandstone fire-belt of Sydney, the rain-shy outback expanses of Burke or the peaks of the Blue Mountains (and that's only using Australia as an example), every person is in some way or another, a representative of the home that gave him or her birth. In its people, the country finds its reflection, giving the world diversity. Diversity leads to individualisation and ultimately freedom. Our identity, fostered by our early home environment, is becoming a valuable commodity in our post-modern, globalised world.

The small waterway that I loved to watch flood from the high vantage of my living room window, was known as Bonney's Creek. It ran between the lush green rolling hills of steep, cleared farming land and formed my childhood's southern horizon. Bonney's Creek started across the road, then snaked its way through a stand of willow trees that stretched some hundred and fifty yards through the paddocks, down to the Gawler Road bridge. (Here it twined its way around Gravel Hill and disappeared behind the Cannery before joining the Leven River.) But to us - my brothers and friends - it was a source of endless exploration and adventure.

The best times were when it rained which often turned the crossing - that thirty yard stretch across to the willows - into a muddy World War I no-man's land. First there was the road traffic to negotiate, then the treacherous barbed wire (with which all Tasmanian fences seemed to be stretched). Finally we had to make a dash across a muddy Flanders Field of soggy craters while avoiding the attack of 'enemy' cattle, taking care not to attract the attention of the bull, real or imagined while being ever alert for the Red Baron plovers who dive-bombed us as we ran in squelching gumboots, for the safety of willow trenches.

The swelling and swirling waters rushed through the willows where small islands gave us refuge. There we built shelters, survived dangerous rapids and impenetrable jungle. It was our Zambezi and I was the Phantom, the Ghost-Who-Walks hunting down criminals in darkest Africa. The next day I was Tarzan living and swinging from the jungle canopy. Once my older brother and his friends built a raft made of lashed four-gallon drums and we became Treasure Island pirates, Long John Silver complete with a crutch we had fashioned from a willow bough. Then there were the Indian Wars, with my

brother wearing his possum skin Davy Crocket hat battling it out with his tomahawk against the war-painted Creek warrior, Red-Stick.

In dry weather, more sure of our footing, we emulated the Pamplona 'running of the bulls' as we dashed daringly close to the herds into the safety of the waterholes. On these sunnier days, the creek became a commercial highway as busy as the Rhine as we sailed our cargo ships and barges downstream. And, in the still waters of the miniature billabongs amongst the willows, the Battle of Trafalgar was often re-fought. In spring we made our way across the paddock downstream to pick the daffodils that seemed to reappear magically every year.

In examining the world of childscape, Porteus (2004) looks at children's literature and childhood autobiography. In his study of childhood autobiography he found that they all agreed on the important influence of childhood in shaping adult life and that the authors of childhood literature tend to concur with the portrayal of the rural countryside as the ideal world of childhood. A good example is Tolkien's Shire of rolling, fertile fields, and busy, harmonious fun-loving Hobbits living in burrows. Cities are ambivalent or places of abject horror and the mountain desolation and forest wilderness are dangerous places with lurking terror. Where city places are invoked as ideal places, the suburban areas where a high percentage of children live, never get a mention. Harry Potter's holiday refuge with the Dursleys in number four Privet Drive is a suburban nightmare of banality.

The scholars of the autobiographies of childhood also identify rural environments (including rural villages, working-class villages) as ideal places of childhood. Even tight-knit urban neighbourhoods qualify as standing for natural ways, and an understandable social life as opposed to the 'non-place' urban realms of adults, speed, progress, technology and development. According to Edith Cobb in her study of three hundred childhood autobiographies, ... adult creativity emerges directly from

one's childhood sense of world and self' (quoted in Porteus 2004:154). Imagination springs from a special perceptual relationship to the physical environment. Chawla confirmed Cobb's study and found that the heightened awareness Cobb spoke about was characteristic of persons deeply involved with the arts and the humanities. People involved with science, abstraction, business and politics '... either omitted to mention childhood environments or spoke about them with detachment or rejection' (Porteus 1990:155).

Porteus finds similar results in his own research adding that the implications for the survival of humanity are profound. 'There is beginning to develop in Western consciousness, a deep unease concerning the role of business and science in shaping the future' (157).

The implications for cultivating place-conscious education are even greater.

Shearwater Finds a Home

Only three months after Shearwater commenced, we were alerted to the fact that a Convention Centre, largely used for wedding receptions was on the market. It was located out of town, along Left Bank Road.

It was called *The Willows*, its name inspired by a string of straggling willows that traced the banks of a dry watercourse. The willows growing in the dry waterway, immediately conjured childhood memories of my favourite play area among the willows in the creek, and of English images evoked by Kenneth Graham's *Wind in the Willows*, which I had read as a twelve year old.

Journal Entry May, 2005

*This experience brought to my attention a well-known reference from the writings of Marcel Proust. In his seven-volume, allegorical, autobiographical novel, *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913-27), (*Remembrance of Things Past*), he recounts an everyday event, the partaking of light refreshment. The narrator, on the tasting of tea and a madeleine cake, retrieves from his unconscious memory the landscape and people of his boyhood holidays in the village of Combray (Proust 1970).*

On seeing the willows, the creek, the fig tree and the cleared paddocks, I knew this property would become a magical place of imaginative play for children.

What was once part of a sub-tropical rainforest covering the Mullumbimby Creek flood plain was now cleared pastureland. A prominent feature in the paddocks was a large deciduous fig that would have taken root and sprouted following the clearing of the forest. Previous owners would have spared the tree in order to provide shelter for the stock from sun and storm. All that remained of the bush was a rainforest remnant clinging to the banks of Mullumbimby Creek, littered with rusting car bodies and discarded farm machinery.

