

Finding Te Parenga': Informing environmental identities through drama

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Abstract

This paper takes the “future focus” in New Zealand’s curriculum as a starting point for examining the potential of drama to inform students’ emergent environmental identities. Drawing on research connecting eco-literacy and identity within the TLRI (Teaching Learning and Research Initiative) project *Tuhia ki te Ao – Write to the natural world*, the authors analyse the ecological teaching of a drama unit on Bruce Mason using a 3D model of eco-literacy learning for drama: the operational, the enviro-cultural and the eco-critical. The analysis highlights how teachers can shift existing drama practices to include an ecological dimension. In particular, this drama case study shows how actively engaging with playscript settings and students’ formative memories and experiences of place can facilitate personal and collective expressions and critical explorations of cultural and environmental identities.

Biography



MOLLY MULLEN is a lecturer in applied theatre at the University of Auckland’s Faculty of Education and Social Work. To this role she brings over ten years of experience producing theatre education, youth theatre, community arts and children’s theatre projects in the UK and New Zealand. She has ongoing research interests in funding, organisational practice and management in applied theatre. Other current research projects focus on applied performance and ecology, and drama and performance in early childhood education settings.



SASHA MATTHEWMAN is a senior lecturer at the University of Auckland and principal investigator on the TLRI project *Tuhia ki te Ao – Write to the Natural World*. She started her career as an English teacher and is the author of *Teaching Secondary English as if the Planet Matters* (2010).



LEIGH SYKES moved to New Zealand from the UK in 2009. She was Teacher in Charge of Drama at Rutherford College in West Auckland from 2009 to 2015, and became Learning Area Leader for Performing Arts at Hobsonville Point Secondary School in 2016. She trained at the University of Durham and recently completed a Master of Arts (with Distinction) in the Advanced Teaching of Shakespeare with the University of Warwick. Leigh’s research interests are focused on active teaching methods and developing the cultural value of Shakespeare for New Zealand students. She is keen to create and enhance the understanding of Shakespeare through performance.

INTRODUCTION

On the bus to Takapuna, in between excited talk and window gazing, the students read an extract from Bruce Mason's (1962) *The End of the Golden Weather*:

"I invite you to join me in a voyage into the past, to that territory of the heart we call childhood. Consider, if you will, Te Parenga. A beach, three quarters of a mile long, a hundred yards wide at low water. Rocks at either end: on the east, chunky and rounded, a squat promontory. The rocks on the west are shallow, spreading into a terraced reef, shelving far out to sea. Here there is no smoothness. The surface of these rock shelves is jagged, cutting and tearing at the bare foot, fretted away by the corrosive sea." (Mason, 1962, p. 11)

Looking at the photos on their worksheet, Aimee exclaims "ooo! We need to find some rocks!" Where are the rocks?" They study the picture and walk towards the beach. Shannon has been here before to swim at high tide, Aimee has never been. They spot rocky cliffs at the far end of the beach that look like the ones in the photo, it's a long way, but they set off, determined. Aimee is excited by the things she finds in the sand: shells and particularly the lumps of volcanic rock, 'crater rock' she calls it. She cradles the pieces in her hands and puts some in her bag. They keep walking towards the distant cliffs, agreeing that it is better to walk barefoot on sand than wear shoes.

At their best, secondary school drama classrooms are spaces in which young people can explore their identities and their place in the world (Gallagher, 2014). This article explores the potential for drama to create a forum for students to explore and articulate a sense of environmental identity, fostering "an active concern with the relationship between humans and the environment, and the impact and consequences of the activities of the former on the latter" (Kleiman, 2010, p. 157). The focus is a 12-week unit developed by Leigh Sykes, Learning Area Leader, Performing Arts, at Hobsonville Point Secondary School in West Auckland, for a mixed class of year nine and ten students. Over the course of the unit, the students put Bruce Mason "in his place"; examining the landscape represented in his plays *The End of the Golden Weather* and *The Pohutukawa Tree*, and then visiting the Takapuna landscape (the place where he grew up and that shaped his creative process). The opportunity to visit the place so vividly rendered in Bruce Mason's plays was a significant dimension of taking an ecological angle on the study of his work.

