

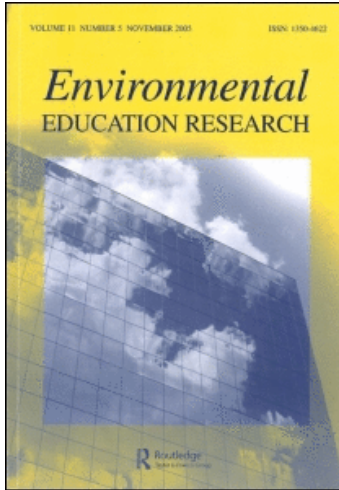
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### The globally great moral challenge: ecocentric democracy, values, morals and meaning

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## COMMENT ARTICLE

### **The globally great moral challenge: ecocentric democracy, values, morals and meaning**

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This response article written from ‘outside’ the Swedish–Danish contexts of this special issue considers how we might highlight and make additional ecocentric meaning of some of the terms most frequently used in this collection. In the first instance my focus is on ‘meaning’ but this is expanded to include other terms such as valuing, values, ethics and democracy. The way we value meaning demands elaboration because ‘meaning-making’ is pedagogically central to the ecological experience of learning, crucial to fulfilling the not always clear aims of environmental and sustainability education and their regional variations (including education for sustainable development), important for their research, and, indeed, underpins the philosophical quest more generally. Thus in this article, I introduce an ecology of the meaning of meaning, meaning levels, valuing and values, as they might inform stronger notions of democracy in critical approaches to learning, education, sustainability and development. This existentially focused introduction to ‘meaning’ and its ‘making’ is set against the politics of ‘climate change’ where political leaders have recently made grand declarations about the globalized moral challenge induced by human-induced climate change. How might pedagogues and researchers imagine the place of meaning and role of value in learning and in an education for sustainable development when the crisis of meaning lies at the intersections of the intensely personal and moral and the globally abstracted political?

**Keywords:** meaning; values; democracy; ecocentrism; education

### **Lags and pacts**

In this article I develop a distinct frame in which the valuable insights into education, research, sustainability and democracy represented in this special issue can be considered and recontextualized. In a nutshell, that frame is the globalizing of morality and value. An ‘outsider’ article such as this might probe how environmental and sustainability education researchers, through the work they have undertaken in Sweden and Denmark, are reconstituting and/or critiquing the moral governance of knowledge as power. We might well ask what is the meaning of value, or sustainability, or development, or morality of the geo-political democracies and constituencies their research represents? And what of any global assumptions, imperatives and tensions?

The Prime Ministers of Great Britain and Australia, for example, are deeply concerned about the consequences of climate change. Their respective geo-political interests in this ‘crisis’ are not always clear but independently they have declared that

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an effective nation state and globally cooperative response presents a ‘great moral challenge’. They govern in vastly different geo-cultural regions, but share similar Anglo-political traditions. That is, different geo-political assertions of moral power exist that are similar at the same time. When this moral challenge was declared, the Australian Prime Minister also proposed an ‘education revolution’. Two years later, the moral challenge and the education revolution remain disconnected.

What can this globalizing moral challenge mean for particular geo-cultural-political formations of knowledge, power and value? And, inevitably, education, curricula and pedagogy? Given the ‘crisis’ and ethico-political positionings of leaders, we might conclude that, existentially, our morals aren’t sufficient. Or, globally, do we need new ‘governing’ moral anchors and ethical bearings legislated for us? In the lead up to the ‘planned’ global agreement on climate change policies at Copenhagen, The Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN) observed that a lack of agreement and action by the various Nation States would be ‘morally inexcusable’. Global progress, or not, what is there for education’s role in sustainability and for its researchers?

Zygmunt Bauman’s (2008) book asks, ‘Does ethics have a chance in a world of consumers?’. Its final chapter, titled ‘Making the Planet Hospitable to Europe’, identified some of the daunting issues confronting the most recent incarnation of European federation. One is the rising tension about the links of democracy and the reforming of the traditional Nation State.

Earlier, Bauman (2006, 75) painted a grim picture of the now globalized ‘horror of the unmanageable’ in which he argued the ecological crisis constituted the ‘ultimate catastrophe’ that resulted from our ‘inborn aversion to self-limitation... resentment of, and disrespect for, all and any borders and (ultimate) limits’. Globalism, understood here as including the ‘no borders’ escalation of ecological risk and its politics (Beck 1995), manifested as, for example, ‘liquid fear’ and ‘moral lag’ (Bauman 2006) now confronts the globally declared challenge to morality and the consequential agonism of ethics head-on. Against the backdrop of this special issue and, for example, Heila Lotz-Sisitka’s exemplification of the local struggles of South African researchers to address Badiou’s ‘one sole world’ challenge, it is timely to consider how the ‘inside’ context of the collective articles might assist us to think through the Janus-face dilemmas of globalized moralities and geo-cultural formations of knowledge/power and values/democracy. How in crisis conditions is meaning and value reconstituted or problematized in the research we produce and disseminate in, for example, journals targeting an international audience?

We might note with specific but variable socio-ecological and geo-political relevance to the Swedish–Danish context the many dilemmas that trouble researchers like Lotz-Sisitka who might well agree with, but respond differently and creatively to the challenge of globalizing the research imaginary (Kenway and Fahey 2008). Bauman’s analysis goes further than this though, and it is of special significance to the efforts on display in this special issue. Bauman (2006, 2008) argues that the ‘knowledge classes’ of our time must engage a ‘new encounter’ in a revitalized intellectual-public pact to deal with the almost intractable problems now confronting the human condition. This ‘outside’ article hopes to ‘flesh out’ later some of the ‘terms of reference’ that might be considered in the making of such a pact – that ‘meaning’ and its making should more assertively be incorporated into what researchers can pursue, globally and locally. Marcia McKenzie (2009) recently encouraged environmental education scholarship to become a much more public form of intervention through critique and collaboration, heightening research in this field as a form of social

imagination. But how might this imaginary work existentially and in the everyday with young learners, as is glimpsed in the conceptual and empirical work represented by this collection? As these global challenges to moral imperatives ‘trickle down’ there is some inevitability in the reworking of how democracy might ‘work’ ecologically within the normative processes of a ‘humanly-constructive’ (Payne 1999) critical education system (Kyburz-Graber 1999) and its research efforts, as exemplified now in relation to education for sustainable development (ESD) in this collection (Östman, Læssøe).

