Chapter 1: From Place to Planet: The role of the language arts in reading environmental identities from the UK to New Zealand.

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From here to there

The environmental crisis is now a prominent theme in literature, media, and non-fiction and more recently in theatre. This is the cultural arena where environmental identities are tried on and tested and by writers, readers and audiences. Teachers of the language arts have a vital role in mediating environmental identities through their engagement in this discourse and debate. There are many possible avenues to follow (see Matthewman, 2011) but the representation of place is a good place to start, not least in relation to its currency and value in educational discourse (see Comber, 2015 and Gruenewald & Smith, 2008). In this chapter I will examine the ways that teachers in New Zealand secondary schools have worked to inform environmental identities through a focus on place and belonging. I began writing about the connections between English and environment as a teacher educator in the UK. My move to New Zealand has highlighted for me how a sense of place and identity is central to an interpretation of texts.

Cockney translation

When I read Andrew Motion's poem ‘Sparrow’in 2004 and designed a lesson activity to use with Year 7 students in Bristol, UK,my focus was on the bird and its habitat while the sense of place was taken for granted (Motion, 2004, p.143). I followed Motion’s account of his poem which talks about place in general terms as ‘country’ or ‘town’ (Burnside & Riorden, 2004, p.246). However, when I used this poem as part of a professional development day with Auckland teachers in New Zealand in 2015, the interconnection between culture and ecology and the specificity of place was brought into sharper focus. In the next section I will outline the moves in the lesson sequence as it was framed in the UK and follow by an account of how this evolved in relation to the nature and culture of New Zealand.

The first move in the sequence was to withhold the title but to notice that each line is an act of naming, a noun phrase which follows the form of the Anglo-Saxon 'kenning' - something is being named - what is it? These range from the descriptive, 'puddle bather' to the punning 'hedgerow flasher' to the lyrical 'heaven filler' (Motion, p.143). Conveniently there are thirty of these kennings which can be distributed around the average class and analysed individually and in pairs to draw out clues and connotations. Thoughts in relation to the kennings were collated on the board under headings such as: 'characteristics of the species'; 'habitats'; and the 'human attitudes to the species'. This was usually a good point to reveal that the lines make up a whole poem leading into a performance with students standing to read out their lines (in numbered order) with the teacher voicing the refrain 'No longer'. Students had probably already begun to make guesses at the species and this was encouraged in relation to the teaching point that 'this is a species that has adapted to live alongside humans in multiple environments - both urban and rural.' Before the answer of 'sparrow' was either guessed or finally revealed by the teacher, the possibility of a range of various birds and creatures such as spiders, rats, pigeons had been considered. The significance of the refrain 'no longer' is brought into focus once the sparrow has been considered as a familiar bird held in some affection by the poet. Why no longer? What has happened to the sparrow? What have we lost? What is the purpose and value of this 'ecopoem' which appeared in the anthology *Wild Reckoning* (Burnside & Riorden, 2004)*?* This anthology commemorated the fortieth anniversary of the publication *Silent Spring*, the seminal text of the environmental movement (Carson, 1962). For older students the sparrow poem segued well into a reading of the opening fable in *Silent Spring* which describes a small town in America where nature has been steadily poisoned and where no birds sing. A creative alternative was to research their choice of an endangered species as a prelude to writing their own kenning poem. Teaching the poem to student teachers of English I suggested that pupils could write an ecocritical introduction to the poem for an environmental publication based on their research into the disappearance of the sparrow.

But in New Zealand, sparrows are plentiful. When I arrived in Auckland I was pleased to see masses of them everywhere, jumping onto urban cafe tables, squabbling in the kanuka trees or flocking for bread in my 'backyard'. Clearly the refrain 'no longer' did not apply here. Also, when I came to teach the poem in New