This unit was developed and analysed as part of a two year research project, Tuhia ki te Ao – Write to the natural world (funded by the Teaching and Learning Research Initiative). In the next section we briefly introduce the project and the key ideas, concepts and models that inform it. We then propose what we see as the opportunities and challenges of bringing an ecological focus to secondary drama in Aotearoa New Zealand. We then move into discussing the drama unit, highlighting the ways in which ecological learning was developed. Finally, reflecting on the strengths and limitations of the unit, we explain how it could be revised to strengthen the "eco-critical" dimension of this learning to inform students' environmental identities

Environmental Identities and Eco-literacy

Tuhia ki te Ao: Write to the natural world sets out to explore environmental identities and the process of how young people communicate and develop a relationship and kinship with the natural world within the secondary school context. Hobsonville Point Secondary School is one of two schools who are partnering with the University of Auck-

land's Faculty of Education and Social Work to find ways to integrate an ecological focus in three learning areas: English, Social Sciences, and The Arts, while taking seriously the bicultural framing of the NZ Curriculum. This research responds to the apparent gap between aspirations in the NZ curriculum for education that promotes ecological sustainability, and what actually happens in schools. Ecological sustainability is one of the values of the NZ curriculum; a value that should be integrated across school activities and curriculum content. But, at present, research indicates that its status in secondary schools remains marginal in relation to high stakes assessment areas (Eames, Cowie, & Bolstad, 2008). In this context Tuhia ki te Ao sets out to show that each secondary school learning area has something distinct to offer in terms of ecological learning.

One premise of Tuhia ki te Ao is that learning in secondary school classrooms plays a part in shaping students 'environmental identities': the knowledge, understanding, values and attitudes that people hold about their relationship to the natural world, their understanding of their physical place in the world and the relationship between their culture and nature. We work with the idea of identities as developing and changing over time, in relation to both the built and natural environment. We emphasise the importance of students developing a sense of environmental identity as part of their cultural heritage (Matthewman, 2017).

Literacy and identity formation are powerfully linked (Abrams & Rowsell; Gee, 2000; Ferdman, 1990) and this includes the way that environmental identity and ecological literacy have been brought together in the context of education (Thomashow, 1995, Matthewman, 2017). The concept of "Eco-literacy" is central to the way the research team are investigating teaching and learning across the three learning areas. We propose that literacy practices play a part in environmental as well as socio-cultural understandings, attitudes and actions. As people around the globe encounter results of human driven climate change and other environmental instabilities, it is crucial to reconsider the ways in which we speak for and represent the natural world (Buell, 2005).

Teaching and learning on this project is framed by a multimodal, three dimensional conception of literacy, adapted from Bill Green's (1988) 3D literacy model (see also Green & Beavis, 2012). Bill Green proposes three dimensions of literacy: operational, cultural and critical. Tuhia ki te Ao refocuses these dimensions to include the ecological as follows:

- Operational literacy includes the technical elements of writing, multimodal design or artistic creation. In drama this dimension might encompass learning and applying conventions, elements, stage craft techniques, design principles, or script/ character analysis tools, such as Stanislavski's fundamental questions.
- Enviro-cultural literacy involves recognizing, selecting and applying available cultural forms and practices for cultural and environmental effect. In drama these dimensions might include locating a playwright or performance form in a culture and place or learning about the cultural and environmental impact of a particular play. It would encompass the development of students' knowledge of important cultural and environmental texts and performance practices.
- The eco-critical dimension of literacy involves understanding how forms and representations might be critiqued, contested and transformed for different cultural and environmental purposes, interests and contexts. In drama, this might encompass critically analysing the cultural and environmental values expressed in a play or performance or making informed choices about the use of forms and techniques to achieve environmental and cultural effects/affects.

The three dimensions are not intended to be hierarchical or sequential, but should be integrated over the course of a task, lesson or unit of work.