At a geo-culturally and politically sensitive level of ‘positioning’ research in environmental and sustainability education, this special issue complements others of *Environmental Education Research* that have addressed a regional perspective of research development (as noted in the editorial, see Lotz-Sisitka [2004] and Seybold and Nickel [2006]). Yet, it has done so without necessarily delving into the globalizing or globalized question of existentially driven meaning (for learners) that is somehow globally caught up in, for example, political leaders’ exhortations about a great moral challenge. To be sure, in this collection Rudsberg and Öhman’s ‘epistemological moves’ and Östman’s ‘transactional perspectives’ are invaluable ‘micro’-level investigations of meaning-making as forms of pedagogically driven knowledge transfer within particular geo-cultural forms of knowledge production. Their ‘transfer’ potential to different contexts, as well as a global imaginary, warrants follow up work.

Regionally emergent geo-cultural ‘political’ or normatively focused theorizations of ESD are, indeed, imbued empirically with notions of meaning and value, extending to action competence (Mogensen and Schnack), pragmatically reflecting a Deweyan notion of experience of nature and ‘simplicity’ (Sandell and Öhman), and addressing ‘actions’ (Rudsberg and Öhman). Demonstrated in this special issue, and others (see, for example, Nickel and Reid [2006]), the individual contributions reflect important regional developments that also indirectly show how States are grappling with questions of meaning, values, ethics and democracy. But, as a whole, they tend to linger beneath the tensions of the anticipated globalization of the research imaginary (Kenway and Fahey 2008).

‘Sustainable development’, a focus of this special issue and a consequence of the global predicament about which political leaders speak of moral challenges and education revolutions might, again, be the culprit *despite* its global imprimatur (witness the UN’s Decade of Education for Sustainable Development) – a ‘governmental effort’ (Læssøe this issue) now potentially implicit to the normativity of ESD and its research. Its ethico-political ‘diversion’ has not escaped the field’s internal critique – be it the unknowing or voluntary insertion of the concept of sustainable development into the abstracted technics and intellectual exchange of ESD boosters (Payne 1999, 2006); the non-coincidental and non-problematic transition of the field to the globalizing language and discourse of ESD (Gough 2001; Jickling and Wals 2008); its possibility (Stables and Scott 2002); and frames of mind (Bonnett 2004) that, in turn, re-complicate the purposes and practices of schooling (Stevenson 2007); sustainability in higher education (Sterling and Scott 2008); and the policy micro-politics of ESD reforms within the Nation State (Lundegard and Wickman 2007; Huckle 2009). But these critiques of the new normativity ushered in by ESD and its myriad meanings cover a great deal of conceptual, empirical and policy ground. How learners and others ‘handle a complex and value-laden process’ (Kyburz-Graber 1999) that is sustainability, or ecopedagogies for learning about notions of sustainability, or grand crises now ‘out there’ of global proportions, remains elusive and,

therefore, potentially de-moralizing and disempowering at a time when their meaningful opposites are most needed.

### **A meaningful challenge for education and purposeful revolution**

It is within these multi-layered and intersecting circumstances and contexts of the globalizing of different versions of democracy and existential quests for meaning, morality, values and ethics that we might revisit the idea of a ‘crisis of meaning’ (Sarles 1971) and what that globalized reflexivity recommends for critical and humanly constructive education. In writing about meaning, Mark Johnson’s (2008) Preface to his *The meaning of the body* declared, ‘people want their lives to be meaningful... [and] need to make sense of our experience’. He warned, however, that meaning runs deeper in the body than do concepts and propositions. The linking of meaning and body is central to this contribution and the ‘fleshing out’ I undertake later given such a connection is rarely made in the discourses of environmental and sustainability education, including ESD. Johnson added: ‘when philosophy ceases to further our quest for meaning – when it stops addressing the recurring problems that define the human condition – it loses its relevance to human existence’. That is, the embodied meaning of meaning within our globalizing sense and ‘value theory’ is vital to our sense of morality, ethics, politics and commitments to democracy. At issue here, therefore, are notions like ‘embodied democracy’ and the ‘democracy of the self’, if I may, and of the meaningfulness of meaning and its ecocentric making as they occur in diverse, plural settings and contexts.

We know that social organizations, like classrooms and schools, and political institutions of democracy such as the local school board, Nation State or their united federations, constantly require reimagining and remaking through our most meaningful vote. So too do the making of their underlying meaningful values and senses of normativity through our pedagogical choices (and framings of research!). In education, might we focus far too much on limited views and outcomes of learning and not on meaning, the meaningful, and their making? We are more concerned with the power of knowledge as ‘knowing’ and less concerned with the values of ‘becoming’. Might a shift in our sensibilities (and sensitive pedagogies and inquiries) to the role and value of meaning, and its subjective, social, cultural, ecological and now globalized making, be a useful addition to environmental and sustainability education research? Clearly, Rudsberg and Öhman and Östman do. Conversely, how, why and to what extent do democratic institutions and states already govern the meanings and practices of these terms (Læssøe)? And how, and to what extent, are the dilemmas of meaningful agency and ossified institutional structures embedded in or constructed by the given purposes, value, role and place of education – notwithstanding the now hyper-intensified and individualized penetration of the globalizing imperative? And hence the need for a different imaginary in research (Kenway and Fahey 2008)?