Zealand I realised more acutely that rather than ‘capturing the 'sparrowness of sparrows wherever they are (or are not any more)’ the sparrow in Motion's poem is viewed through the lens of Englishness and lives in English places (Burnside & Riorden, p.246). Expressions such as 'cocky bugger', 'hedgerow flasher,' 'stubble scrounger' and even 'country clubber' need glossing as these reflect the idioms of English speech and there are no hedgerows in New Zealandand the only stubble to be seen around Auckland is of the designer variety. Rather than being a problem, this difference is a point of interest raising a new set of questions: How would the poem change if it was written about sparrows in New Zealand? What lines would need tobe altered? What lines could be added? One teacher commented that sparrows in New Zealand count as pests because as scavengers they compete more successfully for scraps than the native bird scavengers. This New Zealand environmental perspective could be set against environmental perspectives which suggest that other environmental focuses such as habitat loss are more important (Inger et al, 2015; Peach, Vincent, Fowler & Grice, 2008). Of course the elegiac tone of the poem does not make sense in New Zealand in relation to the abundance of sparrows but at one time, not so long ago, it would not have made sense in England. 'The best-documented change has occurred in London where numbers of breeding sparrows declined by 60% between 1994 and 2004' (Raven, Noble & Baillie, 2005 in Peach et al, 2008, p. 1).This might be especially poignant as sparrows were part of a London identity and argot - the 'cockney sparrer' - an underfed city child. Moreover the decline of the sparrow has been linked to the 'great thinning' of the insect population in Britain (Summers-Smith, 2003). Nature writer Michael McCarthy’s book, *The Moth Snowstorm: Nature and Joy* (2015) describes the rapid disappearance of British wildlife since the Second World War, which is closely linked to the intensification of farming and the use of pesticides, herbicides and fertilisers. McCarthy writes, “The country I was born into, possessed something wonderful it absolutely possesses no longer: natural abundance . . . Blessed, unregarded abundance has been destroyed.” His most sobering example is the blizzard of insects that used to obscure the windscreen of the car on a summer's evening in England, a phenomenon that will only be remembered by people over the age of fifty. This example makes the teaching point of how rapidly the ecology can change and natural taonga (treasures) can be lost, requiring awareness of threats and the importance of protection not just of species, but of ecosystems. It is easy to transfer the activity to a bird in danger of

extinction in New Zealand - unfortunately there are plenty of critical and endangered species to choose from - the most familiar ones being the kiwi (all five species), takahe, black Robin and the kea.

Of course the significance of the lesson sequence is lost if all the cultural, environmental and ecological context is stripped away in the rush to guess, or to perform, or to write. This is the basis for an ecological lesson sequence rather than a stand alone lesson, and it would work well as part of a cross-curricular collaboration. Teaching this sequence ecocritically requires the teacher to impart and to manage knowledge and research into environmental issues in relation to the text. But good English teachers have always researched and prepared the contexts of texts - knowing that a strong interpretation is informed by knowledge - rather than leaving students with only their own hunches, guesses and feelings. The difference is that the environment has only relatively recently emerged as a context for literary criticism, whereas race and gender have long been 'hot topics' (Glotfelty, 1996, p.xvi).Motion's stated aim in writing the poem is environmental: 'to invite readers to consider the plight of all kinds of endangered species – the humble as well as the exotic' (Burnside & Riorden, 2004, p.246).In teaching 'Sparrow' in relation to a sense of place teachers can inform the local environmental identities of students with a sense of pride and wonder. For instance, when asked about significant wildlife in New Zealand which could be equivalent to the sparrow , one student quipped derisively 'well we've got a flightless bird.' This could have been countered with 'Yes, and do you know why the kiwi is unique to New Zealand and has become the defining symbol of our culture?'Followed by 'How many other native species do we have?'[1]

Environmental identities

In New Zealand I have been leading a two year research project *Tuhia ki te Ao: Write to the natural world* (Matthewman, 2016) which is focusing on the ways that teachers can engage *ecocritically* with texts so as to *inform* students' environmental identities.

Within the project we have used the term "environmental identities" to refer to the shifting mix of knowledge, understanding, values and attitudes that people hold about

[1]There are 70,000 native species of plants and animals and many of these, like the kiwi, are endemic. (Brockie, 2016)

their relationship to the natural world, their understanding of their physical place in the world and the relationship between their culture and nature. Environmental identities may be shaped by a wide variety of influences including the mass media and the everyday acts of living within a culture. We seek to emphasise in the project that environmental identities are not fixed; they develop and change over time, and are affected by physical and social location. Underpinning the project is the idea that school subjects are important sources of feelings, knowledge and values that can inform and draw on environmental identities. Clayton (2003) emphasises the 'sense of connection to some part of the non-human natural environment, based on history, emotional attachment, and/or similarity, that affects the ways in which we perceive and act toward the world' (p.45). From this we derive four aspects ofenvironmental identity to consider in our planning: a sense of place and belonging; attitudes to animals and plants; involvement in group activities related to the environment and a sense of the natural world as interconnected. Crompton & Kasser (2009) argue that 'it is at this level of values and identity that environmental communication must aim since only a change of identity can make a real difference to people's behaviour' (p.7). This sits easily with the focus in English on 'personal growth,' albeit from a less familiar angle.