During the first year of the project (2016), one emergent research focus was on the ways in which multimodal eco-literacy could help students to connect with local places and ecological concerns as part of informing their environmental identities. In Leigh's unit, we propose that the process of studying and staging Bruce Mason's plays became a way to connect students with particular places and environments in Auckland, past and present, and for students to experience and express a sense of their own personal connection to those place within a collective social context.

The concept of environmental identity has been studied in the fields of environmental education (Thomashow, 1995), sociology (e.g. Stets & Biga, 2003), psychology (e.g. Crompton & Kasser, 2009) and literary studies (e.g. Buell, 2005). In the project we have started with Clayton's (2003) definition of environmental identity as "A 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). We have been guided by the empirical framework devised by Crompton and Kasser (2009) and extended by Jaksha (2013) which investigated environmental identity as composed of values and life goals, group membership and fears and threats. Drawing on our reading of seminal texts by Thomashow (1995), Clayton (2003) and Crompton and Kasser (2009) we have settled upon a four part model of environmental identity as comprising 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 (2003). We began with a focus in the project on "sense of place" as this is raised as fundamental to environmental identity formation across the literature. In relation to this particular project within the drama learning area the seminal work of environmental educator Mitchell Thomashow (1995) has emerged as especially relevant for understanding how the concept of environmental identity relates to place. Thomashow details a three part educative process for working on "ecological identity"¹. The three avenues that he explores are childhood memories of special places, the awareness of disturbed and damaged places, and developing a connection to wild places. He argues and illustrates how these "paths of exploration" create rich "educational possibilities for the collective expression of environmental identity" (p.18). In the educational context we suggest that the movement from the personal to the collective expression of identities is key.

Bringing an ecological focus to secondary drama: Challenges and Possibilities

Bringing an ecological focus to drama teaching is something teachers should already be thinking about (or doing) if they are taking the values of the New Zealand Curriculum seriously. In considering ecological sustainability in Higher Education performing arts, Kleiman argues that drama, theatre education and applied theatre lend themselves to the "integration and promotion of sustainability" (p. 164). Sustainability is usefully defined as the process of "exploring the long-term impacts of social, cultural, scientific, technological, economic, or political practices on society and the environment (Ministry of Education, 2007, p.39). The project Tuhia ki te Ao is focussed on developing relationships to nature which promote the concern to sustain the environment for the present and the future. However, the section of the New Zealand Curriculum on The Arts makes no specific mention of the environment, ecology or sustainability. In contrast the earlier, 2000 curriculum statement for The Arts was much more direct: "Arts education enables students to generate ideas about themselves, their experiences and their environment and to express and communicate them in a variety of artistic forms" [emphasis added] (Ministry of Education, 2000, p. 10). This version gave learning examples for each arts discipline to explore the relationship between art-making and the natural world. We suggest that this guidance is a significant omission in the current curriculum which means that the value of ecological sustainability risks being sidelined within drama teaching in

¹ Thomashow uses the term "ecological identity" in order to stress the importance of developing a sense of the natural world as interconnected. We prefer the term environmental identity in relation to the greater familiarity and immediate accessibility of the term "environmental" for students and teachers.

New Zealand secondary schools. Hence the importance of sharing ecologically focussed work to bring the possibilities into the foreground of teachers' thinking and planning.

We suggest there are multiple ways in which teachers might approach an ecological focus, capitalising on their experiences and expertise and responding to their students and the local context. For example in Boxes 1 and 2 Molly and Leigh reflect on their own environmental identities in relation to their ecological focus in the project:

Molly: The approach I am inclined towards reflects my background is in youth and community theatre and theatre education. My work often focuses on social issues and I see myself as committed to the idea of drama as a critical social praxis. Also, I was raised vegetarian, wearing Greenpeace t-shirts and going on protest marches. When I learned about the hole in the ozone layer at primary school, my first feelings were fear and disempowerment. But, my parents got me books with titles like 'how ten year olds can save the planet', and I made my own t-shirts about banning CFCs, wrote poetry about the destruction of the countryside, and made bad 'agit-prop' plays with my cousins. Perhaps unsurprisingly then, my initial idea for bringing an ecological focus to drama is to get students activated, making theatre about an important (to them) environmental issue, using documentary or devised theatre.