At the front of the property bordering Left Bank Road, grew two broad girthed camphor laurels, whose arboreal shade lent the function centre a grove-like atmosphere that served as a setting for idyllic wedding photos.

The activity of people creates places, and places in turn imprint themselves on and influence people. Some of the world's finest literature invokes place, as do anecdotal tales, drawn from memory about dramatic interactions with the physical environment (Brierley 1998, 2004; Porteus 1990; Falkiner 1992a, 1992b).

Stories have a way of ‘appropriating the landscape’ (Partnow quoted in Green 2000: 26)) whereby the memories of a place and its human occupants become indivisible. People are often identified with place: Socrates and the Athenian agora, St John and Patmos, St Bernard of Clairvaux, Thoreau and Concord and Walden Pond, Wordsworth and his Lake Country, Monet and Giverny, Lawrence of Arabia and the photographer Olegas Truchanas and his protégé Peter Dombrovkis with the Tasmanian South-West wilderness. While walking through the streets of Rome, I encountered a nameplate on a residence commemorating the occasion of Goethe having taken rooms there while on his Italian journey. In Basel, I visited friends who rented an apartment in a house, which bore a plaque informing all, that it was the rectory in which Carl Gustav Jung once lived as a child with his family. The imagination is immediately stimulated. Place becomes a threshold over which we cross to our inner world. As Heidegger stated, ‘Place places man (sic) in such a way that it reveals the external bonds of his existence and at the same time the depths of his freedom and reality’ (quoted in Brierley 2004:11).

In an interview with a former student at Shearwater, I asked her about her experiences at school and how it had influenced her adult life.

My fondest memories are of my time at Shearwater. ... During the holidays, I couldn’t wait to get back to school and play in the trees down by the creek with my friends. I loved it when it rained and the dry watercourse filled up with rushing water. The teachers allowed us to play in it and get wet. ... As an artist, I get a lot of joy out of working nature themes into my designs. When I think about it, I guess the artwork we did at school and the natural environment I experienced in such a fun way has certainly had a big influence on who I am, what I do and how I do it. (Jasmine 2010, pers. comm. 19 July)

The creek, that magical childhood place of play that Jasmine referred to, is the major geographic feature of the property. Known as Mullumbimby Creek, it meanders along the school’s southern boundary.



Mullumbimby Creek as it flows along part of Shearwater's southern boundary

Its origins lie further to the west where it takes form as a tumbling waterfall, plummeting a hundred meters down the Koonyum Range escarpment to the valley floor below. Flowing past the school, Mullumbimby Creek converges with the Main Arm, under the Federation Bridge to form the Brunswick River. Skirting around Mt Chincogan, the Brunswick winds its way lazily towards its Pacific Ocean estuary.

The whole area is recognised as standing in Arakwal Country, a part of the Bundjalung Nation. This understanding came to be acknowledged by the Shearwater community on all formal occasions paying respect to the traditional custodial owners, both past and present.



Plaque located at the entrance to the Shearwater's Office acknowledging Indigenous (Arakwal) custodianship and the School's obligation to place. In many of the studies about place in Australia (Chatwin 1987; Flannery 2001; Mathews 2004; McKenna 2004; Read 2000; Rothwell 2007; Tacey 1995) and also in conversations with people I have spoken to, concern is voiced about the care and responsibility for land, place or country.

Land in the valley was selected for farming following World War I and was cleared to accommodate dairy cattle. The original milking bales on the purchased property was transformed into a craft space and was eventually demolished in favour of an extensive wood and metal workshop. A further set of milking bales (part of the next door property purchased by the school in 2006) still stands today and acts as a storage shed for grounds equipment.

On purchasing the property, a vegetation and fauna survey was immediately commenced by two parents of children attending the school, Dr Andrew Benwell, a botanist and ecologist, and Gary Opit. As part of this survey, they compiled a register of the vegetation and significant trees on the property and recorded them on a map. During their investigation they identified a rare and endangered species of sweet myrtle (*Gossia Fragrantissima*) growing on the creek bank, the first to be found in the Brunswick Valley area. Some other major rainforest trees identified included White

Booyung, Flame Trees, Hoop Pines, Lily Pillies, Coolamon, Red Cedar and Onion Cedar, White Fig and Moreton Bay Figs, Cabbage Tree and Bangalow Palms.

The property's potential as a wonderful site to build a learning community that was connected to real life was immediately realised. As an educator, the possibility of further cultivating the relationship between education and place inspired renewed enthusiasm. In my reading about place, I discovered what we were actively attempting to bring into being, was what theorists (Gomez 2005, Gruenewald 2004, Mumford 1946, Orr 1992, 1999) were highlighting as sorely missing and needed in education.

Taking into account what the phenomenologists, cultural critics, bioregionalists and humanist geographers tells us about place and what it can teach us, Gruenewald has gone to serious lengths to demonstrate the need for place-conscious education. He sees schools as places, which could lead the recovery of the quality of all our experiences and relationships: to ourselves, between each other, between the immediate environment and us and to society at large.

Ultimately, the kinds of places that we acknowledge and make possible will determine the kinds and the quality of human and nonhuman life in our communities, bioregions, and on our planet. This prospect suggests an active role for schools as centers of both inquiry and action in local, regional, and global space. (Gruenewald 2004:638)

The creek and the fig tree were immediately recognised by the school community as central to future planning and determined the positioning of the buildings and the design of the grounds. The fig tree and the creek have now become magical places of imagination where the children play.