Another continuity arises from within the wider discipline of English in relation to the significant addition of ecocriticism to the canon of literary criticism.[2] Put simply, ecocriticism studies the relationship between the physical environment and cultural representations. Lawrence Buell (2001)one of the most influential ecocritics also draws a link between identity and environmental action. He examines a range of literary representations of environmental issues alongside reviews of prominent historical environmental case studies (such as love canal and the Exxon Valdez) which lead him to conclude that 'an awakened sense of physical location and of belonging to some sort of place-based community have a great deal to do with activating environmental concern'(p. 56). Initial work in our project *Tuhia ki te Ao*has gravitated towards articulating place and belonging in relation to the themes that teachers have chosen to pursue in their work. In the context of New Zealand the question of who belongs and who *most* or *really* belongs is both fraught and sensitive.

[2]Ecocriticism is now an established field with entries in the major introductions to literacy criticism and theory (see for example Barry, 2002).

Cultural protocol decrees that greetings must be given in a certain order, first to Māori (as the first people), then to the colonial islands in order of their historical connection. Formal meetings in our education department begin with a welcome in Māori with the speaker stating his or her place and ancestry (the 'pepeha'). These expressions of a hierarchy of belonging mean that individuals from any culture (including Māori) are already inserted into a discursive history of post-colonial territorial disputes. Belonging in Aotearoa New Zealand involves negotiating your part in sedimented layers of history and protocol which can feel exclusive and hierarchical whoever you are.Our research shows that students have affiliations and views of place and environment which are part of their cultural identity and which are embedded or *implicit* within cultural literacy practices. Conversely, alienation from the natural environment and the experience of displacement through migration or through changes to home environments can cause a profound sense of dissonance (Nixon, 2011). To attempt to counter this alienation, the school curriculum, and the teaching and learning that take place in subjects, has the potential to inform, draw on and help *explicitly* develop students' environmental identities in positive ways.

Environmental identity is not just a matter of dimensions of environmental concern but involves cultural mediation and labelling. Students are exposed to available constructions of environmental identity in the media, literature and the culture of everyday life. In New Zealand these can be recognised as: Māori kaitiakitanga; pakeha settler; New Zealand conservationist; New Zealand 100% Pure; and the global eco-being. These environmental identities may be provisionally sketched as follows:

Māori Kaitiakitanga*:* This indigenous perspective holds that Māori have a literal ancestry and kinship to the natural world (Mataama & Temara, 2010). This is expressed through myths and stories of relationship and belonging to the land. Māori groups (iwi and hapū) have particular historical connections to land areas and they have the status of *kaitiakis* - guardians with an inherited obligation to protect the land. While the status of kaitiaki is often appropriated in mainstream environmental discourse the meaning of this word is held to be sacred and appropriate only to Māori as people of the land (Mutu, 2010). But as many Māori are now urban dwellers with broken links to the land this may be an equally difficult identity to inhabit for most

Māori as well as for Pakeha. However, it offers an important and high status alternative to a resource based view of the environment.

Pakeha settler identity: Pakeha (Non-Māori or more commonly used in relation to New Zealanders of European descent) have long ties to farming reflecting the historical importance of New Zealand agriculture to Britain. This may be represented as a caring and productive relationship (Stephenson, 2010). It is of course a contested environmental position as the waterways are increasingly polluted by dairy farming and fertiliser and pesticide run off. As former All Black captain and 'national hero', Richie McCaw said in a recent advert for the milk company Fonterra - 'people say that farmers don't care much about the land' and then he listens, nodding to the farming couple who explain their efforts to protect, plant and regenerate. This identity of working your land is very strong in New Zealand and is present in many a suburban backyard cum smallholding. Homes are referred to routinely as 'properties' in general conversation and improvement of both land and property is part of a deepseated belief in ownership, progress and development. 'Bring on the weekend' is the advertising slogan of DIY giant Mitre 10 reflecting and contructing a kiwi obsession with weekend improvement projects.

New Zealand conservationist: This identity is dominant within education and aligned to the New Zealand Department of Conservation. It is focussed on the protection of native species. New Zealand has a delicate ecosystem highly vulnerable to foreign fauna and flora. The solution is radically anti-alien with poison dropped to kill pests in remote forest areas, strict biosecurity and gated 'pure zones'. It is a dominant attitude to nature that views any non native, even if innocuous, as suspect, or at least valueless. "It's non native" means it can be easily dismissed, culled or chopped down. Planting days and 'working bees' to clear weeds are common activities in rural and semi-rural primary schools but are less prevalent in secondary schools where the main focus is on high stakes assessment.