Leigh: I was born and grew up in London, meaning that my upbringing was in a densely populated urban environment. Until I started Secondary School (after moving from London to Hertfordshire), I believed that sparrows were baby pigeons, as these were the only two types of birds I had ever seen. Despite this, I became passionately interested in animals at a young age, cultivating caterpillars in jars, bringing home strays and running a 'car boot sale' in the garden to raise funds for the World Wildlife Foundation. At 13, I chose to become vegetarian to support her animal advocacy, and has been ever since. But, my approach to this unit is grounded in my background as a British-born, British-educated Drama teacher with an ongoing commitment to learning about the theatre of Aotearoa New Zealand. The majority of the drama and literature I studied at school and University was from the UK, Western Europe and North-America. I had a great deal of exposure to theatre forms and practitioners from the United Kingdom-specific Mystery Plays, through Shakespeare, Chekov and Post War American Realism and into the 'In-Yer-Face' theatre of the 1990s. I had very little exposure to Australasian or Pacific theatre prior to arriving as an immigrant to New Zealand in 2009. On arrival, the first piece of theatre I saw was a bare bones production of *Niu Sila* in the school hall at the secondary school where I was teaching. I was aghast at the apparent political-incorrectness of the show, but my mainly Pasifika students loved it and explained that the play was very funny and accurate in its depiction of the characters and their relationships. That experience set me on a journey of discovering more about the theatre of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Box 1. Molly's and Leigh's environmental identities related to their focus on ecological drama

The advantage of the New Zealand curriculum is that teachers have the freedom to take up an ecological focus in a way that responds to their skills and experiences as well as to local cultures, students' identities, local environments or current issues. Academic literature on how theatre studies might respond to ecology and environmental change provides the basis for a range of possibilities for bringing an ecological focus in secondary drama in ways that are consistent with the framing of The Arts curriculum in Aotearoa New Zealand. Some examples are listed in Box 2.:

- Making performance about an environmental issue.
- Learning about the environmental impact of theatre making and conduct an environmental impact study of a school play or local production. Students might then study sustainable theatre making and come up with the concept for a more sustainable production process (Kleiman, 2010).
- Process drama offers a range of possibilities for engaging students with ecological issues or themes. Teaching about environmental issues can provoke anxiety and fear which, in turn, can lead to fear and apathy (Hicks, 2014). Eva Osterlind (2012) argues that process drama is an ideal form for handling the difficult emotional dimension of teaching about environmental issues.
- Site specific performance and ambulatory or walking performance forms can engage students with the cultural and environmental significance and histories of particular places (Woods & Mullen, 2016; Matthewman, Mullen & Patuwai, 2015; Davis & Tarrant, 2014).
- There is a growing cannon of 'green' or environmental plays and productions that can be studied or staged (Chaudhuri, 1994; Arons & May, 2012).
- Originating in English Literature, ecocriticism provides an approach to text analysis that focuses on how nature is represented, seeking to reveal environmental values and knowledge and examining depictions of the relationship between humans and more than humans (Matthewman, 2011). An ecocritical analysis could be extended to live performance, considering how animals, plants, landscapes are presented or represented on stage and how a production expresses particular historical or cultural knowledge and values about the natural world (Arons & May, 2012).
- In a cross-curricular project with Science, students might look at examples of performances that present or interpret scientific research about the environment and come up with their own performance concept.

The topic of Leigh's unit was New Zealand Drama, with a focus mainly on plays in the Western, humanist tradition. This may not seem like the obvious choice when thinking about ecologically focused drama teaching. As a strongly humanist art form, much theatre is primarily an expression of human experience, society and cultural identity. When performed on stage, inside a designated venue, theatre literally cuts culture off from nature. Early Western naturalism in particular tends to express a hostile view of the natural world. It represents humanity's dominance over nature by literally placing "man" centre stage in a social drama while nature appears as a theme, a symbol, or a threatening force (Chaudhuri, 1994). But, Una Chaudhuri has suggested strategies for working with historical naturalistic drama. These include identifying and performing the ecological subtext; connecting the ecological themes in the play with actual ecological concerns (historical or current); and incorporating non-naturalistic strategies to raise critical questions about the relationship between the human and more than human world as depicted in the play. Leigh's approach to working with Bruce Mason's plays incorporated these strategies as well as connecting to Thomshow's (1995) work on developing ecological identity through place connections.