Earth and mankind are inseparable and share a common fate. (Brierley 1998:21)

It is 4.00 am Eastern Standard Daylight Saving Time - pre-dawn. Once again I am finding myself re-editing this chapter, this time at home in Mullumbimby, stealing time from the call of my domestic and professional duties. The early morning darkness is still and quiet and I wonder what the bush turkey is doing. I have just returned from Hobart after spending time with my thesis supervisor. I turn inwards, processing an intense weekend of work in Hobart. Discussing understandings of place in Hobart has stirred memories of my undergraduate studies at the University of Tasmania. As a teenager, the allure of a 'sophisticated' student lifestyle of Hobart attracted my allegiance. In the face of discursive theoretical course work, I abandoned my childhood places and felt embarrassed by my country bumpkin origins.

Towards the end of my studies, I met a steady stream of hippies, young people who had fled the cities of the mainland in favour of a natural, country lifestyle, where place was important. At first I regarded their back-to-nature ideals as naïve and at the time, found nothing 'Romantic' about what I had experienced as a child, growing up in semi-rural environment. But soon after, I was made to realise that I had taken my childhood places for granted and so began my appreciation of the privileges they had provided. This coincided with a growing interest in Steiner education and the importance of a relationship between education and place.

It was some years before I discovered that there was an emerging study of place and that it had developed out of and in response to a historical body of work about place, particularly in the discipline of geography.

It is at this point that I find it relevant to insert a theoretical and historical context to my writing about place-conscious education.

A Chronology of Place

The following provides a brief chronological history of how place has been studied and examines some key concepts of the multi-disciplinary approaches to place relevant to their application in education. In summary form I also wish to trace the development of place as a studied concept, how it has come to be represented and how the reification of place has led to the suppression of place as a subjective expression in modern society. I will then proceed to explore the ways some of the humanist geographers, in the face of impending ecological disaster, have worked to recover place as a site of personal experience and learning.

Throughout the ancient world, including the Middle Ages, the role of place was uncontested. Aristotle was the first person to rationalise place. Reflecting the world-view of Greek philosophy, he considered place in relationship to space. In doing so he set the philosophic foundations for the debate between the positivist science of the Twentieth Century and the humanist, phenomenological based geographers and other contemporary scholars of place.

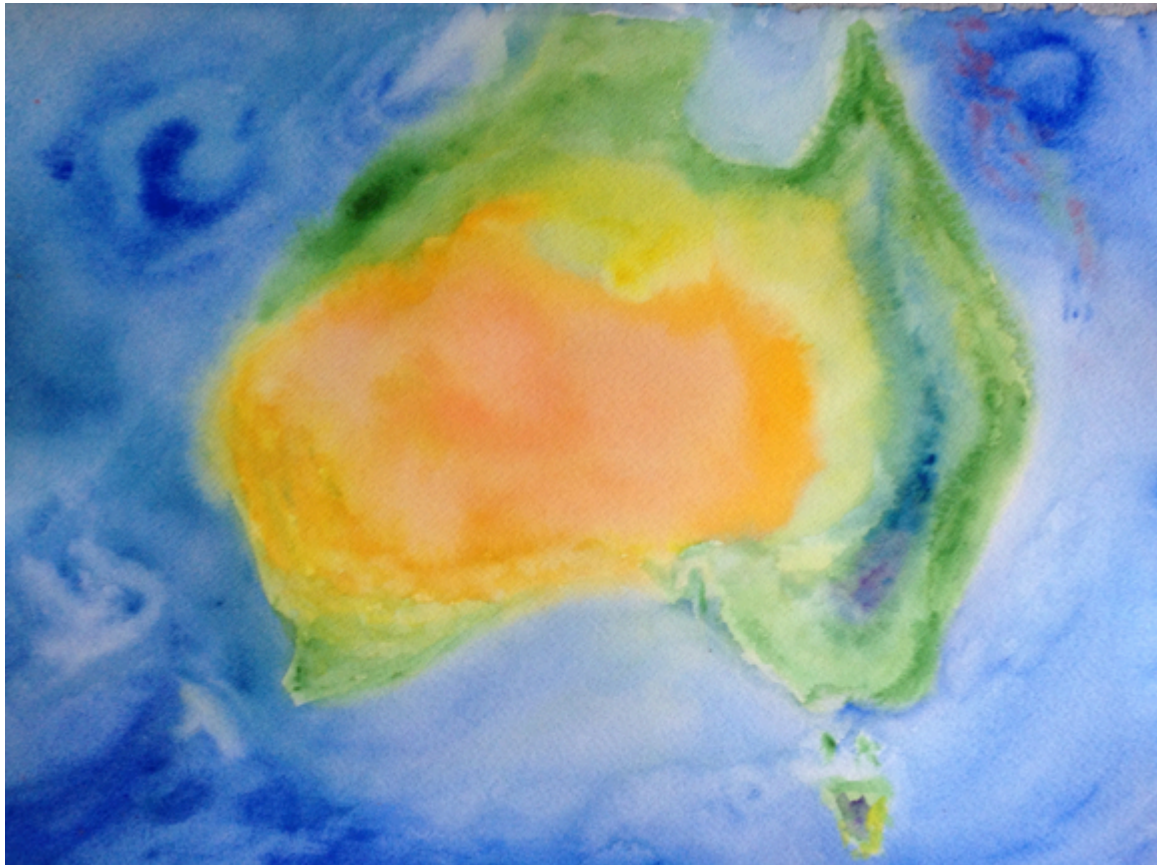
Aristotle considered the expansive nature of space, with its negative aspect of disintegrating place, in contrast to an inwardly working space that consolidated place. Aristotle identified these two concepts as ‘cosmogenesis’ (projection of the world as space) and ‘topogenesis’ (particular places in the world). He introduces the term ‘Chora’ (meaning to roam and the origin of the German word for space, ‘raum’) as an intermediary term which the Alexandrian astronomer/geographer Ptolemy and later



My grandchildren enjoying one of their favourite outdoors places on the northern shore of the Brunswick River estuary. (Photo: Joshua Rushton)

Ritter (one of the founders of modern geography) also employ with the term ‘chorography’, the study of particular places (cited in Brierley 1998). Creswell (2004) describes it as a spatial equivalent to time’s chronology.