For Bauman (2006, 91), the emergence and persistence of moral lag in late (or ‘liquid’) modernity relates to the fact that ‘motives for action tend to be clearly visualized only as afterthoughts, often in the capacity of a retrospective apology or a case for extenuating circumstances, while the actions we take, while sometimes inspired by moral insights or impulses, are most commonly prompted by the resources at our disposal’. If moral lag potentially subverts and perverts the way we understand, practice and research environmental and sustainability education (including ESD, but

not exclusively), how then might democratically meaningful ecocentric value theory be introduced and opened up for inspection in that discourse and its research? This very modest contribution to the special issue responds partially to that task.

In combination with the main contributions to this collection here, my aim is to highlight some of the conceptual and normative considerations for a revitalized reflexivity about the embodiment of value theory and democracy in environmental and sustainability education and their research. I am interested in how terms such as meaning, pluralism, morals, values, democracy and action might be grappled with ecocentrically in relation to the new intellectual compact Bauman calls for, and might inform the radical reflexivity about political democracy and meaningful existential valuing and values with which we are concerned in this special issue. In a nutshell, my focus is to offer some embodied and ecological meaning to ‘value theory’.

### **Moral and democratic defogging**

If politics is (sometimes) the art of the possible and it is only through democracy (or revolution) that democracy is remade, then ‘baby steps’ might illuminate some ‘value’ possibilities for schooling and educational reform. This contribution about meaning and value as they lie between the intensely moral and globally ethical is not speculative as it easily could be, but is empirically informed by the art and craft of the socio-ecological imaginary, against most odds, that I found in various studies of families, their moral spaces, and intergenerational ethics-politics (Payne, forthcoming). Those findings provide some fertile ‘lessons to be learned’, not only about the sustainability of those families but, in particular, about the meaningful praxis and ethical role of participatory democracy in the proximal environment of the ‘private’ home place as those ‘places’ were shaped within the ‘public’ social structures and the crisis-like geo-political spaces they and we inhabit.

But schools, societies and democracies are far more complex than families, as is educational research responsive to their globalizing injunctions (Kenway and Fahey 2008). Here lies that great moral challenge to the lag Bauman has rightly identified. Alasdair MacIntyre (1984, 1988, 1990) and others such as Charles Taylor (1989, 1992, 2004) are leading interpreters of the moral sources of our contemporary situation and self-understandings. Each, in their own (communitarian) way, has traced in different ways the ebbs and flows of morality and ethics. Taylor’s account of moral orders and social imaginaries, for example, suggests quite different strands to modern experience – individualism, instrumental reason and subjectivism – illustrating how each of these contains both destructive and creative possibilities. MacIntyre examines three rival versions of moral enquiry and, irrespective of the absence of any concession to the ecocentric position many in environmental education quest for, rightly poses the question of ‘whose justice’ and ‘whose rationality’ is being served?

Both write from within the anthropocentric frame and tradition of western philosophy. Both imply that any great moral challenge, education revolution and, indeed, intellectual pact to respond to any crisis, will be daunting prospects. And both, unlike Bauman, were writing pre-‘ecological crisis’. Their very clear warnings, however, speak most cogently to the renewed quest for meaning and its crisis sources and consequences. And, if ecocentrism is a worthy ‘end-in-view’ of our research and pedagogies, also not noted in Kenway and Fahey’s (2008) equally anthropocentric reimagining of globalizing research, what, indeed, does this mean for the ‘means’ and ‘ends’ (Reid 2009) of the frames we deploy in our research efforts?

### Politics and value theory in environmental education

At a generalized level it seems as if the discourse of environmental education, including the socially-critical variant of the '80s and early '90s most committed to strong democracy, has drifted or been encouraged into the neo-liberal project of a globalized economy and its 'big brothered' educational version of sustainable development (i.e., 'ESD'; Jickling and Wals 2008). If this is the case – noting how the notion of ESD has been co-opted into policies and practices sponsored by the state, as John Huckle (2009) and others referenced earlier have well described in this journal and elsewhere – vigilance is required.

Value theory can be broken down into at least two axiological considerations that recursively inform the agencies reconstituting political and ideological structures, namely 'valuing' and 'values'. Here is where struggle is most likely to 'privately' and 'politically' occur in 'public' education through the presence or absence of any commitment to democracy in the classroom, or in curriculum and pedagogical policy. Each of the notions of valuing and values will be contextualized in the following section after I outline a broader paradigmatic *frame* in which the ecologizing of democracy, and education and its research, might proceed. As we move into this framing heuristic below, environmental and sustainability educators and researchers might reflexively consider their own 'value theory' positioning and subsequent framing of research and approaches to it, noting similar intentions can be found in Öhman's (2008) and Kronlid and Svennbeck's (2008) respective accounts of environmental ethics and democracy in ESD.

As will become clearer in the final sections on 'meaning', I seek to 'push' these reflections into the rarely considered or articulated notion of the embodied 'meaning of value' and 'value of meaning', as each is complicated further in their relationship by the advent of ecocentrism in inquiry. Mindful of Bauman's call for a new pact by intellectuals, and with apologies to one of John Dewey's contemporaries, George Counts (1932), I ask, 'dare education try to build a new socio-ecological order?'. But upon what interpretation and understanding of an ecocentrically meaningful value theory?