Finding Te Parenga: The unit and student work

In planning the unit, Leigh had to work within the models and principles of curriculum design at Hobsonville Point Secondary School. Learning at HPSS is designed to be connected across learning areas and to connect and illuminate overarching concepts, or themes, ranging from 'Citizenship' to 'Innovation and How Things Work'. The unit of work created for Tuhia ki te Ao was offered to Foundation students (years 9 and 10). It responded to the school-wide overarching theme of Citizenship. This worked well in relation to the aim of developing a collective expression of environmental identity through drama. The unit was taught as part of a SPIN (Special Interest module) lasting one twelve week term. Students were presented with the following description when choosing their cross-curricular Modules

and SPINs for term 2 2016:

We will explore the dramatic treasure of New Zealand theatre. We will look at plays that were written to give New Zealanders a voice and a place on the world stage and we will explore the ways in which the New Zealand landscape plays a significant role in these plays. We will explore approaches to interpreting scripts through the ideas of theatre practitioners such as Stanislavski, and the ways that we can take scripts from the page to the stage. We will visit some of the locations that appear in New Zealand plays (e.g. Takapuna beach where *The End of the Golden Weather* is performed every Christmas Day), before performing extracts from one (or more) of these plays to our peers.

All students are required to experience each Arts learning area at some point during their Foundation years (9 and 10). At Hobsonville Point Secondary School the process for taking students on trips is straightforward. Being able to arrange activities outside the classroom and school with the minimum of fuss was instrumental to the success of the unit.

The unit began with activities to gauge the students' existing level of knowledge and experience of theatre, followed by a presentation on New Zealand Drama. Using extracts from Bruce Mason's *The Pohutukawa Tree* in the first instance, students investigated character relationships before moving onto the more complex task of identifying and analysing relationships with the environment described in the play. Activities for engaging with the social and cultural themes of the plays ranged from reading and staging scenes, mind-mapping, applying tools for script-analysis based on Stanislavsky's fundamental questions, and using thematic freeze frames to investigate concepts such as family, class and cultural relationships.

Initially student's attention was drawn to the ecological subtext through script analysis tasks. They began by simply identifying the elements of the script that provided information about the setting and environment. They then moved on to reading and discussing key extracts, investigating the environmental context of the play and the characters' relationship to Te Parenga. The readings generated some very rich discussions. For example, students quickly engaged with debating the implications of the environmental changes that Claude Johnson describes in his speech at Sylvia Atkinson's wedding:

The very land we're standing on was thick in virgin bush. It all had to be cleared by hand, cut down, burnt off. And when the land was clear it all had to be grassed: only tussock here, so the seed had to be brought from England, twelve thousand miles by sail: makes you think, doesn't it? And you know, in two generations, it looks like rolling English countryside. This fine old house: it'll last as long as an English castle and it's full of memories; built out of the best Te Parenga totara. (Mason, 1963, p. 41)

Students learnt about the environmental context of the play, researching the native plants named in the script, like totara, and finding historical photographs and maps of Auckland to help them visualise the changing landscape described by Johnson and other characters. This connects with Thomshow's (1995) point that ecological knowledge and understanding needs to be linked to feelings and affiliations. Reading literature and enacting drama works specifically on that interface between the intellect and the emotion.