The Classical geographer, Strabo, developed a descriptive methodology to suit the practical Romans whom he served. His work, as he said, was not designed for mathematicians but for statesmen who must know countries, natural resources, and customs.



Painted topographical map of Australia using watercolour paints (wet-on-wet technique) by an eleven-year-old in a Steiner School. Painting with a fluid medium encourages an aesthetic, holistic form of expression, free of abstract state borders and lines of latitude and longitude. (Photo: Shearwater archive)

It was at this time also that a gradual loosening of the relation between the divine and space became apparent. The Romans substituted the Greek term “cosmos” (thought of as internal space) with “universe” (infinite space). This shift became all-important in the Renaissance when the perimeters of space were broken. Employing rudimentary location technology (staff and astrolabe), the Renaissance pioneer explorers attempted to locate space in the world and discovered place.

In the Seventeenth Century, the reification of space found its scientific justification in the analytic geometry of René Descartes and its application to mapping. Following exploration and mapping came containment and mastery, in the forms of colonisation and the exploitation of natural and human resources.

Studies of place had been relegated to topographical location and meagre description. Space was enshrined as absolute, universal and a *tabula rasa* onto which generalised scientific laws could be inscribed and from which people had been removed. Thus the British Admiralty was able to declare the continent of Australia *terra nullius* and available for occupation and exploitation.

Influenced by Kant in the Eighteenth Century, von Humboldt and Ritter were concerned with establishing a geography that was free from the determinism of politics and more one in which natural, regional phenomena such as mountains, forests, plains and rivers predominated in suggesting boundaries. Factual knowledge alone was insufficient and required an integrating intelligence that related comparative detail to an idea of a whole. The Earth was also becoming regarded as the dwelling place of human beings and their influence on the environment was taken into account.

The influence of the Swiss educational reformer Johan Heinrich Pestalozzi on the German schools cannot be underestimated, along with his introduction of Rousseau's philosophy (which drew attention to the importance of human relationship to nature). Ritter, who had strong pedagogical interests, spent time at Pestalozzi's Yverdon Institute to study his method and later introduced it to his own teaching.

Ritter went on to develop a comparative chorological methodology with which he described the world in regions by employing horizontal and vertical viewpoints. As Brierley (1998) points out, he proceeded from the simple to the compound and established a totality of interrelated features so that the essence of each area, its character, became its focal point. Ritter then studied the impact that geography had on people.

Humboldt, a great observer and traveler and friend of Goethe, saw geography '... as a way of understanding the harmonious unity of the cosmos as a living whole, a unity in multiplicity.' (Brierley 1998:14) Humboldt understood geography as

heterogeneous, which regarding all objects as a natural unity, standing in a spatial relation to the whole of the earth's surface. The forces of nature are interconnected to the earth and these are to be studied comparatively. Also the human being is a microcosm of the earth and his or her development is intimately connected to the earth-macrocosm. Brierley goes on to stress that a sensitive teaching of the world as a living organism is vital to human development.

The Recovery of Place and the Rise of Humanist Geography

Place as a concept enables conversations across disciplines ... and links the local and the global (Somerville 2008:3).

Rebelling against the strictures of post-war materialism and a traumatized generation of returned servicemen and their families, the 'baby boomers' voiced their defiance to the status quo by rejecting the 'black-and-white' dualist Cold War generation of their parents with a psychedelic riot of colour and celebration. They grew their hair, adopted eastern philosophies, took mind-altering drugs, embraced sexual license, listened to 'outrageous' music, defied the draft, opposed the Vietnam War and their own governments, took their demonstrations to the streets and the barricades, supported marginal causes of race and gender and contemplated a new social order, reading Marxist literature, Marcuse, Jean-Paul Sartre and Marshall McLuhan. As the initial wave of energy broke onto the beach of established social order, many pursued their utopian dreams by abandoning the cities and settling in communes in the rural settings, rejecting technology and growing their own food organically.

Later, stimulated into action by the realisation of the finite energy resources, pollution of the planet, the deteriorating state of water quality, the alienation and suppression of subjectivity in society and the blatant politicisation and power appropriation of place, those so inclined in academia, the concerned geographers, sociologists, psychologists and philosophers (among them feminists) reopened the debate about values, ethics, the politics of science, identity and subjectivity.

Humanistic Geography proposed the core notions of the ‘body-subject’ to describe in a non-dualistic way the reciprocity of body and world, as well as the ‘intersubjectivity’ or the generally taken-for-granted sociocultural heritage through which we learn to behave in certain ways (Cresswell 2004).

Closely related to this humanistic theme was ‘.. the retrieval of **place, social space and landscape** ... ‘ (original emphasis) (Mels 2004:xiii)



Shearwater student working on reef research during a dive off North West Island, 2003. (Photo: Gerard Braithwaite, Shearwater archive)

The retrieval of place, social space and landscape was in contrast to the widespread disciplinary dominance of the positivist quantitative hegemony. Tuan (1974, 1977), Buttner (1979), Seamon (1979, 1980) and Relph (1976) developed place as the centre of ontological and epistemological inquiry on a par with the status accorded to theories on space. They looked to the continental philosophy of phenomenology for support. It has its roots in the philosophy of Edmund Husserl and Merleau Ponty who retrieved the importance and particularity of place by recognising bodily empowerment through lived experience (Mels 2004). The continued concern and support of other philosophers of place such as Heidegger, Bachelard, Malpas and Casey was more as a reaction to the hegemony of the reified spatial logic in the modern West (Mels 2004).