### Expanding the real-world frames and their implications for an eco-moral, ethical and political education and its research

New, or different, paradigmatic horizons and vocabularies are available from which these issues, debates, research and educational implications can be framed and re-framed. Of generic value here is how the central concepts of *anthropocentrism* (humans as the superior species, and at, the 'centre' of the 'universe') and *ecocentrism* (the ecological or relational integrity of the human and 'more than human' and 'other' than human 'worlds') provide a 'way into' making *meaning* of many of the many moral stances, value positionings and existential conditions we 'ordinarily' occupy or create as pedagogues, researchers, scholars and policy-makers. Figure 1 schematically represents some of the complex philosophical ideas and conceptual debates that are dealt with in far more detail elsewhere (Hargrove 1989; Hay 2002).

If Figure 1 is to be helpful as a reflexive starting point for deliberation about these matters, the tendency to dualistic thinking must immediately be negated. The broad representations in Figure 1 have been regularly debated in, for example, *Environmental Ethics*, as might be expected, with numerous qualifications about how they sit along a continuum or spectrum of interpretation and practice; for example, weak





processual orientation that privileges our individual and collective ‘becoming’. The absence of an underlying value theory is displayed epistemologically in our pedagogical foci on content, attitudes and knowledge change or gain (with meaning and value implied); or equity, inclusion, participation, care and justice (with values strongly implied but meaning and its making assumed as self-evident); or identities, their multiple formations and (fragmented) selves (where values and meaning are indirectly ascribed); or textual deconstruction of others’ frames, approaches, methods and findings (with values implied by what is opposed/critiqued and meaning might be left open to the reader – but also other colonizing imperatives, values and meaning-making).

## Valuing

This two-part section on axiological considerations and their implications for education risks oversimplifying complex and, at times, contested matters. We note that discussions about valuing and values have occurred regularly over the past three decades in the discourse of environmental philosophy. One contribution is exemplified later for heuristic purposes. The non-exhaustive list of terms and metaphors in Figure 1 demonstrates the vastly different ways in which agents, structures, histories, discourses and institutions bestow value and, therefore, meaning upon Nature, ‘nature’, and their various ‘environments’. In juxtaposing these types of interpretive frames on the ways we intuit viscerally, construct socially or impose value (or not) on our relations with natures, places and spaces we are, hopefully, able to ‘open up’ for critical reflection our ‘own’ perceptions, vocabularies and subjectivities. Our positioning can be *individual* or *collective*, as thinkers/speakers/writers or/and agents and actors – and spatio-temporal as that more *ecological* positioning occurs in the past, present and future and their environmental settings in regard to our identifications, relations, attachments and actions *in, about, with* or *for* various natures.

Holmes Rolston III’s (1986) notion of ‘contingent valuation’ provides a useful conceptual frame within value theory for examining the possible meaning-makings intersections of ‘valuing’ and ‘values’. The purpose of introducing Rolston’s ‘meaning-levels of values’ but in relation to ‘types of wildland values’ as possible ends (only) is to provide a basis from which the pedagogical and research practices of environmental and sustainability education concerned with normative or axiological concerns such as pluralism, difference, morality, ethics, literacy, citizenship, democracy, culture and ecology and, importantly for the purposes here, their interrelations, can be deliberated. Like many of us, Rolston has been concerned that matters of value and nature are continually reduced to (neo-liberal) economic terms of cost–benefit analysis.

Rolston identified seven meaning levels of value. Each contingently implies a particular process of valuing. He identified 12 ‘objective’ types of value pertaining to the wildness of nature’s lands. The latter consideration is a major limitation of Rolston’s value theorization, upon which I capitalize in relation to the globalizing trajectory of ESD to flesh out the intersections of meaning, valuing and values. He privileges the North American interest in nature, understood often as the ‘wild’ or ‘wilderness’, about which I briefly comment later.<sup>1</sup>

As a heuristic device, however, Rolston’s work is useful to the extent that it highlights the intersections of the valuing process and value object. How the typological and taxonomic aspects of his ‘wild’ value theory interact over context, time and space

provides the basis upon which contingent valuations are made. His heuristic explains how differences, pluralism and relativism can occur and can then be applied to, for example, assessing the value of wildlands or, more deeply, critique of the assumptions upon which we value wildlands, or nature in particular or global geo-political formations of ESD and its research too. We find this culturally embedded approach to value exemplified in this special issue in, for example, Sandell and Öhman's account of the Scandinavian philosophy of outdoor life, *Friluftsliv*. To a certain extent that legacy mirrors the limitations of Rolston's work in that a particular historical and cultural construct of nature, culture, value, meaning are invested in a particular view of nature and of (parts of) Scandinavia. We find similar cultural templates for values and their valuing in how Australians relate to the 'bush' or the 'beach' and its/our 'edginess' (Payne and Wattchow 2009); (some/many) North American minds to the wilderness (Nash 1980) where each clearly enjoys a similar but with different cultural–natural–moral–historical–democratic/participatory logic. We see it in the East where, for example, the decline of the soul of Japan, its *Bushido*, is lamented (Nitobe 1905/2001).

Mindful, therefore, of the limitations of Rolston's theorization of a 'wild' value theory, but alert to its heuristic potential, we can more generally and democratically think through ecocentric value theory in terms of the broader framing called for globally previously while taking into account the deep concerns found not only in southern Africa, but also in Northern environmental criticism about environmental racism (Buell 2005), health (Brulle and Pellow 2006) and the persistence of, for example, the colonial imperative.

According to Rolston (2006), contingent valuation lies in the experience of interest satisfaction. Valuing and its meaning are subjective. Indeed valuing brings value into *being* and is, therefore, a means of *becoming* ethical in self-conceiving a relationship with others and to the world – a claim that briefly is problematized if the ecocentric move is part of the opening now needed socio-ecologically and democratically.