Many students were surprised when Leigh told them that Te Parenga is based on Takapuna in Auckland. This information opened up the opportunity for students to explore Bruce Mason's relationship with the place where he spent much of his childhood. This

place influenced Mason's plays, his imagination and his creative process. For example, in the collection *So/lo* Mason writes:

I could not have been much more than seven or eight when I first scooped a hole in the flax bush at the bottom of the garden and made a rough seat there. I would sit there by the hour, unseen, scribbling in tattered exercises. (Mason, 1981, p. 88)

And:

Rangitoto ... declining from a central cone to the water in two huge flanges, meeting the sea in a haze of blue and green ... still sits there in the lobby of my imagination. That huge panorama has formed a backdrop of my life. No anguish but it was not subtly redeemed by it; no joy not deepened by it. (Mason, 1981, p. 87)

Leigh wanted the students to experience and understand something of Bruce Mason's relationship to place. Students read extracts from Mason's *The End of the Golden Weather*. They looked at the language features used by Mason to depict the setting and discussed how the extracts expressed the character's and the author's feelings about this place. The next step was to take the students to the location described in *The End of the Golden Weather*. The plan at the time was to experience the location that had inspired the setting in the two plays and then to use the knowledge of that place to identify locations within the school grounds to perform extracts from one of the plays. In the event, while preparing activities for the trip, Leigh found that a very visible change had taken place in Takapuna since she had last visited, with the creation of a new children's playground in exactly the location where *The End of the Golden Weather* had been performed on Christmas Day for a number of years. She decided to take the unit in another direction, asking students to explore the changes in the landscape between the era of play and the present day and hoping to encourage them to form an opinion about those changes. This connects with Thomashow's (1995) exploration with students of disturbed environments as a component of environmental identity work. It also connects with the literary ecocritical idea of the environmental text and reading as promoting awareness that the environment is "in process" rather than fixed and permanent (Buell, 1995).

On the trip to Takapuna students undertook one of three activities. The first required students to closely read the text and identify the places that were described in the writing in the real landscape. The second activity required students to find places shown in period-appropriate photographs and take the same photos to see what changes had occurred in those locations. The final activity required students to assess the implications of the new playground for the environment and different groups in the community, and to research the reasons for placing the facility in its location. On their return, students completed presentation slides that combined the photographs they had collected with their responses to the location and their understanding of the way that it had changed. Students were then encouraged to consider the reasons for the changes they had identified. This included a discussion about the wider cultural changes in Auckland and New Zealand and how this was connected to changes in land use – one issue raised was the growing multiculturalism of Auckland as a global city. This discussion was enriched by listening to a recording of Bruce Mason performing an extract from *The End of the Golden Weather*. The voice of the author did not match the students' expectation of a 'New Zealand voice' and led them to reflect on the way the play presented a particular pakeha² perspective on the place in which it was set.

The final assessment task required students to select an extract from *The End of the Golden Weather* and perform it. Their rehearsal process and performance needed to

² A New Zealander of European descent.

draw on techniques and methods that they had learned over the course of the unit. They also had to find a way to incorporate material from the field trip to convey their experience of Takapuna beach or to communicate their opinions about the changes that had taken place there since the play was written. Students responded to this task in a number of ways. Some less experienced students struggled to incorporate material from the field trip in a meaningful way, finding themselves fully absorbed by the challenge of rehearsing and staging the extract. Others addressed this aspect of the task with some confidence, for example by articulating a response to the changes they had observed in the landscape by adding devised scenes or narration to their chosen extract. Other students drew on physical theatre techniques to 'become' the setting, drawing both on Mason's rich descriptions and their own remembered sensory experiences of the beach. For some students then, the opportunity to 'be' in the place so vividly rendered in *The End of the Golden Weather* seemed to have given them a sense of the world of the play that was connected to an actual place and environment.

Ecological learning and 3D Literacy

The 3D literacy model explained earlier in this article is one framework for reflection on the ecological learning that was taking place during this unit. For example, in a drama context, 'operational literacy' might include the technical elements of multimodal creation. In this unit, operational literacy was developed from the first lesson as students constructed a definition of 'a play' and then looked at specific features of a script. Over the course of the unit they learnt about monologue, dialogue and ensemble formats by looking at different sections from and versions of Mason's plays. They learnt a range of elements and techniques including freeze frames, physical theatre, and methods for script and character analysis. In relation to the ecological focus of the unit, students encountered and defined terms like landscape, environment and setting. The tasks in which they identified different ways in which the scripts gave information about setting and environment, or where they researched the plants, environments and landscapes depicted in the plays, shifted the primary focus away from human characters and actions and provided a way to access the ecological themes in the plays. This was also a way to expand their circle of attention from the human to the natural world and to emphasise the connection and interdependence between the two.