Learning in place. Shearwater Class 5 students cross-country skiing in the Mt Selwyn area of the Southern Highlands. Apart from the exhilarating experience of skiing, the students learn to appreciate traversing a landscape free of roads and designated pathways. (Photo: Shearwater archive)

The central premise of phenomenology is what Husserl calls ‘intentionality’, which is defined as the relationship of all acts of consciousness to objects of consciousness or phenomena. Relph (1976) argues that phenomena equates to

something in place. Humans exist in place and place determines experience. Place is no longer simply location, but the essence of ‘... unselfconscious intentionality that defines places as profound experiences of human existence’ (quoted in Cresswell 2004: 23).

The implication here of course, is that if the experience is in itself an object of consciousness, the human being is liberated from the constraints of place. Granted that thought always takes place in an embodied condition - alive, and the body can be considered as place, but the thought is free from the constraints of its initial experience. Like Ho Chi Minh’s experience of being locked in his windowless cell, one is able to know through experience, memory and the power of thought when the full moon is rising in the east. One may not witness it, but through imaginative thought one can participate in its contemplation.

Place was elevated from ideographic description to being viewed as a universal condition of being, and a way of being in the world began to accumulate a non-quantifiable vocabulary of human associations such as ‘value’, ‘belonging’, ‘experience’ and ‘meaning’.

Even though scholars would agree that an understanding of place is fundamental to understanding the nature of our relationships to each other and to the world, (Gruenewald 2003) research about the concept of place in relationship to education as a concept is under-theorised (Somerville 2008). As a Waldorf teacher and a geographer, Brierley (1998; 2004), recognises the contribution of Steiner.

It is early morning and once again I find myself struggling with the editing of this work. The caroling dawn song of the bush calls me back to the immediacy of place. The journey into the theory of place and the recollections of place making activities at Shearwater have drawn me away into that interior space which I refer

to as 'thesis world'. Is this the inner landscape that Gerald Manly Hopkins, the English poet referred to as Inscap? Is this the *paysage interieur*, the inner place that the French symbolist poets, Rimbaud and Baudelaire were exploring long before Freud and Jung?

Are our memories of place, as Marcel Proust suggests, little more than a " ... *thin slice* held between the contiguous impressions that composed our life at the time, remembrance for a particular form is but regret for a particular moment, and houses, roads, avenues are fugitives, *alas as the years?*" (Quoted in Brierley 2004: 13).

I decided to take myself away from the computer and walk into the back of my property here in Mullumbimby and stretch out. I catch sight of the bush turkey striding purposefully along his beat next to the fence among the trees. I tidy up the fallen palm fronds as a gesture to a neglected commitment to keep the place tidy and halt the relentless advance of the rainforest into our living space. I have been working in Yallingup, Western Australia, and a long way from home. I notice with concern that the regenerating undergrowth has become overgrowth. What is more alarming is the rapid spread of an introduced ground-cover exotic that has colonised the forest floor. I immediately turn to weeding, but as with the cleaning of the palm fronds, it is but a utopian gesture of promised intention.

In the still morning air I turn to reflection on my motivation and intention: is this attempt at order a metaphor for the state of my own inner space? Is the writing of this thesis a hubristic attempt to control those potent primal forces that surge from deep within? I shudder. History and my own observations have informed me that those subterranean forces, if ignored or suppressed, have a tendency to break

their shackles and institute their own regime, that registers to the unprepared as chaos. I look down to the creek that flows at the back of the property. It is the same as creek that flows past Shearwater. I recall its neglected state when we first acquired the school property; the rusted car bodies and the straggling rainforest remnant clinging to its banks and then my visit back to the school yesterday, experiencing the satisfaction of seeing the luxuriant regeneration of the plant life that has occurred as a result of thoughtful planning and over fifteen years of continual nurture. As the theory suggests, working in harmony with nature has positive healing effects. My thoughts turn to those turbulent inner stirrings of the unknown. All my intuitive impulses urge me give these forces their due, work with them and allow them to emerge and contribute to our society and culture in a creative way.

Working and Teaching with Place The Mullumbimby Creek Regeneration Program

In this school [Shearwater], place serves as inspiration for lesson content. (Upitis 2007:6)

Inspired to protect the Sweet Myrtle, of which at that time, only seven specimens were known to exist, Gerard Braithwaite, one of the School's founding class teachers, incorporated bush regeneration as a regular part of the Shearwater's Learning Program. Working with his Class 7, he applied for and received a modest grant to commence a rainforest creek regeneration program that centred on the protection of the Sweet Myrtle. Working with sensitivity to place, what could have remained a theoretical lesson became an experiential, hands-on project that encompassed applied ethics and meaningful values. The lesson activity involved the clearing of tree weeds (camphor laurel and privet) and the planting of native rainforest trees to help reinforce the stability of the creek bank. The banks were vulnerable to damaging erosion whenever regular heavy rains fell. It was common for the rain gauges to record falls of 200 mm

over 48 hours, enough to cause severe flooding and closing off vehicular access to the school and shutting it down. On a number of occasions, buses were called before the end of the school day to evacuate children back to their homes to avoid being stranded at school. An application for a grant of money from the NSW Eco Schools was made and in 1997, \$1500 was received to commence the program. With this grant, 300 rainforest trees were purchased and planted as well as 5 cubic meters of mulch, which was used spread around the new plantings (Gerard Braithwaite 2011, pers. comm., 15 July).



Bush regeneration regrowth along the banks of the creek – ten years after.

This lesson activity has since become enshrined as part of Shearwater's Year 7 Learning Program. In 2001, Gerard's work was taken up with dedication and enthusiasm by a school parent, Ken Ohlson. Ken's interest in bush regeneration arose out of his vision of living and being part of a community settlement in the 1970s. Working in the Public Service (Australian Taxation Office) in Brisbane, he had, by 1984 saved enough to buy a share in the Webster's Creek Community, a multiple occupancy (MO) near Nimbin. Committed to bush regeneration, he studied a Certificate III course in Land Management and Conservation. In mid 1995, he moved to Ocean Shores with his family and enrolled his daughter Rose in the Byron Bay Community School. Only catering to primary age children, Ken sought out a suitable high school and enrolled her at Shearwater in 2001.

