

Post-metatheorizing Environmental Behaviours in Environmental Education

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SUMMARY *A five-participant dialogue is constructed using Kollmuss and Agyeman's (2002) model of pro-environmental behaviour, Stern's (2000) coherent theory of environmentally significant behaviour, the Hart and Nolan (1999) and Rickinson (2001) critical reviews of the environmental education research literature and this respondent's views. The dialogue demonstrates how metatheoretical development might selectively sensitize and circumstantially advance the practical aspirations of environmental education.*

Introduction

The task of responding to Anja Kollmuss and Julian Agyeman's meta-analysis of environmental behaviour is challenging because of their efforts to incorporate sociological considerations into psychological models whose linear and causal logic in curriculum theory remains controversial in environmental education. I have reservations about the metatheoretical task, namely the plausibility of such a complex project in the very first instance; the practical utility of any outcome, noting Kollmuss and Agyeman virtually ignore the body of environmental education research knowledge; and, third, the abstracted and instrumental 'one model fits all' reduction of individual, gender, social, economic, political, geographical and cultural differences that are crucial to effective learning, appropriate teaching and insightful research.

Kollmuss and Agyeman's text suggests they too have reservations. How, then, to constructively respond, first to their model and, second, to the project of metatheorizing? On reading the authors' text for the first time, a number of alarm bells rang—the title 'Mind', the admission of excluding (promising) perspectives that 'starts with people's behavior and works backward' and the non-discussion of the influential roles of habit and personality. Why alarm bells? Elsewhere, I have written about the 'limiting factors' to the rational mind, transparency of language and intentional action presented by the human body in its historical embeddedness in various social, geographical, global and

cultural milieu (Payne, 1997), (in)significant experiences in environmental 'behaviors' (Payne, 1999) and the importance of habit in environmental (in)action and (mis)behaviour (Payne, 2000). So, given the word limits for this response, subsequent reads of Kollmuss and Agyeman's text hunted for conceptual signposts about habit and its limiting role in 'the gap' of environmental 'knowledge' and behaviours, notwithstanding their highly generalized mention of 'strong barriers'. Some promising signposts were identified and are discussed shortly in positively advancing their model.

Second, 'second order' metatheorization of phenomena is likely to continue. That said, I compare and contrast Kollmuss and Agyeman's model with another model about environmental behaviours developed by Paul Stern (2000) in a special issue of *Journal of Social Issues* devoted to environmentalism. The Guest Editors, Lynette Zelezny and P. Wesley Schultz (2000), assert 'collective efforts across disciplines' are needed 'to effectively foster sustainable living using a broad knowledge base, the most creative ideas, and the most promising strategies' (p. 367). Ironically, only Kollmuss and Agyeman cites the other's work (a much earlier collaborative piece by Stern written in 1993), providing an interesting opportunity here to (a) contrast the seemingly independent natures of the two 'meta'-analyses and (b) bring that comparison into further dialogue with two recent meta-analyses of the environmental education research literature (Hart & Nolan, 1999; Rickinson, 2001).

Some general conclusions about the Kollmuss and Agyeman and Stern comparison are summarized below beyond any specific treatment or inference they respectively offer the role of *habit*,

- both analyses originate in the North American context of research, noting the authors draw heavily on research published in German;
- both models have a genesis in the positivist (socio-)psychological mentalistic/cognitive tradition and individualistic presumption of an actor's rational self-clarity and intentionality;
- the authors move eclectically to a more post-positivist stance and contextually aware view of research that includes a broader range of intervening variables and explanations. Stern's 'coherence' of psychological and social explanations seems stronger than Kollmuss and Agyeman's use of feedback loops between 'dis'aggregated variables;
- both admit to the enormous complexity of the task they respectively undertake while acknowledging some limiting factors;
- both converge in differing ways on the importance of a relatively 'common' range of causal variables but each uses quite different terminologies in model representation (e.g. Kollmuss and Agyeman's categories of 'internal' factors such as 'personality traits', 'environmental consciousness' and 'external' factors such as 'economic situation' while Stern's categories include 'attitudinal' such as 'environmentalist predisposition' and 'personal capabilities' such as 'literacy' and 'social status' and 'contextual' factors such as 'material costs and rewards' and 'advertising');
- both pay scant attention to the 'laboratory' variable of formal schooling and, therefore, the body of environmental education research that speaks most directly about a fundamental socializing/enculturating 'shaper' of the lives of those purportedly served by metatheory and models of human behaviours;

- the authors marginalize the 'collectivism' of social movements and environmentalism and its body of knowledge while Stern appreciates its importance and incorporates certain understandings into his discussion;
- despite offering useful conceptions of (pro/significant) environmental behaviours, the authors are relatively vague about the environmental values they textually privilege, and how their model contributes to the various social constructions of environment/nature that operate within the discourse of the environment. Stern is clearer;
- despite both discussing altruistic perspectives each is somewhat vague about a social and political theory informing metatheoretical development and, inevitably, an understanding in education of a range of concerns, be it interpersonal power or the politics of schooling/curriculum or the 'ecology' of the home–classroom interface. This vagueness challenges
- the 'practical' explanatory power of 'second-order' metatheoretical models, noting Stern includes a number of 'principles for intervention' that are suggestive of information processing/cognitive constructivist and social/cooperative learning theories only.