The second dimension, 'enviro-cultural literacy' involves recognising, selecting and applying available cultural forms and practices for cultural and environmental effect. The enviro-cultural literacy in this unit involves the students understanding the cultural and environmental significance of a particular playwright, Bruce Mason. Over the course of the unit, Leigh drew attention to the way in which Mason's depictions of places, landscapes, animals and plants was one way in which he attempted to articulate a New Zealand 'voice' in theatre, challenging the very Euro-centric canon that had dominated New Zealand's stages for many decades. The students gained some understanding of the wider social and cultural context in which the plays were written, reflecting on why this assertion of voice was important to New Zealand playwrights at this time and the cultural complexities involved in doing so.

Mason wanted to represent issues affecting Aotearoa New Zealand and some of his plays, like *The Pohutukawa Tree* present issues of cultural change and land/environmental change as intricately connected. Students began to engage with this theme in Mason's two plays as they researched the changing landscape of Auckland and Takapuna and explored the relationships that different characters had to Te Parenga.

Students also learned about Bruce Mason, his childhood relationship with Takapuna and its influence on his plays and creative process. The trip to Takapuna beach extended students' earlier work analysing the language used in the scripts. The trip immersed students in an environment, enabling them to experience what it felt like, looked like, smelt like and sounded like - all of the senses evoked in Mason's rich

descriptions in *The End of the Golden Weather*. This experience informed the students' understanding of the environmental context of the plays and also the particular environment that shaped Mason as a writer. Importantly, students connected the plays to this actual place, not a generic New Zealand landscape. The experience of walking quite independently around the beach as they completed their set tasks was, for some students like Shannon in the opening narrative, a process through which they made a potentially formative experiential connection to a place in Auckland that they had never visited before. Without the trip this place and its significance in the plays and to Mason would have had little meaning to them, it would have remained an abstract setting, a backdrop for the actions, identities and relationships of the characters.

The 'eco-critical' dimension of literacy involves understanding how forms and representations might be critiqued, contested and transformed for different cultural and environmental purposes, interests and contexts. Throughout the unit, specific tasks directed the students' attention to recent and historic changes in the Auckland landscape. This related to the environmental subtext of the plays such as the changing use of land as deeply connected to personal, cultural and social change. As they discussed the changes to Te Parenga described by different characters in *The Pohutukawa Tree* and the contemporary changes to the landscape of Takapuna (specifically the playground and continued development) students were asked to consider the views of different groups who were invested in or affected by these changes such as parents with children, older residents, Maori representatives or local historians. Leigh then gave the students the aesthetic challenge of finding a way to incorporate material, elements or conventions into an extract from *The End of the Golden Weather* to convey their feelings or opinions about the environment or environmental changes in Takapuna. This task required students to transform the original play. For example, one group juxtaposed the hazy nostalgia of Mason's writing about Te Parenga with devised scenes that presented young people on a contemporary Takapuna beach.

Within this unit are examples of the strategies suggested by Chaudhuri for working with historic naturalistic plays. Students started to engage with the ecological subtext of the plays, the theme of deeply interrelated cultural, social and ecological change. In both of the Mason plays, the landscape, like the characters, seems caught within the forces of 'progress' and 'development'. They connected the historical changes depicted in the plays with current ecological concerns related to recent changes to the Takapuna landscape. In the final assessment, some groups effectively used non-naturalistic techniques to convey their feelings or opinions about these changes.

