




THESIS SYNOPSIS

Teacher Identity, Activism, and Empowerment: Entanglements with Climate in Aotearoa, New Zealand

Thomas Everth 

The University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand
Email: thomas.everth@gmail.com

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Propelled by energy from fossil fuels, human population and human agency have grown exponentially over the last century, resulting in rapidly increasing and potentially catastrophic anthropogenic impacts on the coupled systems of climate, ocean chemistry, ecology, and society (Steffen, 2022).

The impetus for the thesis arose in 2019 as a culmination of years of personal struggle as a high school science and mathematics teacher in coming to terms and the lack of meaningful engagement of the education with the climate emergency. I was the lone voice at the New Zealand Association for Research in Education conference in 2019 who as much as mentioned climate change in a conference paper. I decided then to begin this PhD study.

By applying a Deleuzo & Guattarian (1983, 1987) analytical and methodological framework, this thesis researched the perceptions and desires of seventeen climate activist secondary school teachers in Aotearoa, New Zealand. The participants try to make sense of the diffractions between their ambition to be changemakers for a sustainable future and the milieu of territorialising institutional, social, and economic assemblages resisting this change.

The research was undertaken in form of a longitudinal study with several participant engagements over the course of one year and adopted a grounded theory approach. Guided by the astounding richness of initial long and unstructured interviews and inspired by DeleuzoGuattarian philosophy, the work of St. Pierre (2021), and Fox and Alldred (2015), the research methods evolved in an iterative process of analysis of findings, distilling of conclusions, and participant interactions, and resulted in a rhizomatic presentation of this thesis. The research included the analysis of assemblage drawings made by the participants (see figure 1) as productive semiotic artefacts that entangle the reader actively with the research process (Everth et al., 2022).

The application of assemblage theory (DeLanda, 2016) and Deleuzo & Guattarian (1983) schizoanalysis to the participants' narratives revealed how stratified structures and assemblages in society and the education system retain control through territorialisation and coding. Through the lens of Deleuze and Guattari's concepts, the impact of the climate emergency on society is revealed as a profoundly deterritorialising process. Climate activist teachers were seen as potential prototypical nomad war machines in Deleuze and Guattari's sense. Nomadology (Sidebottom, 2021; Villani, 2019) emerged as a way of escaping from the entrapments in dysfunctional societal strata and constructs as a response to the climate emergency and the unfolding Anthropocene collapse scenarios.

In the summary of the participants' narratives, the thesis gives detailed suggestions for school leadership to engage proactively with climate change education as a way to transform education

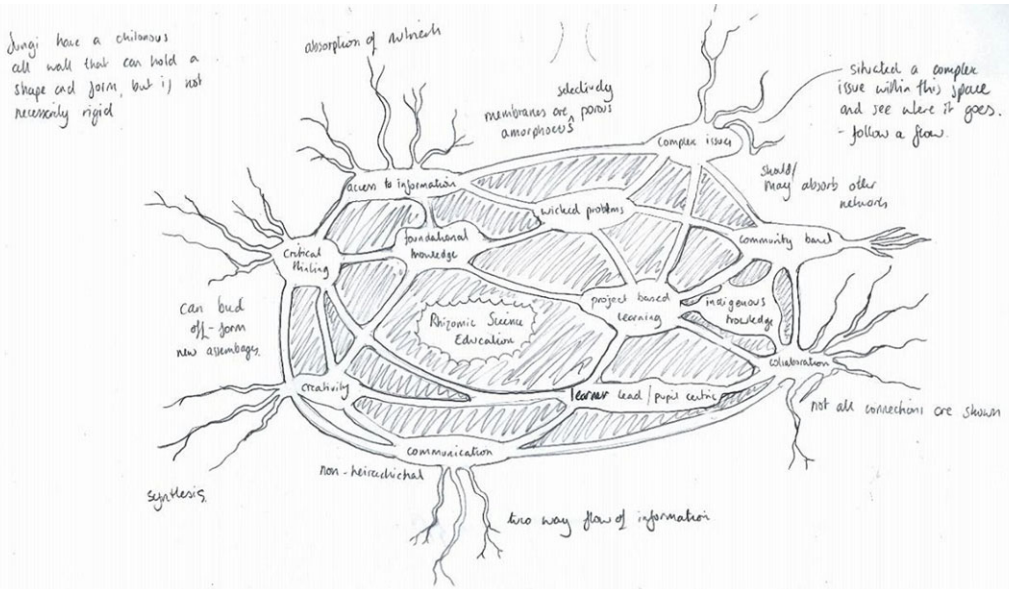


Figure 1. Jacob's imagination of rhizomatic science education. Note: This drawing is discussed on page 122 in the thesis.

from within the system instead of waiting for a radical vision of transformative education to emerge from central government agencies (Everth & Bright, 2022). Specific opportunities to deterritorialise and decode educational institutions and practices are discussed (Everth, 2022a, 2022b) with the aim to generate space and capacity for a meaningful engagement with the climate emergency (Everth et al., 2021).

The theoretical development of the thesis includes an ontological discourse (Everth, 2022a) which includes a critical review of radical constructivism's role in climate change denial and a critique of the application of quantum physics to social contexts (Barad, 2007) with reference to quantum decoherence theory (Everth & Gurney, 2022). This discourse arrives at a pragmatic critical-realist ontology of the possible that corresponds to DeleuzoGuattarian metaphysics.

Please find the full thesis here: Everth, T. (2024). *Teacher identity, activism, and empowerment: Entanglements with Climate in Aotearoa, New Zealand* [PhD Thesis]. University of Waikato. <https://hdl.handle.net/10289/16523>

Supervisors:

Dr Laura Gurney
The University of Waikato
Hamilton
New Zealand and

Associate Professor Chris Eames
The University of Waikato
Hamilton
New Zealand

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Thomas Everth obtained a master's degree in physics in Germany, had a career in the IT-Industry, and worked as a science and mathematics teacher in New Zealand before completing a PhD in Education at the University of Waikato, undertaking research on climate activist secondary school teachers. Thomas is currently a lecturer in ecology at EcoQuest, Centre for Indigeneity, Ecology, and Creativity in New Zealand.