New Zealand = 100%Pure: This is the view of New Zealand that is most likely to be available to British readers through the famous advertising campaign: 'The 100% Pure New Zealand brand has defined how our country and our exports are viewed across the globe' (Ministry of Tourism, 2016). It is an identity that embraces the recreational

potential of New Zealand natural spaces and accepts uncritically the notion of New Zealand as environmentally enlightened and blessed; as one social sciences teacher in the project commented ‘we still have a lot of nature compared to other countries’. The concept of Kaitiakitanga is juxtaposed with the values of the market: 'The product we are selling is New Zealand itself — the people, the places, the food, the wine, the experiences.' (ibid) The main problem with this identity is that it can lead to a complacent celebration of landscape and amenities without an awareness that the environment is a process and is under threat (see Matthewman, 2013 for discussion).

The global eco-being: this is a more general environmental identity which involves shopping second hand, growing food, taking sustainable transport options, eating vegetarian or at least organic, and being involved in environmental campaigns. However, given that this is a global *middle class* identity, air travel is likely to be a blind spot. Embracing this identity may earn you the dismissive epithet of "greenie" or "hippy" which is a common response in New Zealand to anything which threatens the 'commonsense' of maximising the resource potential of the land.

The problem is that these identities may not seem especially attractive or available to urban and suburban children many of whom are immigrants who not fully enculturated into being 'New Zealanders'.[3]And evidently there are problematic and contradictory elements in all of these positions. These identities have all been raised in our project classroom observations largely as implicit ‘givens’ rather than as positions to be explored and critiqued. For example in Social Sciences the teacher listed up essentialised comments about Māorimade by students such as: ‘land is sacred to them’, ‘they are very traditional and respect their land’, ‘The land is like family to them’ which was contrasted with a destructive Pakeha viewpoint: ‘we don’t think of the consequences’. These views were left uncontested creating a problematic in- group versus out-group identity which can work against constructive behaviours (Crompton & Kasser, 2009). The environment remains someone else's responsibility (Māori) or conversely someone else's fault (Pakeha). A resonant example is the often

[3]Over 3.25 million of the 4.5 million people in New Zealand live in a main urban area. http://www.stats.govt.nz/browse_for_stats/Maps_and_geography/Geographic-areas/urban-rural-profile-update.aspx

studied play *Waiora* in which the Pakeha mill owner, Steve, surveys the view and says to Hone, his Māoriforeman:

> It's a beautiful place here, eh? You could do a lot with it. That land over there – you could pick it up for a song. Burn it off, plant pine and in 30 years' time you could mill it. Make a fortune…the māoris I know they'd probably get up on that hill and watch the sunset. (Kouka, 1997, p.81).

It is challenging to move students on from stereotypes to consider that identities are not fixed and are always nuanced – and this would be possible and available in this play through a sensitive reading of the character of Hone. Working towards a more nuanced and critical understanding of the complexity of environmental identities is an important function and potential of close reading of text and place in relation to environmental context. However it requires strong teacher mediation in leading debate and discussion and offering alternative perspectives and readings. For instance, students were introduced to a recognisably 'New Age' definition of an eco-poem on YouTube which led one student to respond that ecopoems are written by 'greenies' and another to offer that it sounded like 'the sort of thing that hippies would write'. The YouTube representation of eco-poetry could have been contrasted with a more political definition such as that available in the anthology *Earthshattering* (Astley, 2007). Working with a strong example, such as 'Sparrow' or *Waiora*, allows the teacher to prepare to discuss the differences between cultural perspectives on environmental issues. Learning to be eco-critical means being aware of the identities that are available and represented and debating the contradictions and problems in a global as well as a national context.

Environmental knowledge

One of the major challenges for teachers in the project has been judging how to introduce ecological knowledge to be integral to the activity and consistent with the subject discipline. Students may be unaware of what they need to know or how to research and this is reflected in the vignette that follows:

A feeling for somewhere...