Being a stand-alone school and relying on the community support of parents, both Stan Stevens and myself conducted an enrolment interview with every single parent. It was also an induction process where the parents were given an outline of the educational philosophy of the School as well as its community aspirations and values. This included a survey of the parent's interests and skills, which the School might at one time or another draw on. We realised there were many people with place making skills who were not educators as such but who could share their skills and knowledge to the community. On hearing about Ken's skills and interest in bush regeneration, we offered Ken an opportunity of future employment working with Shearwater's Mullumbimby Creek Regeneration program as a groundsman. Ken's initial response was voluntary. Currently Ken still manages the program.

Ken took the offer seriously and soon realised the enormity of the job and that to do it well, it would be years in the making. The creek with its riparian rainforest remnant has suffered severe degeneration. Rusting car bodies and discarded farm machinery littered its banks and invasive and difficult to eradicate tree weeds (camphor laurel, coral trees and privet) and ground weeds (lantana, freckle face, velcro weed and introduced pasture legumes) required removal. A disused weir, built in the 1960s by the NSW State Water and the Department of Primary industry also demanded attention. The challenge was extended when Shearwater purchased an additional parcel

of land adjoining its property in 2005, which added a further 500 meters of creek frontage that became part of the regeneration program (K Ohlson 2011, pers. comm. 23 May).

Support for the program came in the form of neighbours and government environmental grants. Sharing part of the creek's southern banks was the Mullumbimby Creek Native Nursery, whose owners Jo and Brad Green, had also commenced their own rainforest tree-planting program. It was from their nursery that most of the subsequent acquisition of native trees ground plants was made. Adjoining their property is a cattle farm owned by Ray Musgrave, who was happy to maintain the status quo. Next to this property was *Acaria*, a biodynamic farm owned by Stefan Mager, managed by Barry Phee, a former grounds man and parent at Shearwater. *Acaria* was also sympathetic and supportive of the Shearwater Creek regeneration program.

Following up Gerard Braithwaite's successful grant application, Ken applied his public service skills in securing grants of over \$51,000 to continue the program. The Creek program was largely funded by the Eco Schools Grant, which biennially made allocation of money available to successful School applications. Monies were also received from the Australian Government Enviro Fund. During the following fifteen years, Ken and the students planted and noted in the School's Plant Register some 7,000 native rainforest trees and 5,000 native ground cover plants (mainly lomandra – a hardy perennial herb, and dianella – commonly known as the flax lily). Both these plants have robust root systems and aid in erosion control. Over the following years, Ken in his methodical manner, divided the creek into manageable project sectors, for which grants were applied for, received and completed.

The Educational Aspect

The practical implementation of the Stage Four Environmental Science Program is realised through the Creek Regeneration Project. Considered strong enough

and capable of wielding saws, secateurs, spades, hoe and mattocks, the students are able to experience a rainforest environment at first hand. As primary age children, they had played in parts of the rainforest area but now the difficulties of removing lantana, velcro weed and coral tree roots provided a sharp remove from classroom theory.

Following weed removal, largely with help of Ken and other groundsmen, is planting. Ken has developed a tree planting process that has assured a 90% success rate. It involves digging a hole, placing in water crystal and a small amount of dynamic lifter long life (fertiliser), covering this with soil, planting the tree and then adding more fertiliser, newspaper mulch and finally a layer of sugar cane mulch (obtained from the local plantations).

Over the fifteen years of continuous work, 12,000 trees and ground cover plants have been added to the creek banks. The earliest projects now boast ten-meter trees and mature palms and shrubs, where a new generation of children plays.

The Built Environment

The buildings are an element in the rural landscape. (D Jacobson 2011, pers. comm. 11 May)

The design and construction of buildings is an activity embodying conscious intention that influences and is influenced by the environment and the human community. The level of this consciousness varies in the community and a successful building program and its managers are required to allocate considerable amount of time in communicating with a diverse section of the community. As a school in Australia, communication with all three tiers of government is required: local, state and federal. Educationally, school registration (state responsibility) and subsequent eligibility for government per capita funding (federal and state) are critical to a school's financial sustainability. Funds for building programs (federal) and in NSW, a

state sponsored interest subsidy scheme were also crucial in building a school with little private finance. Building, health, roads and transport and planning permission comes largely under the jurisdiction of local government. Then there are the neighbours and the immediate interest groups whose needs would want to be considered in the design process: teachers, parents, friends of the school, the children and the builders (including tradesmen and building suppliers). An experienced and tactful architect and/or project manager can save much time, money and stress.

Calling on my long professional and personal association with David Jacobson, I made contact with my architect friend and invited him to visit Shearwater, soon after the purchase of the Mullumbimby Creek site in June of 1993. After addressing the staff and parents, he was commissioned to survey the site and develop a footprint in preparation for the development of a master plan.

The Brief

Part of the consultation process involved developing a brief. David had already had extensive experience in designing Steiner Schools throughout Australia – Lorien Novalis School, Kamaroi, stages of the Glenaeon School and Blue Mountains (New South Wales). His work partner Mark Baxter had also designed the West Coast Steiner School, (Western Australia), Mt Barker (Adelaide) and a stage of the Yallingup Steiner School, Western Australia).