Habit and Kollmuss and Agyeman's Signposts

Inklings of how Kollmuss and Agyeman might incorporate habit more forcefully into their model beyond their very general mention of the 'barrier' of 'old behavior patterns' can be found. Their model includes 'social norms, cultural traditions and family customs' in outlining the role of 'normative influences' in one of the 'flawed' perspectives they review. The authors also question the underlying assumption in some models that people act rationally when they state that '[m]otives for behavior can be overt or hidden—conscious or unconscious'. Kollmuss and Agyeman's questioning of norms, traditions, customs and rationality is important if we acknowledge that habit often lies 'below' consciousness, as they seem to do. Habit can be viewed as 'irrational' and inscribed in the 'body' over time and through socializing processes (by the family, neighbours, peers) and encoded by various factors (socially/culturally), invariably as routinized behaviours, tacit understandings, patterns of action/interaction/communication, forms of experience and modes of social arrangement and association that, effectively, allow the actor 'to get along' or 'survive' in the everyday without really knowing how or why [1].

Kollmuss and Agyeman also acknowledge the effect on attitudes and values of 'individual, social and institutional constraints'. This concession opens up a rich vein of possibilities for theoretical development in relation to the way habits, norms, and even 'local' and 'cultural' traditions are socially constructed over time, place and space, both as a source of constraint and enablement, individually and/or collectively. Anthony Giddens' (1984) metatheoretical inclusion of 'conventions' provides a very useful account of how constraint and enablement 'work' in the everyday and how the authors' generic use of 'barriers' might be elaborated and refined in relation to the 'mundaneness' of many 'normal', everyday behaviours. One of Giddens' strengths as a social theoretician targeting empirical possibility is his 'duality of structure and agency' (or, as Kollmuss and Agyeman state, where 'internal and external factors act synergistically'). For the sake of brevity, Giddens' project emphasizes

the need to excavate what he calls the 'practical consciousness' of agents, including the crucial role habits, routines, patterns and other tacit behaviours play as 'conventions' with 'rules' and 'resources' human actors continually draw upon in recursively 'reconstituting society' through its various structures, of which environmentally problematic consequences are a fundamental concern.

Moreover, when the ideas of social constraint and enablement are read into Kollmuss and Agyeman's startling omission of '... our desires for comfort and convenience', a major portion of everyday environmentally problematic behaviour is effectively erased from metatheoretical discussion and (probable) model inclusion. Numerous authors from psychological, sociological and philosophical backgrounds have discussed the open-ended 'lifestyle' preoccupations of individuals where 'self-inventing', 'fragmented', 'tourist' and 'architectural' selves now proliferate in postmodern commodity culture(s). Viewed against the backdrop of the authors exclusion from discussion of the 'personality' factor in which identity 'seeking' and lifestyle 'sustaining' considerations are now highly influential for the majority, there is ample scope for the authors to develop the (psychological) personality construct in the (sociological) identity formation/maintenance and lifestyle desire 'direction' (see, for example, Cote, 1996).

Stern on Habit

Stern's stress on 'nonactivist' and 'private sphere' environmentalism leads him to include habit and routine in one of four causal factors influencing environmentally significant behaviours. The three other variables identified by Stern are 'Attitudinal', 'Personal capabilities' and 'Contextual factors'. For these latter three, there are numerous resonances with Kollmuss and Agyeman's metatheoretical discussion. Obviously, all of conceptual resonances, tensions and terminologies (mentioned above) in the two models cannot be discussed here. The reader is invited to pursue that more complex task in his or her time.

Unfortunately, Stern's discussion of personal habit and household routine is limited to the need for 'breaking old habits' that have environmental *impact* before (pro) environmental *intent* might be enacted. Nonetheless, Stern's differentiation of impact and intent is a very useful one because it underscores the need for any 'intervention' to come to grips firstly with what *is* the case *already* for human agents in the *everyday* before any *ought* might be socially constructed, enacted or imposed externally on those actor(s) through the educational process. That is, there is a strong case to ethnographically describe, and later interrogate human individual and collective *experience*, including habits, routines, conventions as both rule and resource, and other hidden or tacit patterns of action, interaction and communication, be it at home, in the neighbourhood, at school or in the shopping mall (for whatever impact, be it 'environmentalism', 'sexism', etc.).