So, for Rolston and the heuristic he provides, a first meaning level of value is posited as *individual preference*. Probably, 'I want', which abounds. In the contexts in which most of us live in the affluent North, the neo-liberal mantra of choice, and freedom of choice, lies at the heart of this meaning level. A second closely related level is *market price*. I might want to choose 'freely' in the market as providing empirical objectivity for my or our preferences, wants or desires where goods and services can be exchanged, processed and 'freely' consumed according to scarcity or abundance of that artifact, good or service. It is at this meaning level, in which the majority in the North invest heavily, that Bauman (2008) questions the possibility of an ethics – be it social or environmental or the socio-ecological both. Market price and value are very well understood as they penetrate most phenomena we experience and choose 'politically' in the everyday (Ginsborg 2005). Individual preference and market values, however, might not be in our own best interest, or *individual good* – a third level of meaning that responds to what I really need. Negative examples abound, individuals choose to smoke which might not be good no matter how much the market value of a cigarette is raised by taxes imposed by governments keen to reduce their expenditure of health care, hospitals and associated negative costs on work productivity. *Social preference*, Rolston's fourth meaning level, is where individuals express a social will through politics, ethics, religion and numerous other forms of social relations and arrangements, although each of these may, of course,

conflict with other social interests. Social preference is often an amalgamation of the valuing process of individual preference as it is filtered through other meaning levels and social values or norms and traditions.

Herein lies a strange kernel of democracy and the ethics and politics that amalgamation prefers, or wants. Within the neo-liberal project, only individuals have a centre of experience, societies don't. Socialism thought otherwise, as does communism and various religions. Communitarianism and 'third-wave' politics briefly captured some interest, but socially over time Nation States were not wanted or preferred within certain democracies. Green parties are marginal for numerous reasons that cannot be explained here, but basically their social or public preference is low. Social preferences often have more importance than individual preferences in that through time and the role of habit and tradition they are more enduring. But, as before, the *social good* might be very different to what society prefers or wants. Social preferences might lead to, for example, oppression, discrimination and disadvantage that others do not see inclusively and equitably as a democratically inspired and enacted social good. *Anthropocentrically*, social good can include strong environmentalism – if we save the world we save ourselves. Human-induced climate change and its consequences threaten me/us.

The aforementioned five meaning levels typically constitute an anthropocentric and anthropomorphic logic (Figure 1). Rolston's (1986) sixth *organismic value* moves us into the biological world and beyond the economic, subjective, social and political world. Organismic value shifts meaning to genetic, biological, survival and, potentially, to notions like intrinsic good, duties/obligations and even legal rights for organisms (and their species) that exist in the non- or more-than-human world. Wildness, and potentially, otherness, exist prior to or outside human interests. This organismic meaning level is sometimes linked with the notion of biocentrism. Organisms and species live in ecosystems and, hence, Rolston's seventh *ecosystemic value* concludes his taxonomy of meaning levels. Here, an argument can be made that here is a parallel of the continuous 'good' of the ecosystem and that of the social and that of the individual but at different levels of meaning. Conceptions and constructions of such an ecocentric 'good' might trump the anthropocentric 'preference/want' but the reverse invariably holds true in different versions of political systems – strong and weak versions of democracy, socialism, capitalism, communism and dictatorships and the internal dynamic and regulation of those 'systems'. Rolston makes the point that ecosystemic value is more of a fiction because there are no policy makers, social wills or goals for ecosystems as we anthropocentrically understand them. However, the meaning level value of an ecosystem is clearly linked with *ecocentrism* and its potential for a global 'good'. *Ecocentrically*, social (and global) good will require 'genuine' practices of sustainability that consider the ecological interests and valuings and values of nature and our relationship with it, mindful of the geo-political/cultural differences Lotz-Sisitka enlivens for us. From this author's point of view, and in specific relation to the other authors' efforts in this special issue, I take issue with Rolston's fiction, predicated upon a particular view of 'nature' as 'wild', where I contend one key aspect of a pedagogical move to the quest for meaningfulness of the meaning of *nature* is to understand its inner, social and outer versions and their moral–ethical–political–ecological coherences, convergences and divergences (Toadvine 2009).

A cursory glance through these meaning levels of valuing highlights their vulnerability and fragility in a democracy, as we anthropocentrically know it, to a wide range

of consumptive, colonial, exploitative, instrumental and geo-cultural-historical logics and traditions that invoke at those different levels a heightening of moral agonism, relativism, ethical quandary and political debate. But, on closer scrutiny of how such meaning level valuing exists in the everyday suggests how easy a monodimensional view of value and meaning can occur if the social and cultural factors and forces shaping value(s), including education and research, are not treated critically and engaged with meaningful intent. Rolston's first part of value theory does help us 'see more clearly' where people, research and policy 'come from' (or not) morally, ethically, politically, culturally and ecologically. Undoubtedly, economic self-interest, the attraction of freedom and rights, and the mantra of choice dominate, confirming Bauman's pessimism about the possibility of an ethics in neo-liberal variants of consumer driven 'democracies'.

When coupled with 'values' that typically are a product of such constrained meanings and limited valuing and their (distorted) prioritization, it is clear to see how complex the needed reflexivity becomes about how we might value, or not, our individual and collective relations with his/her/our environment and, more broadly, between culture and nature. Here, to make sense of this conundrum, the reader can relate the sliding continuum of anthropocentrism and ecocentrism (Figure 1) to the seven meaning levels and how they then inform the values we prize, privilege and promote from among the following survey of values.

## Values

Again, to provide a sense only of the values' 'products' or objects of the process of valuing, I draw very briefly from two authors only, Holmes Rolston III (1986), again for consistency and fleshing out the heuristic I'm constructing, and Laurie Prosser (1980). Prosser is used because of Rolston's limited framing assumptions about the wild. Prosser's values focus more proximally, but still abstractly, on 'open-spaces'. They more accurately correspond with the environments I interpret are being represented in the texts of this special issue, and possibly those that can be found in other geo-cultural and regional settings – the plaza, a neighbourhood, a pond, a track and even the 'garden' whose rich nature meaning (Cooper 2006) will be touched upon later to tie together the links between meaning, valuing, and becoming.