As a founding pupil of Glenaeon, David was fully conversant with the basic principles of Steiner education. His mother, Vera became a founding teacher at Glenaeon and his father Sturmer was also an architect and student of Anthroposophy. David's knowledge had been reinforced by a deepened study and exploration of child development and the Steiner learning program while developing Lorien Novalis School's architectural plans. This process involved working with the teachers of the school and with its spiritual mentor, Douglas Waugh, a one-time student of the American environmental architect, Walter Burley Griffin. During his undergraduate

studies at Sydney University, this awareness of the environment and spirit of place was reinforced by two of his esteemed teachers, Glenn Murcutt and Richard Leplastrier, who placed high value on the importance of the environment in determining design. Their work has since been highly regarded both nationally and internationally. ([http://www.ozetecture.org/2012/glenn-murcutt-architecture/Architecture and Place](http://www.ozetecture.org/2012/glenn-murcutt-architecture/Architecture%20and%20Place), [Architecture AU architectureau.com/articles/architecture-and-place/](http://ArchitectureAU.com/articles/architecture-and-place/)).

Living and working in Manly, David also became involved with a local social activist group, The Friends of Manly, who formed in response to an insensitive development proposal on the Manly foreshore. The group ran an intensive campaign as part of the Council elections. David was among those on the Friends of Manly ticket and the team was duly elected. He was subsequently voted in as Deputy Mayor. His four-year term on the Manly Council made him thoroughly conversant with local and state planning policies and their formulation (David Jacobson 2011 pers. comm. 12 April).

Due to our already extensive professional relationship, I had acquired an acknowledgement of the importance of place in architectural design. Taking account of Benwell and Opit's survey of the site and Gary and Carmel Opit's Seasonal Synopsis of the regional activity of its flora and fauna, we walked the property and studied the local geography and history of its human habitation. Following considered reflection, David took as his design focus for the School buildings a maturing white fig tree (*Ficus Virens*). Before committing to the design, this deciduous species of fig was inspected by a tree specialist and was estimated to be some 50 years old, in a healthy condition and had an expected life span of 200 years. Since then the primary school, library and administration buildings partially encircle this fine specimen (Shearwater 2006:11)

As a school, we were seeking to have designed buildings to harmonise with the environment, and in the process, we sought to accommodate its prevailing climatic

weather patterns, and reflect the school's values. These include its environmental concerns, use of sustainable materials, cultural and educational understandings (taking into account the stages of child development), aesthetic considerations and social vision (Korobacz 1993, Notes for architectural design brief).

Architectural Master Planning

In 1994, David Jacobson was appointed by the Shearwater to develop an architectural master plan for the school. Details of this were presented to the school in early 1995. (See Figure 4, 5 and 6)

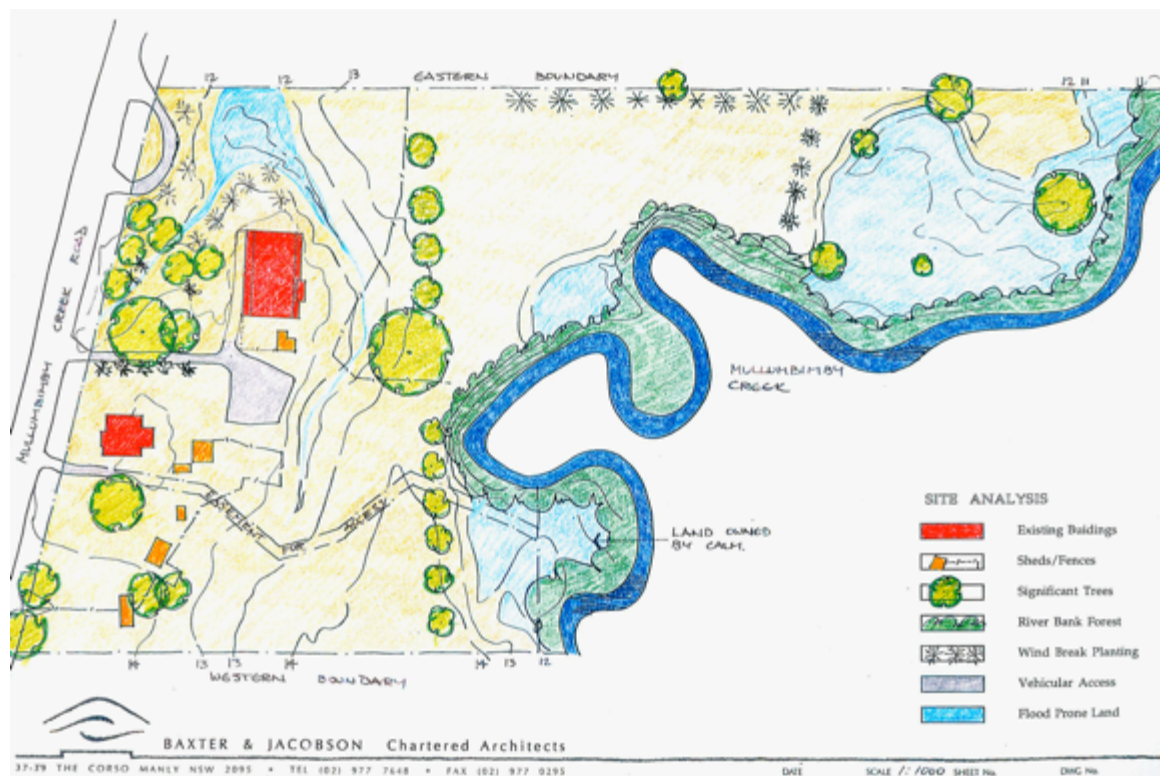


Figure 4 Site plan of the 'The Willows' at the time of the second land purchase. (Baxter & Jacobson)