This contrived dialogue of metatheories selectively highlights how some 'exclusions' in Kollmuss and Agyeman's metatheoretical modelling might be addressed and, by implication, the vexed question of the model's 'readiness' to be accepted or applied in environmental education research, curriculum and pedagogical development.

Metatheorization in Environmental Education

For utilitarian purposes, the preceding Kollmuss and Agyeman and Stern dialogue about habit should be located in current trends and issues in environmental education research, as interpreted in Paul Hart and Kathy Nolan's (1999) critical review and Mark Rickinson's (2001) review of the field's evidence base.

Both of these major reviews identify significant substantive and methodological transitions in research over the past decade. According to Hart and Nolan (p. 11) new vantage points in research are offered by 'interpretive, critical and postmodern lines of inquiry' that respond more assertively to 'what's going on here?' Rickinson (2001, p. 219) calls for insights into 'learners' experiences of learning'. This trend to developing interpretations of human *agency and experience* contrasts markedly with causal-comparative/correlative studies and curriculum/pedagogical models that instrumentally seek to connect knowledge, belief, attitudes, values and determine/predict the 'right' behaviours. But, *habit* is not mentioned in either review despite the rise of interpretive approaches that aim (naturalistically) to reveal the (authentic) 'grounds' of environmental concern, sensitivity, experience, thinking, 'voice' and the 'perspective of the knower' (Hart & Nolan, 1999, p. 32) and 'conceives of learners as active agents' in shaping their own experiences, preferences and perceptions of nature/environment (Rickinson, 2001, p. 223). However, 'barriers' (to knowledge, action, etc.) attracts some discussion in the literature reviewed but is mainly concerned with misconceptions, misunderstandings, confusions and 'levels' of environmental knowledge, understanding and concern.

Again, like the above 'hunt' in Kollmuss and Agyeman's discussion, some promising avenues are hinted at in the Hart and Nolan and Rickinson meta-reviews. Hart and Nolan point to the need for more focused inquiries into student and teacher thinking where phenomenological, narrative and life history type 'ethno' methodologies might more sensitively respond to the contextual and cultural factors that explain the underlying bases of human values, identities and behaviours. Rickinson's (2001, p. 259) discussion of a lack of research into 'unfriendly' behaviours throws into sharp relief Stern's useful demarcation of 'impact' and 'intent' and highlights the view that environmental educators (and the field's research trajectory) are typically preoccupied with 'pro' and 'significant' environmental behaviours, or creating the 'right' epistemological/pedagogical conditions for them. If so, this 'pro' trajectory/horizon in environmental education discourse also marginalizes the commonsense mentioned above about the need for a 'diagnosis' of any troubling condition before an 'ought' prognosis can be devised, let alone acted 'intentionally' upon via any curriculum and pedagogical 'intervention'.

Rickinson and Hart and Nolan reiterate the more generalized demand for researchers and theoreticians that greater evidential insight and explanatory power be given to the friendly and unfriendly social/historical constructions of our individual and collective perceptions, understandings, relationships and behaviours with/in various environments and natures over time, place and space. Thus, worthy of further consideration in models and research are 'normally' and 'habitually' experienced sites such as the home, neighbourhood, playground, and so on. These sites shape individual, family and peer habits of involvement but are also shaped by the ethos, traditions and culture

of the locale/organization. 'Site' inquiries would make for interesting investigations of the already 'is' experiential (re)constitution of pro, neutral and anti-environmental perceptions, understandings, actions/behaviours and socio-environmental consequences.

Conclusions

In contemplating Hart and Nolan's (1999, p. 2) observation that environmental education research is arriving at 'new' metatheoretical levels, consideration might be given to the merits of: (1) Zelezny and Wesley Schultz's call for greater disciplinary dialogue in advancing knowledge about (promoting) environmentalism; and (2) assessing the potential utility of metatheoretical development to 'move' environmental education research or debate beyond a level of self-referentiality typical of research activities in most curriculum areas.

For (1), Kollmuss and Agyeman's model can be advanced by incorporating at least three of Stern's concerns—the significance of habit, a stronger coherence of psychological and social (including cultural) factors and explication of the normative underpinnings of any metatheoretical discussion. Nonetheless, these remain somewhat undertheorized in Stern's discussion. Regardless, this respondent is not convinced that models can incorporate the breadth of theoretical detail and nuance of the particular/circumstantial required, noting the range of concerns raised by other respondents in this volume.