The selection of Rolston and Prosser to build a heuristic about value theory will probably be of less comfort to those working in socio-cultural contexts markedly different to those represented in this special issue. I reiterate the limited critique of the absence of broader concerns about the persistence of environmental racism, and similar issues, in Australia, the USA and the UK. Again, however, the values, possibilities and 'choices' revealed by this inventory-like approach to wild and open spaces of now objectively given values are not exhaustive but indicative. In the interests of space, these values will be listed only and the reader is encouraged to study the texts, and others that speak to nature's values, and our relationship with various natures. Rolston's (1986) values include *market*; *life support*; *scientific*; *genetic and biodiversity*; *recreational*; *character building*; *aesthetic*; *therapeutic*; *spiritual or religious*; *cultural symbolization*; and *historical*. Finally, Rolston includes *intrinsic natural* value where 'nature' is deemed to be no longer a tributary to human experience, even though some of the above values hint at the intrinsic value of nature that was touched on earlier in regard to the meaning levels of organismic and ecosystem valuing.

Prosser's (1980) mainly anthropocentric 'preventive medicine' values suggests how open-space environments call also for an openness in our valuing processes conducive to the care, conservation and even preservation of the qualities and characteristics we associate with nature. Prosser's values of open spaces, some of which replicate Rolston's, but are far more suggestive of the process of valuing, include: *security; hope; contemplation and meditation (mindfulness); inspiration; awareness; aesthetic appreciation; enjoyment; experiential satisfaction; vicarious satisfaction; self-awareness and self-understanding; catharsis; delicious fatigue; calm, peace and tranquility; respect/humility/wonder of larger than self; solitude, freedom, meaning and order; return to cradle; human relationships; growth towards a holism; visual refreshment, sensuous experience; and social interaction.*

In summary, for this special issue and ecocentric opening, Rolston's (1986) axiologically-driven notion of 'contingent valuation' asks that we examine the many permutations of 'valuing' and their products in 'values', as outlined previously. To reiterate the problematic of value theory in a democracy, there is a great moral challenge in not only reflecting on how we are positioned somewhere in this complexity, but more significantly in some imagined ecocentric education revolution. Open to interrogation is how we then frame, justify and enact such a position aesthetically, ethically and politically in our teaching, learning and research.

## Meaning

Finally, there are deeper implications about how value theory works (or doesn't), particularly when so much critical education research is rightly driven by concerns about knowledge production, pedagogical transmission and information retrieval and dissemination – all variations within the education sector's preoccupation with epistemological issues and solutions that inordinately privilege the mind, intelligence and, often, calculative rationality. Not much progress has interpretively been made about how the re-embodiment of more than mind 'learning' can proceed. We cannot forget that experientially sourced, everyday 'embodied meaning'-making, as well as its implicit value/knowledge subjectivities, are carried into the classroom and cannot be by-passed pedagogically or in research. Indeed, the rational classroom is all too often disembodied of emotionally charged and aesthetically meaningful matters that, if so, immediately jeopardize the existentially great moral challenge the next generations will need to 'cope' with if, indeed, democracy and its derivatives such as pluralism and diversity are to be (re)valued and enacted.

The term 'meaning' has been used frequently in this special issue in relation to other terms also frequently used, such as values, sustainability and democracy. The 'meaning of meaning' and its language (Stables 2001) have been neglected in the discourse of environmental education and its research. In this short section, I can only alert the reader to some of the different claims on the importance of meaning and some of the different senses of meaning that, in some respects, is a prerequisite to the limited discussion earlier about the process of valuing and the 'product' of values.

Mark Johnson (2008) stated the obvious when he conceded meaning is a big, messy multidimensional concept. But he, like we, cannot avoid the responsibility of dealing more earnestly with the meanings of meaning and, following the heuristics of Rolston and Prosser, how meaning and valuing are intertwined in complex and contingent ways in relation to the inevitability of learning and knowing, as well as acting in the everyday with purposeful and competent agency. David Cooper's (2006)

very relevant ‘eco’ study of the philosophy and phenomenology of gardening and its meanings (that is, as an everyday version of access to ‘nature’ for many but not all) becomes very useful in building the case for an ecological approach to inquiring about the ecological meaning of meaning. He identified the different but overlapping modes in which meaning typically occurs, namely mereological (part–whole relationships), instrumental, depictive, allusive, expressive, symptomatic and associative. That non-exhaustive typology helps orient pedagogical and research deliberation and potentially in relation to the heuristic of Rolston, Prosser and Figure 1.

Messy and complex as the meaning of meaning is, here I am broadly concerned with the absence of mention about the role of meaning and its ecological making in the lives of those whom our pedagogies, curricula and research purport to serve. Embodied meaning, or somatic understanding, the spatiality of movement, ecological subjectivity, or intercorporeality and other somaesthetic aspects of ‘body consciousness’ (Shusterman 2008) are invisible dimensions of the human condition too often ignored in pedagogical debate, but highly suggestive of a less epistemologically constrained notion of formal and mind as cognitively-driven learning.

Grappling with the ecological ‘meaning of meaning’ adds yet another dimension to the notion of the ‘making of meaning’ and, inevitably, conventional understandings of learning, teaching and pedagogy. According to recent developments in some areas of scholarly endeavour, particularly the intersections of the cognitive sciences, phenomenological philosophy and anthropology of experience (Gallagher 2005), meaning is deeply sourced in our sensations and perceptions of self, others and world, and embodied in its making of self, social and ecological conceptions and constructions. For example, Keltner’s (2009) study of facial emotion and gesture in the everyday persuasively links human emotion with ‘the good’ – both individually and socially if we were to interpret him through Rolston’s typology. Moreover, David Abram’s (1996) reference to ‘synamnesia’ – the fusion of the senses and perception – is posed in relation to the forgetting of the emotional basis of our ecological being and becoming.

