

## **What kinds of ecological thinking do contemporary Australian picturebooks really teach?**

Australia is facing a biodiversity emergency: more than 10% of endemic terrestrial mammals are already extinct and many of the country's rainforests are listed as of "significant concern" in terms of their conservation status. This crisis underscores the need to strengthen children's *ecoliteracy* - the capacity to understand how living systems interconnect and to act responsibly on that understanding. Our project aimed to examine a number of contemporary Australian picturebooks to identify the texts' affordances for building ecoliteracy and subsequently, each texts' orientation to contrasting ecological orientations: *deep* or *shallow* environmentalism. The project consisted of three complementary studies: two single-text close readings of nonfiction environmental picturebooks about rainforests and a thematic analysis of six narrative picturebooks featuring native Australian animal characters.

We will share the results of the project, which demonstrate a recurring pattern of texts informing without empowering, of prompting rich noticing, while omitting human accountability. We'll share examples relating to how plant- or animal-centred focalisation, restrained anthropomorphism, and purposeful eco-aesthetics provided potential to scaffold ecoliteracy and detail how these ecological affordances were often bounded by what remained implicit. Using our analytical framework, we'll present examples of our spread-by-spread coding, including how specific words, images, and paratexts invited (or inhibited) notions of ecoliteracy and either deep or shallow environmentalism.

The current phase of the project involves the design and evaluation of a classroom-ready *Ecology Text Analysis Toolkit* to support teachers as they select and mediate the texts they use in their classrooms. In our presentation, we'll share the preliminary toolkit. Overall, our aim for the presentation is to illuminate the affordances of children's literature that represents truth-telling, collective responsibility, and hopeful, place-based action, lighting the way for young ecoliterate readers.