

## Animality and Environmental Education: Toward an Interspecies Paradigm

Compassion, in which ethics takes root, does not assume its true proportions until it embraces not only man [sic], but every living being.

-Albert Schweitzer, Nobel Peace Prize Address, 1952

One of the deep roots of the environmental crisis, it has been suggested, lies in anthropocentric Western characterizations of humanity as separate from other species and the natural world—the belief that we are somehow of a different, and more important order, than all other animals (Abram, 1996; Evernden, 1993). We might describe this as a “forgetting” of our animality: a move away from the understanding that we are animals ourselves, embedded and dependent on natural systems, as well as a growing disconnect, and diminished sense of caring about, other species. This special themed issue of the *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, with its focus on animality and environmental education, brings into conversation the themes of interrogating humanism, paying attention to speciesism, and proceeding from a vision of socioecological justice that includes other animals and acknowledges them as subjects with whom we share the world.

The first eight papers in this issue comprise the accepted papers from the “animality and environmental education”-themed call for papers, while the last two papers are those from the regular submissions process for Volume 16. Putting together this issue has been an exciting process in connecting with scholars who are working toward a new, interspecies paradigm in environmental education, while also learning from those who are considering ways of thinking about, teaching about, and addressing some of the complex environmental issues we face today.

The special focus of this issue raises the question of *why* it is relevant to explore the theme of animality, or to consider the experiences of other species, in environmental education. Certainly, these are timely topics to explore, given the broad turn toward the “animal question” in past decades, but also because of the growing recognition that many forms of human, animal, and environmental injustices are intertwined. Scholars in the field have already compellingly demonstrated that how we respond to the environmental crisis requires a holistic approach, one that involves paying attention to interconnected social justice issues such as colonialism (Cole & O’Riley, 2010), gender (Gough, in press), class and ability (Newbery, 2003), and heterosexism (Gough, Gough, Appelbaum, Appelbaum, Aswell Doll, & Sellers, 2003; Russell, Sarick, & Kennelly, 2002). To this list, the contributors in this issue add the importance of considering our relationships with other species. In doing so, they build on the works of

other environmental educators who have critically considered how nonhuman animals figure into our research and teaching efforts (see for example Fawcett, 2002; Kahn & Humes, 2009; Oakley et al., 2010; Russell, 2005; Warkentin, 2009; Watson, 2006). They also further the conversation of *why* animality is important to consider in environmental education, and *how* we might move toward humbler, more attentive, more critical, and more compassionate relationships with our nonhuman neighbours.

Several authors in this issue suggest part of this work involves critically questioning our frameworks of thinking and the extremely diverse (and human-centric) ways that we socially construct other species. Nonhuman animals are often categorized in particular ways based on the ways humans relate to them: they may, for example, be characterized as beautiful, charismatic, and wild; conversely they may be considered domesticated, dull, and stupid. They may be pets or pests, loved or reviled, welcomed into our living environs or extirpated from them; they may be heralded as beings we admire or reduced to bodies we designate for scientific testing or vivisectionist practices. Further, given Adams' (1995) assertion that the most common way Westerners interact with other animals is by eating them, many species have also been ontologized as food: a relationship that has become increasingly in need of critical scrutiny, in light of the reality that industrialized livestock production, from which the vast majority of "food" animals come from, has been named the principal contributor to greenhouse gas emissions (Cassuto, 2010; D'Silva & Webster, 2010).

Exploring our relationships with other species runs deeper than being exclusively "about" the environment, however. It is also about better understanding ourselves, and, importantly, considering the subjective experiences of other animals—those who are profoundly and materially affected by our actions (cf. Russell, 2005). Questioning and evaluating the outcomes of our constructions of other animals can open up new ways of seeing and appreciating them, while simultaneously pushing back against unsatisfying frameworks of thinking inherited from previous eras, such as Descartes' (1637) reductionist philosophy of animal bodies as machine-like mechanisms that can neither think nor feel pain. Ideas such as these contributed to an intellectual tradition in the West riddled with speciesist accounts of other animals as lacking in emotions, cultures, and lifeworlds: accounts that authorized animals' abuse and contributed to the anthropocentric project of measuring humanity's worth on the grounds of *difference* from other animals, perpetuating a sharp human-animal divide.

The authors in this issue highlight the need to question outmoded frameworks of thinking alongside the political structures, representations, ideologies, and discourses surrounding the "human" and the "animal" in the field. In questioning epistemological and ontological assumptions about other beings and the ways we represent them in our teaching and research efforts, while simultaneously remaining open to what we can learn from and *with* other animals, the authors of the first eight papers lay groundwork for an interspecies paradigm.

This issue begins with **Helena Pedersen**'s contribution, "Counting Affects: Mo(ve)ments of Intensity in Critical Avian Education." Pedersen's paper brings into focus the unique personalities of former battery hens who emerge as agential *subjects*, rather than objects, in a unique research experiment. Adopting a posthumanist, interspecies approach, she outlines how research can be an act of animal liberation and encourages environmental educators to reflect on two questions: *What are the connections between research and activism?* and *What are the implicit assumptions about nonhuman animals guiding environmental education practice and scholarship?*

**Lauren Corman** similarly considers the implicit—and explicit—assumptions about nonhuman animals, in this case in how they are represented in a seminal critical pedagogy text. "Impossible Subjects: The Figure of the Animal in Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*" offers an insightful reading of Freire's enormously influential book. Corman identifies the explicit speciesism of the text, wherein humans alone are afforded the status of subjects while nonhumans are framed, disparagingly, by what they lack. She argues that such a schema leaves no room for respectful, or even accurate, understandings of other animals to emerge.