For (2), metatheoretical development and modelling does have a useful place in environmental education research and debate and curriculum and pedagogical development, as long as it is limited to a *sensitising* role. 'Habit', for example, is largely absent from consideration in environmental education discourses. If reflection or debate affirms the importance of habit in the everyday environmental problematic then educators' efforts to understand, let alone bring about 'change', might well be enhanced by this newly sensitized insight. If debate concludes the irrelevance of habits in learners' experiences and reconstitution of prevailing socio-environmental conditions, not much can be gained from this dialogue.

Nonetheless, Kollmuss and Agyeman's and Stern's discussions highlight numerous possibilities that so far have received relatively little empirical attention in environmental education research, such as gender differences and emotional involvement. Thus, Zelezny *et al.*'s (2000) elaboration on gender differences in environmentalism across age and 14 countries assumes a far greater salience in its potential reinterpretation in environmental education research and curriculum development in culturally diverse educational settings. Similarly, Cheryl Lousley's (1999) ethnographic study of environmental clubs and the culture of schooling is a valuable addition to the environmental education research literature in that it considers a range of variables, including gender, in explaining some of the interactions and power relations 'embedded' in the school 'site'.

The essential point I wish to make about the practical utility of model development is that any metatheory should be sufficiently *descriptive* so as to *sensitize* educators and researchers to tasks they might *selectively* undertake at *appropriate* sites for educational, curriculum and pedagogical inquiry, explanation or critique. On the other hand, formulaic models presented as complete

and prescriptive should be treated with caution. Taking (1) and (2) together, this response illustrates how an 'openness' to meta-dialoguing can be both revealing and useful. This conclusion rests on a presumed agreement, in this selective instance, about the role of habit in 'bridging the gaps' in human experience (and mind-body dualism/value hierarchy) promulgated through the 'traditional' treatments of knowledge, attitudes, values and pro/anti-environmental behaviours/actions.

Post-metatheorizing: grounding metatheory

Finally, given this very selective focus on everyday habit as deserving of inclusion in the lofty heights of (post) metatheorization, there is, I believe, an explanation for the lack of attention to the role of habit, routine, convention, tradition and other underlying patterns of human action/interaction or tacit behaviours. Simply, the 'place' of *pre, un* or *practical consciousness* in sometimes 'irrational' human *agency* and *action* is marginalized by an overemphasis on the *discursive* consciousness and associated cognitive and linguistic apparatus of the *ahistorical* and always *intentional* human subject.

In short, compelling everyday 'truth' still lies in the old saying that we are 'creatures' of *habit, comfort* or *desire* but are also 'seekers' of *security, stability* and *certainty*, among other needs and dispositions. All of these characteristics dynamically 'combine' the physiological/organic and psychological of 'human being' with the social/historical, environmental and cultural of the 'human condition' in the everyday existential of human *behaviours*. I suspect no models can reasonably accommodate this ecological holism, whose contours I have only broadly outlined. Models will also have difficulty in accounting for the fact that human 'behaviour' is both knowing and unknowing, intentional and non-intentional, linguistic and non-linguistic, frequently habitual, sometimes irrational but is invariably 'social' according to various (socio-historical) 'conventions' that are conditioned into the body, often in contradictory ways by numerous competing forces. Thus, the relative 'randomness' rather than predictability of a considerable amount of human (in)action, interaction or behaviours and environmental consequences.

If so, (post) metatheorizing might be enhanced through 'meta-methodologically' (Hart & Nolan, 1999, p. 32) 'grounded' interpretations and subsequent interrogations of *agency, lived experience, individual and social action* and environmental consequences that might 'critically' inform and/or draw upon interpretations of *subjectivity* which, in turn, might selectively sensitize and/or be sensitized by more theoretically complete meta-models than are currently available.

Notes on Contributor

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Note

- [1] Jensen and Schnack (1997) also call for better understandings of habit in their development over a number of years of 'Action Competence' in environmental and health education research. In response, I have told the story of how I as a young boy left the tap/faucet running while cleaning my teeth. In a drought year with severe water restrictions on domestic use, my father destabilized this habit by asking me to turn the tap on for the final rinse only (Payne, 2000). Today, 35 years later and after five relatively dry years, our State's water storages are at about 50 percent of capacity. Water restrictions 'kick in' at 54%. The State Government is asking each person via a print and electronic campaign 'to save three litres per day'. How? By turning taps off while cleaning teeth, shortening showers by two minutes, not washing cars or not hosing down private driveways, all 'lifestyle' habits, routines or conventions I address later in this article. The effectiveness of the restrictions is unclear at the time of writing but, as Kollmuss and Agyeman suggest as a promising alternative, the campaign appeals to individual's present behaviours and, hopefully, works that now informed person 'back' to a more appropriate 'new' behaviour.

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