Johnson’s (2008) transdisciplinary ‘aesthetics of human understanding’ draws on the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s accounts of perception (1962) and chiasm (1968). Shusterman’s (2008) notion of ‘body consciousness’ and Gallagher’s (2006) investigation of the shaping of the mind by the body are examples of fundamental challenges to western thought (Lakoff and Johnson 1999). However and originally, this ecologizing and democratizing line of thought about embodied meaning-making extends into a critique of the now given Western construct of environmental ethics (Toadvine 2009). Toadvine’s philosophy of nature is concerned about the ‘foreclosure of the meaning’ of the term nature whose ecocentric revaluing can be found ecophenomenologically in a re-examination of the *nature of experience* and the *experience of nature* and, therefore, the *relation of experience and nature*:

The limited intellectual context of environmental ethics reveals the need for richer, multifaceted philosophical investigation of nature, one that includes the ontological, epistemological, aesthetic, and theological dimensions, and that also appreciates the intertwining of the history of philosophical reflection on nature with the concept of nature itself. (Toadvine 2009, 6)

Toadvine’s insights into the embodied and experiential nature of meaningful experience are indeed revolutionary for the way we might conceive the ecological self in a more democratic manner. But it is a highly philosophical argument. More accessible

is Cooper's (2006) account of the 'meaning of gardens' and 'garden meaning'. Those applied illustrations emphasize the everyday proximity of gardens or their derivatives, as compared with the elitism of wilderness while reiterating the poverty contexts that persist. For Shusterman (2008, 216), 'somatic reflection' is a key to a more meaningful existence in that it can cultivate 'greater acuity, awareness, and appreciation... and promises the richest and deepest palate of experiential fulfillments...' Toadvine (2009) calls for a form of 'radical reflection' that responds to the intertwining of our bodies with our 'animality'. Johnson (2008) highlights the emotional and aesthetic aspects of the meaning of the body and its meaning-making capacities that, for example, have also been addressed in accounts of the existential and, therefore, ontological-epistemological primacies of 'movement' (Sheets-Johnstone 1999) and 'practice' (Archer 2000).

Sheets-Johnstone's (1999) phenomenological account of the ontology of movement, in particular, the experience of self-movement, locates it in our primal animateness and makes the case for its 'in the beginning' profound epistemological significance. For Sheets-Johnstone, movement creates the qualities it embodies and that we experience. Movement, therefore, is 'meaning in the making' and it is only through the meaning-making of movement and its experience that we might begin to better somatically reflect upon, following Shusterman's Dewey, some of those moral dimensions of our felt being in the world. Possibly more relevant to this special issue, Archer's primacy of practice is equally elaborated in terms of 'embodied sources' of meaningful agency through which, for example, we might rethink notions of action and their competence within the democracies of meaning-making.

For Johnson (2008), at stake in his discussion of the 'meaning of meaning' is the human condition, for without due attention to our quest for meaning, and dealing with the meanings of life, is the cessation of efforts to address recurring problems. Johnson's conclusion is a critique of the objectivist theory of meaning that all too often is trapped in and implied by the 'giving' to us of values such as those assumed in the term 'democracy' and its rehearsals of freedom, choice, diversity and plurality. Johnson's engagement with the meaning of embodied meaning is closely linked with the inclusion here of valuing as a process, but different to it and certainly from the values 'products' we often are asked to live by, or impose on others as rules, conventions or expectations of 'oughts' that, unfortunately but understandably, are rife in environmental education and its research. That is, following the authors cited in this section, there is a persuasive argument that meaning and its making are sourced ecologically in the otherwise forgotten but inviolable body setting and its intercorporeal setting with other human and non human bodies. That 'democracy' of an embodied aesthetic of understanding and the value theory that might further reveal it, as we have seen, is always vulnerable to a range of factors and forces that bring the ecological valuing of meaning and given meaning of objective value into tension.

Johnson's (2008) quest cannot be elaborated here in an educational direction. Suffice to say, it includes a number of concepts that already have been touched on previously in moving toward an ecocentric value theory. In short, Johnson (2008) values the meaning-making body as: a biological organism, an ecology, a phenomenology, social and cultural; hence a meaningful democracy of the meaning-making capacities of his 'embodied mind' before that conception of the relational self enters us into the world of ethics, politics and democracy, as each might be considered in

education and its contested versions of sustainable development. The implications of such ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ intersecting notions of the democracy of meaning and self are to desist from treating and valuing the mind and body as two separate things; that meaning is indeed embodied before it can be conceptualized or converted to understanding, language and reasoning; that in our being we are metaphorical creatures; there are numerous human truths; that freedom is modest but can contribute to self-transformation; that embodied minds do not survive their own death; and that embodied spirituality exists.

Thus, I propose to further flesh out a number of the contributions to this special issue that ‘meaning’ and its making in relation to the *relations of experience and nature* are central to any reflexive discussion about the underlying qualities of human experience, moral intuitions and their embodied positioning, ethical deliberation, agency, competence, and conceptions and constructions of pluralism, relativism and democracy, including education’s contribution, or not.