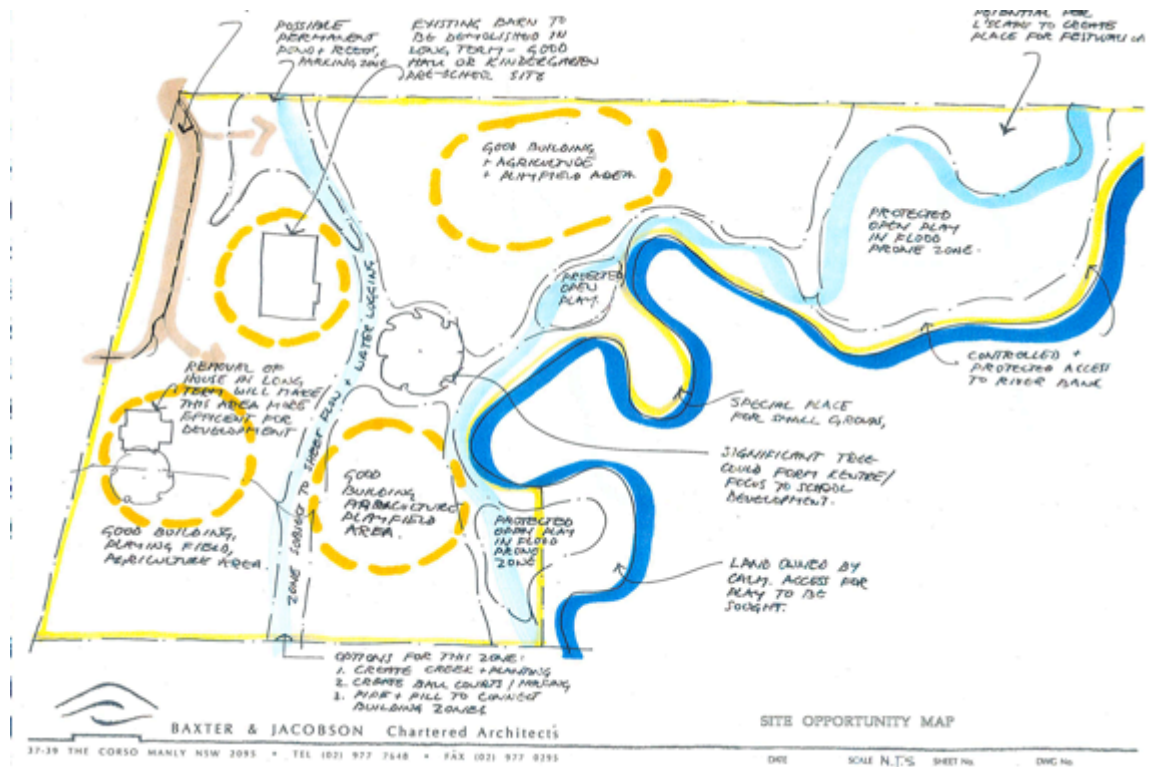


Figure 5 Site Opportunity map. (Baxter & Jacobson, 1995)

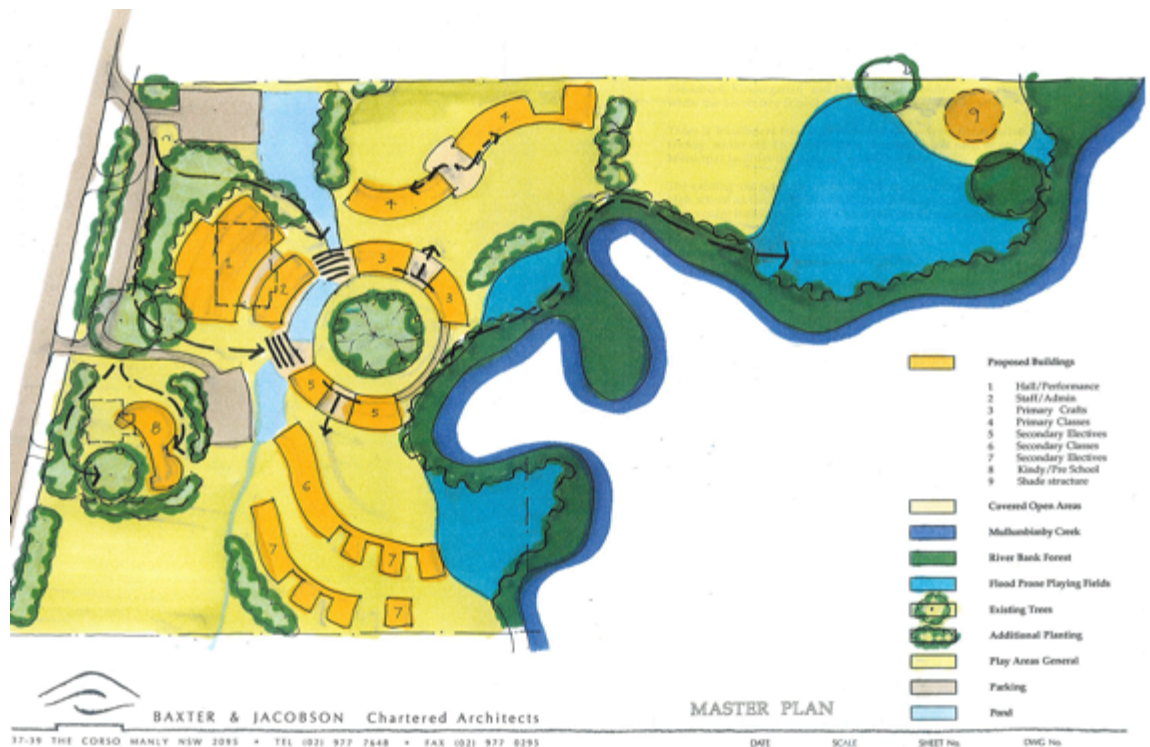


Figure 6. Original Master Plan for Shearwater. Design by Baxter & Jacobson, 1995.