Reflections and revisions

The demands of generating eco-critical and enviro-cultural outcomes sometimes conflicted with the necessary task of building the operational drama skills of the mixed-ability class. This meant that some of the intended learning outcomes were not fully realised by all students. We reflect that the most successful elements of the unit were the students' responses to Mason's work and to the field trip location. In some cases students demonstrated perceptive thinking about why changes had taken place in the fictionalised and actual locations and the implications of those changes. A revised unit could make a more explicit connection to locations that have importance to the students and their experiences of environmental change. For example, those of them that live in the areas around the school would have direct experience of the rapid development in Hobsonville Point and the impact on different groups in the community. In 2017, Leigh has changed the final assessment, using *The End of the Golden Weather* as a model for creating monologues with students based on locations that have particular significance to them. These monologues allow students to explore their own childhood connections to special places using Mason's work as a model. Psychological studies have found that positive experiences in natural settings influences the expression of environmental values (Schultz & Tabanico, 2007).

Another option for revising the unit would be to explore the civic and political aspects of the plays more explicitly. Thomashow points out that an environmental identity moves from the personal relationship to nature (such as the personal exploration of childhood memories of place) to feelings of group identity which support ecological attitudes and behaviour leading to the realisation of greater political and civic responsibility. Mason was primarily concerned with social and political themes that were relevant to New Zealand, but the effects of changing ownership and use of land is a significant ecological subtext in both plays studied by Leigh's students. In *The Pohutukawa Tree*, Mason attempts to present different perspectives on and experiences of the changes to the Te Parenga landscapes. In terms of the relationship between nature and culture, in the play access to, ownership of and relationships to places are highly gendered, class-based, generational and connected to cultural background. Students could examine these different perspectives as well as the representations of the natural world in the play. Students could then work towards a performance that foregrounds the political ecological subtext. Many of the script analysis and research activities introduced by Leigh, as well as the trip, would support this work. Students might also map the setting of the play and annotate it with information about each place from the text based on their research. This could be supplemented by wider research about Māori land loss in the region and the changing nature of urban centres in New Zealand. In addition, the role-on-the wall convention could be used to develop an understanding of each character's environmental identity, collating information from the script about each character's values and attitudes towards places, animals and plants and about how they are affected by the environmental changes depicted in the play.

This would take the work into a more eco-critical orientation. . There were moments in the unit where students started to critique particular representations in the plays. For example, as Molly observed a lesson, she wrote:

It was fascinating to see what happened when the students got to hear Bruce Mason's voice on a recording of the play from 1959. His 'posh' English accent surprised students and provoked them into a discussion that touched on the politics of defining or claiming a 'New Zealand voice'. Hearing the performer's recorded voice generated questions of culture and representation in a way that reading the script aloud as a group had not. More work could have been done, however, to encourage the students' critical thinking about current issues of identity and representation back to the environmental identities of the author and the characters he creates.

The potential of the educational space is that identities can be expressed, explored and debated collectively as "a variety of personal experiences constitute a collective environmental vision" (Thomashow, 1995, p.18). In the New Zealand context it is important to avoid leaving stereotypical representations of Maori and Pakeha perspectives unchallenged. Stereotypical representations of environmental identities can create a problematic "in group" versus "out group" identity which can work against constructive behaviours (Crompton & Kasser, 2009). For instance the routinely expressed idea in the classrooms that we observed that Maori are "more ecological" can lead to the belief that the environment remains one group's responsibility (Maori) or conversely another group's fault (Pakeha). In particular, Bruce Mason' play offers the potential of examining the complex historical shaping of the land which can be set against present environmental initiatives and dilemmas. Auckland is a city of immigrants where an important role of education is to foster a sense of belonging for all students and to allow the expression of a collective and variegated environmental identity which draws on childhood attachments to home places as a stepping stone to forging new connections and bonds to the New Zealand ecology and culture.

Conclusions

Taking up an ecological focus in secondary drama is important, both as a way of integrating curriculum values and to enact culturally responsive pedagogies that recognise place, environment and sustainability as central to identity and literacy development in Aotearoa New Zealand. As outlined above, there are many possibilities for how this could be done without teachers having to make huge shifts in what or how they teach. By focusing on one example of an ecologically focused unit of work we have highlighted some particular activities and strategies that could be used when working with historical, naturalistic play texts. We have also highlighted the value of taking students out beyond the school to connect their drama-making with actual places and environments. Ultimately, we argue, the multimodal creative and critical processes of theatre making can provide a powerful way for students to inform, explore and articulate their developing environmental identities in a social context.

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