### Value theory, sustainability and democracy

Democracy and its subsidiaries like pluralism are what we have and must continue to nurture as things that are lived and have meaning (as the contributors to this special issue are so acutely aware) rather than given to us and which we might merely rehearse. The alternatives to meaningful democracy, pluralism and action/agency are not very attractive, even while the globalized, neo-liberal project persists and is unlikely to change much despite the potentially governing declarations by our political leaders of a great moral challenge brought on globally by moral agonism. Unless, of course, we heed Kenway and Fahey’s (2008) call for a globalizing of the research imagination, notwithstanding their anthropocentric assumptions. But what is a meaningful imagination that globally is ultra-sensitive to the existential meaning-making powers and properties of individuals and collectives in disparate geo-cultural-political places? How does it occur in the classroom, the home, the everyday? Democracy, its subsidiaries, and their implications for morality, values, ethics and politics requires reconstitution, or constant remaking, through which a re-democratized sense and meaningful self ‘privately’ can politicize the public. Might working on an ecocentric value theory and its pedagogical and experiential supports be the moral challenge to educators and researchers?

In the absence of a conspicuous presence of meaning and its ecological making in education discourses that makes additional room for the process of valuing, ‘democracy’ as we currently practise it might be a hollow or shallow victory. The ecological crisis might well be a crisis of meaning, so we might ask: what is the education sector’s complicity and how might its ESD and environmental educators and researchers contribute to the new intellectual pact Bauman exhorts us to make, and Kenway and Fahey ask us to imagine?

Albeit a brief exploration of an ecocentric ‘value theory’ in relation to the contents of this special issue, this ‘outside’ article does highlight:

- the possibilities of attending to the meaning of embodied meaning by examining the nature of experience and the experience of nature;
- the contingency and challenge of value theorization within particular geopolitical forms of knowledge as power, exacerbated here by the incorporation of an ecocentric frame that is overlaid by the globalizing imperative;



- an introduction to the embodied and ecocentric meaning of a ‘democracy of the self’ as a necessary condition or prelude to how democracies given ‘out there’ require constant vigilance and socio-ecologically intelligent remaking;
- the meaning-making processes and contingent levels of valuing embodied in our various ‘natures’, but embedded in and shaped the intersections of our inner and social relationships with the ones ‘out there’;
- the production of meaningful values and how they might intersect and interact in informing constructions of democracy; and
- the critical examination of those framing assumptions, conceptions, constructions and their practices.

In any notion of democracy we attempt to reconstitute, we can anticipate the contingent nature of its values in that rarely do we consider the ‘private’ meaning-making sources and processes that the alleged ‘public’ pluralism of an (som)aesthetic-ethico-politically ‘strong’ notion of democracy rests on (Payne, forthcoming). Education, in the richest sense of the term, is as much about meaning and its making, as it is about learning, or teaching – the latter sometimes shaped by the impoverished neo-liberal sense of training, instructing and vocationalism.

Conversely, in evading the moral challenge of a new socio-ecological order, we might ask will governments benevolently legislate for the right, individualized and lifestyle behaviours that they believe will contribute to a population-wide level of sustainability? Is, or will the education sector and its researchers, be forced into a form of compliance and, yet again, be a reproductive part of the so-called democratic state? Or is there a kernel of something more ‘radical’ in the ways that the contributors to this special issue are pressing for that exists somewhere in the messy flux of the intersections of meaning, meaning-making about morality and valuing offered here – and the pluralism, values, relativism, competence and action offered elsewhere in this special issue? If education cannot contribute to Counts’ dare for a new social order, or Bauman’s pact, or Johnson’s quest, or Toadvine’s insights then we must expect governments to legislate for us under the governing guise of proposing a great moral challenge for our right individual and collective behaviours.

The urgency of any meaningful shift to ecocentrism and the value theorization implied by it and accompanying educational reform to that is daring. It will press educators, researchers and policy-makers to consider carefully the underlying values-theory basis of their pedagogies, curricula, research frames and findings, and the policy recommendations and apparatus for a sustainable form of education for sustainability. Those assertions should only proceed on the basis of some greater moral, ethical, political, cultural and ecological acuity and clarity that the authors of this special issue have partially contributed to in pursuing the democratic basis of ESD in the changing climate of globalizing educational practices and research development.

## Note

1. Jay Griffiths’ (2006) ‘wild’ is very different to Rolston’s. Meeker, Woods, and Lucas’ (1973) questioning of the presence of ‘Red, White, and Black in National Parks’ (in the USA) starts with: ‘National Parks were created as an expression of deeply rooted but poorly understood values in American culture and the traditions of western culture’. An important caution is, therefore, offered in relation to the relativism that is an unavoidable condition of the pluralism and values hierarchies confronting any notion of democracy in

education. Broadly, a key issue (in western societies, but particularly the USA, Canada, some parts of Europe, Australia and New Zealand) is the values-oriented debate about nature being 'real' or/and a 'social construction' (Soper 1995; Soule and Lease 1995). Nature and nurture, scientific and social/personal values and facts might be at odds with each other. Beyond this tension, to some extent the socially constructed nature of 'nature' in the affluent and new-world west lies in the slippage and equation of that term with 'wilderness' (which many/some [white] people 'know', through experience of National Parks, etc.) and conjures or replicates pristine or primordial nature. Cronon (1995), a North American, lucidly argued that 'wilderness' is really only a reflection or mirror of our frustrated desire for the natural. Beck (1995), from a European perspective, argued against the (middle-class) 'escape to nature' via the 'naturalistic fallacy'. See Garrard's (2004) ecocriticism for an indicator of different types of conception and Dryzek's (1997) environmental discourses, noting Arbon's (2008) indigenous view that sits alongside other commentaries and critiques emanating out of ideological and colonial vantage points.

There are, therefore, good reasons to debate, value or critique those versions of 'natures', the 'wild' and so on (and the relations they imply) according to their cultural origins, geographies and conditions of availability, including indigenous or gendered insight. But the realities of relativism and pluralism should not offset the almost universal quest for meaning, as undertaken by Rolston, or Griffiths, within positioned contexts and circumstances and, therefore, the embracing of notions like the meaning of value and value of meaning, as is recommended here in pursuing stronger notions of democracy, agency, action competence – all of which the authors in this special issue are concerned.

### Notes on contributor

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