It is July and a chilly winter's day (for Auckland). Students huddle outside a portacabin classroom but once inside, it is stiflingly hot and Newton comments that he has had to complain about the heating. The room is cramped and dark and the computers have a heavy look. Students sit down and the familiar complaints about slow log in begin. Newton is busy settling the class and dealing with issues. It becomes clear that several of the computers are not working or have no Internet access. The students with working computers know what they have to do and are scrolling and selecting images from the Internet. There are maps, flags, pictures of beaches, waterfalls, Marae[4], food, a couple of city scenes. Newton prompts "It's got to be about you. Remember we talked about culture – where you live… where your family is from." Later he interjects "Remember that idea of sustainability – how is that perspective in your culture?" and again picking up on an individual question he reminds the class "what does sustainability mean? How will we keep the environment for future generations? Like how do we sustain a conversation – keep it going?"

Diane is working on her PowerPoint presentation. She has chosen iconic tourist scenes of the Coromandel: a picture of the famous railway and an image of the viewpoint tower. I am surprised when she says that she has never been on the train or to the viewpoint. "It's just a picture of the environment." She selects an image of a beach in Coromandel. To her, this represents the beach where her father and grandfather built their own bach[5] although she can't remember where exactly in the Coromandel this is or give any place names. She says that she goes on holiday there every year and has good memories of it. Danni works in a fairly leisurely but focused way on compiling her three slides. She has discussion with her partner about what the task is about:

"It's culture!"

"No, it's environment!"

"It's a bit of both."

They confirm this with Newton who tries to draw out how her work connects to sustainability. He asks her about how she would feel about the beach if there were buildings there.

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[4]A māori meeting house.

[5]Traditionally a wooden holiday home by the sea.

This vignette illustrates a common feature of our observations and discussion with students at the school about their favoured places which are often located far from where they live. Diane clearly has a long history with her place in the Coromandel and a deep feeling for it as she describes how her father has taken up the task of working on and renovating the family bach, built by her grandfather. To her, the precise location does not seem to matter while the images are generic and symbolic representing her imaginary sense of the Coromandel in relation to her small and special place within it. It is far from the urban and often edgy setting of South Auckland.

While this feeling for place is important in terms of environmental identity, our aspiration in the project is to begin to deepen this work through attention to the interconnections of place, text and context. In the second iteration of this work the teacher plans for students to be introduced to the form of the ‘pepeha’ and to write place-based haiku connecting text and image. The pepeha requires the ritual naming of geographical, cultural and ancestral connections relating to self. This is a prompt to finding out about the place that you connect with - your place to stand on the earth (Tūrangawaewae). There are many ways to do this but you would usually begin by naming your mountain, your river and your harbour before naming your tribal and family affiliations. It is a Māori form for an introduction but it can also be a resonant form for Pakeha (non-Māori) and it may be adapted to suit personal circumstances. The structure creates an opportunity for learning the Māori language version (Te Reo) and could also be an opportunity for working in other languages. It was notable that when students prepared for this only one out of the sample group of twelve could name a mountain and a river while their knowledge of family and ancestry was much more developed. This reflects the strong focus on cultural identity in New Zealand but suggests that the ecological dimension of this identity has not been part of these students’ experience as Gruenewald (2008) states 'environmental education in schools is rare and rarely intersects with culturally responsive teaching'(p.144). He suggests that the failure to know about the unique places in our lives is to remain in 'a disturbing sort of ignorance' (p.143). More poetically Wendell Berry writes: ‘Not knowing where you are, you can lose your soul or your soil, your life or your way home.' (Berry,1983, p. 103 in Buell, 2001, p.75).

The material impact of the school environment and culture is significant in relation to developing and informing connections to the local place. The connection between positive experiences of nature and place and environmental identity is well documented (see Gruenewald, 2003). However, James Cook school is set in a low socio-economic area, it is difficult and costly (without parental contributions) to arrange field trips - so none took place. Also, students typically don't have mobile phones or access to digital cameras to take original images and have to work on old computers that are not regularly maintained.

In contrast, during the same period of six week observation at Honsonville Point school in a high income catchment area, the target year 9 class (13-14 years old) went on four field trips in the Auckland area and took part in two poetry workshops on different days led by writers. This disparity in opportunity between the two schools has been unexpectedly stark in the project while the demands in terms of tasks set have been remarkably similar. However, during the period of observation it has been the ability of the second school to afford experiences out of the classroom which has been the major point of difference for students' learning rather than the superior resources and technology. For example, the following vignette from the second school suggests the potential of the field trip as part of work on setting and location in Drama.

Comparing locations from then to now.