Part of the difficulty of rethinking speciesism in formal and informal educational contexts connects to the reality that too often, humanism comprises a hidden educational curriculum while emotional connection to animals forms a null curriculum. The next three papers draw attention to these disconcerting trends and offer suggestions for the enactment of interspecies curricula. **Ramsey Affifi**'s paper, "What Weston's Spider and My Shorebirds Might Mean for Bateson's Mind: Some Educational Wanderings in Interspecies Curricula," proposes a more inclusive concept of education: one that proceeds from the recognition that *all* beings are constantly involved in a choreography of learning from and with each other. He draws on the theories of Anthony Weston and Gregory Bateson, interspersed with his own narratives of learning experiences with shorebirds, to explain how a more "mindful" understanding of education can lead to deepened relations with other species, as we consider how we relate to them and importantly, how *they* relate to *us*.

Relationships with other animals are learned throughout our lives, but the early years of childhood are a period of especially steep learning. In "Too Many Monkeys Jumping in Their Heads: Animal Lessons within Young Children's Media," **Nora Timmerman** and **Julia Ostertag** inquire into the first lessons Western children learn about other species. Noting animals' near-ubiquitous representation in children's media (e.g., via fairy tales, nursery rhymes, cartoons, television shows, stuffed animals, toys, and more), they identify how the animals tend to be represented in ways that are both *mis*-placed and *dis*-placed, while the exotic are celebrated and the domesticated are presented, often disingenuously, as having ideal lives. They explore these disconnects and draw upon their experiences as mothers of young children to discuss possibilities for educating children toward authentic human-animal relationships in their own bioregions.

**Seonaigh MacPherson** examines a different manner of education in her paper, one that emerges from the intimate bonds people share with companion animals in their lives. Through a narrative inquiry of her eight-year relationship with Tashi, her beloved border collie, MacPherson discusses the potential of human-companion animal relationships as a means of fostering care about the more-than-human world and, in particular, the mass extinctions we currently face. “What Tashi Taught Me: ‘Petagogy’ and the Education of Emotions” speaks to themes of caring and love across the species line and also the universal experiences of dying and death, exploring how companion animals can help us to cultivate compassion for the lives, and deaths, of other species.

The authors of the next paper discuss the convergence of humane and environmental education. **Maria Castellano, Andréa Quirino de Luca,** and **Marcos Sorrentino’s** contribution, “The Interface of Environmental and Humane Education as an Emerging and Relevant Dialogue: A Point of View from Brazil” begins by presenting conceptual similarities that underpin the need for a growing connection between the two fields. The authors suggest an ethic of affirming life does not depend on a global convergence to a single discourse, but on the appreciation of a variety of discourses that share, at their core, a non-anthropocentric worldview. Their discussion of the successes and challenges of an activist workshop involving the screening of a Brazilian documentary about the meat industry provides insight into the importance of making space to address environmental and humane issues together.

The next two papers, the last of those on the theme of animality in this issue, discuss methodological approaches for researching and representing other beings. In “Representing Animal-Others in Educational Research,” **Gail Kuhl** contemplates research approaches that she and others have undertaken in responding to the challenge of respectfully representing other animals in scholarly work. Acknowledging the partial position we always occupy as researchers, and the reality that we can never quite arrive at an understanding of other beings’ lifeworlds, she opens up the question nonetheless of how we might better represent other species and what criteria we might draw upon to determine “good” research representations.

**M.J. Barrett’s** paper, “Doing Animist Research in Academia: A Methodological Framework,” also addresses research methodologies. Barrett discusses the approaches she employed in her doctoral research, in which she sought to disrupt rationalist frameworks that privilege the human intellect as the primary (and only) way of knowing. She shares in her paper some of the fascinating ways she aimed to enter into dialogic conversation with nonhuman “persons” in her research, “persons” being a term she uses to include other animals but also, intriguingly, plants, spirits, and the natural elements. In doing so, she outlines a methodology for researching *with* the more-than-human world.

The last two papers are not part of the theme issue but are general submissions. Both French language contributions, the two papers each address in their own way responses for thinking about and responding to environmental

concerns. **Anouk Utzschneider** and **Diane Pruneau** outline a reflective decision-making model that environmental educators can use in working with students in “Éduquer les élèves à la prise de décision en environnement : Théorie et perspectives pédagogiques.” They draw on a literature review of decision-making processes to present a comprehensive framework for addressing environmental issues in a way that recognizes complexity and the need for thoughtful, long-term solutions.

The final paper of Volume 16, “Les compétences en adaptation aux changements climatiques démontrées par des employés municipaux d’une communauté côtière canadienne” offers interesting insight into the ways municipal employees responded to a series of two-hour workshops on how to address the eminent rising of the sea level in a Canadian coastal community. This group of authors (**Jackie Kerry, Diane Pruneau, Sylvie Blain, Evgueni Vichnevetski, Paul Deguire, Pierre-Yves Barbier, Viktor Freiman, Jimmy Therrien, Mathieu Lang, and Joanne Langis**) approach environmental education from a governmental perspective, identifying competencies that workshop participants demonstrated. In analyzing participants’ responses and words, they offer recommendations for reflective environmental education in a workplace context.

Collectively, the papers in Volume 16 demonstrate that a critical, creative, and boundary-pushing conversation continues to take place in the field. This conversation is clearly encompassing many directions and approaches, from the research questions we ask to the stories we tell children, from the foundational ideas upon which we base our thinking to our intersectionalist teaching and activist work, from our ways of relating to other species to our decision-making models, and more. I hope that you find this issue as inspiring and thought-provoking as I did in pulling it together.

*Jan Oakley, Guest Editor, Lakehead University*

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