It is the day of the trip to Takapuna beach. Leigh has prepared a set of activities for the students to complete as part of the field trip for drama. In activity one, students are asked to read the opening monologue from The End of the Golden Weather (Mason, 1962), highlighting descriptions of the landscape in the text, finding and photographing the locations and then noting how they have changed from the description in the play. Activity two involves looking for the places where a series of photos from the 1940s-1960s were taken, and again noting how the location has changed over time. Activity three asks students to investigate a newly built playground on the small reserve next to the beach (which used to be a regular performance space for the play) and reflect on who has been affected by this change in land use.

On the bus students chat and text but some read the extract from the play. The script begins with a long monologue from a narrator remembering this place from his childhood and reflecting on the changes that have been wrought there from European settlement to the setting in the 1930's. Students spill out onto the beach. They take pictures using their phones of viewpoints mentioned in the script. The teacher has put together a set of old photos of the same location. Students seem excited by the challenge of matching their photos to the ones from the past.

Back in the drama studio the next day, students discuss the ways that the place has changed over time referring to the play, their own images and the old photos. The teacher directs their attention to the new astro-turf playground which has replaced the grassy performance space used by the playwright. They are asked to consider in their groups how to produce this script to give a sense of the layers of environmental change and the ecological impact of people on the place. Some students plan to use their slide show as a backdrop, others are prompted to consider an interrupting narrator who adds in comments about the present in relation to the play's portrayal of the past. One student group is attempting to create parallel scenes, one group is representing the environment as it is now, and another group as it is represented in the play. In directing their script they are asked to take an environmental angle on the performance.

This combination of the playscript with its explicit theme of environmental change in the opening monologue and the school's proximity to the setting location (also historically a performance site for the play) is a perfect opportunity to develop ecocritical literacy. Ecocritical literacy requires a critical understanding of how texts represent particular ecological interests. The shared model allows the teacher to draw attention to the ecological issues that the text raises in relation to the ecological issues presented at the location. A shared model of place for study has the advantage of building students' place awareness rather than leaving them stuck in a place that they already connect with (but may know little about). Learning how to read a place and knowing that places are in process and changing tends to relate to geography while English and the arts are focussed on the work of representation and the feelings, values and emotions which make *space* become *place.* However, the process of place making happens as much through this active mediation of 'texts, images and

instruments' as through real experience (Massey & Thrift, 2003, p. 292). In this unit we see the potential for both experience and mediation to work together as students explore the representation of the environment as a process reflecting on the multiple changes and shifts in the real and fictional location and their ecological significance. Given our observations of the value of the field trip when working with place, the project is planning to support a field trip for James Cook school in relation to their work on pepeha, haiku and image.

Conclusion: Moving from place to planet

We have introduced teachers on the project to a three part heuristic model drawn from geographers' conceptualisations of place: place as a bounded container; place as part of a web of relations and place as a centre of flows (see Massey & Thrift, 2003).

A sense of place as bounded can be discerned in the student's feeling for a bach situated 'somewhere' in the Coromandel. Knowing 'your' place better is a starting point but students also need an understanding of how places relate to each other comparing the different ecologies and attitudes to place in relation to texts such as 'Sparrow' and other texts which represent nature, the land, the sea, animals and cities. Most texts provoke questions about our relationship to the natural world and have implications for sustainability of place. In the Takapuna example, place is represented as a centre of flows as the play describes the influx of settlers, and the ecological changes that have occurred in relation to cultural change. Arguably students need to develop both a sense of place (as in their place or their Tūrangawaewae) and a sense of planet as they look beyond the confines of their own place to see the environment as a complex and interconnected process (Heise, 2008). At James Cook the students who had explored their own place also learned about the plight of the pacific island of Kiribati in social sciences as part of the project. A majority of the students have family links to the Pacific and they wrote impassioned and carefully structured letters to the Prime Minister John Key about the human impact of climate change on this place. This extends imaginations outwards from the dominant New Zealand environmental identities which are strongly centred on New Zealand as a bounded place, with a unique fauna and flora requiring protection from the threats of outside. But as a student once said to his environmentalist lecturer: 'it's hard to care about the environment when someone's foot is on your neck'

(Gruenewald, 2008, p.145). Social disparities and opportunities have been marked in relation to the two schools and it is important to make explicit the links between social and environmental justice as in the case of Kiribati. Helping students to develop a robust and critical environmental identity requires an *eco*-critical literacy approach within all subjects as a dimension of critical literacy. This means that texts are seen not only as serving particular *human* interests but also *ecological* purposes and interests. The hope is that *eco*-critical literacy can support students to become powerful advocates for their places, communities, trees, animals, insects, birds and plants while also caring for wider communities and the fragile planet that supports us all in a web of living beings.

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