

Religion and Environmental Education

Where is the place for religion in environmental education? This isn't a question that we have taken up very much in our literature, yet religion—in faith-based communities, everyday activities, political institutions, international affairs, and historical legacy—is ubiquitous. Still, from a Canadian perspective, many university students struggle to understand and even talk about religion from a historical perspective, never mind from a position of faith. And, as Lynn White Jr. (1967) argued so persuasively, people are in myriad ways tied to religious legacies, whether they see these links or not.

In international arenas, religion is often portrayed at the epicentre of conflict. Today, these conflicts sometimes seem to spill into the multi-cultural milieu of many countries, including our own. But, differing faith-based communities have often lived together in peace for decades and even millennia. Why is that? What can we learn from these situations?

The impetus for this issue came from two colleagues, at about the same time. One was in the form of a short but moving email that shared the worry of a parent raising teen-aged children amidst Middle East conflict. The other came from an American colleague who pointed out, in a conversation about ethics, that the explicit language of values in religion is likely to be much more familiar to most people than that of philosophical ethics. Together, these comments eventually inspired the question: "How can we understand the ongoing centrality of religious influences in much local and global decision-making—and in some instances, profound conflict?"

If education is, as some say, primarily to show individuals how they can function *together* in society, then religion, which can be both divisive and unifying, should not be ignored. So what are some of the challenges? And, whom would this journal issue engage?

First, religion can take, what are for some, uncomfortably dogmatic forms. Perhaps one of the challenges will be to evolve or engage (for it already somewhat exists) a conversation across communities—including religious and secular—that does not fall into dogmatism. As Gregory Hitzhusen points out in the first article, religious practices already have much in common with practices in environmental education. What can we learn about language use, traditional practices, and ceremonial worlds? And how might these lessons enrich environmental education? And, conversely, religion?

Second, how can a discussion about religion and religious values help to build understanding across faith communities—and with communities that eschew religious belief—in ways that create new possibilities for understanding, respect, and importantly for considering shared environmental concerns? We encourage, through this issue, more generosity in understanding.

Third, some articles here aim to engage the religious communities from which they arise. In many cases they seek to conceptualize, or re-conceptualize, aspects of their faith in ways that effectively engage modern environmental concerns. As they participate in the re-storying of their religious traditions, considerations for environmental education are offered.

Finally, this volume does not pretend to be, in any way, systematic or comprehensive. Its aim is simply to invite conversations about religion in environmental education. We hope that readers will continue these conversations in this journal and elsewhere.

The first three papers each draw from different religious traditions and are all broad invitations. Gregory Hitzhusen draws on Judaeo-Christian tradition to encourage readers to consider areas of common ground between religious practices and environmental education. While he acknowledges that religious topics are uncomfortable for many educators he argues that, while the challenges posed are serious, they are not lethal. He goes on to argue that re-conceiving the role of subjectivity and dogma may reinforce the potential value of religion for environmental education and then goes on to indicate ways that religious elements can be incorporated into environmental education. Next, Almut Beringer draws from Islamic scholarship and, like Hitzhusen, makes a broad appeal for a religious role in environmental education. Here she argues that the modern and postmodern perspectives, currently dominant in education systems, are not sufficiently powerful to sway the human community on a global scale at this acute moment of crisis. For her, the task is to create a space and a platform to explore and authenticate ways of knowing, accessible through intuition and esoteric study, that are essential for a resacralized, spiritualized, and sustainable world. The third article in this sequence, by Martin Haigh, explores the Vaisnava roots of ecological Self-realization made popular through Arne Næss's conception of Deep Ecology. He claims that while deep ecology has absorbed some of the spiritual essence of Vaisnavism, the millennia of accumulated theological complexity contains yet more of value to deep ecology and environmental education. As in the first two papers, the underlying—and often missing—role of religious study is foregrounded.

The next two papers are about particular faith communities, yet they can both also be read as invitations to understanding for readers outside these communities. The first, by Marwan Haddad, provides an Islamic approach to environmental education. For the Islamic reader this paper builds upon previous work by Islamic scholars in developing a harmonious approach to environmental education. For the outside reader, this paper introduces the Qura'n, through passages relating to environmental management, and many important features of Islamic thinking. Similarly Mario Salomone's paper, investigating Catholic environmental thinking and education, will be of interest to readers from both within, and outside of, this faith-based community. Drawing particularly on words of Pope John Paul II, he seeks to reinterpret the dispute over the *epistemology of dominion*, raised by White

(1967), by exposing what John Paul called the “anthropological error.” Given the impact of White’s work on environmental thinking, this paper should be of interest to many readers.

Next, Martin Ashley draws on the Judaeo-Christian tradition to increase our repertoire of educational responses to relationships with the Earth. He argues forcefully against anthropocentrism and posits theocentrism as a viable alternative. He also suggests rehabilitating the concepts “awe” and “wonder.”

Finally, and importantly, Anneliese Mueller Worster takes a very different approach. Like many other environmental educators, she talks about spirituality rather than religion and, in this paper, describes three major steps useful for spiritual, cognitive, and affective learning. For many readers spirituality may provide a more inviting entrée into metaphysical matters than religion. Interestingly this paper is also about both sense of place and displacement. In this way, it becomes a link between the religion—and spirituality—theme and the rest of this volume.

It is unusual for the general articles in a given issue of *CJEE* to take up any one theme. At the risk of forcing coherence on a still diverse group of papers, we were struck that the eight general articles all touch in some way on issues of place and/or displacement. Nicole Ardoin’s article kicks off this section with a review of literature of various understandings of sense of place. Place-based education, she argues, would do well to take a more holistic approach than it generally has and engage with biophysical, psychological, sociocultural, political, and economic meanings of place.

Summer camps are the focal places of the next two papers. In the first, Gavan Watson investigates children’s experiences and conceptions of locally common animals in a children’s residential camp. He asserts the importance of children having such opportunities and makes the point that these need not happen only in places far from children’s homes; rather, he advocates for an urban environmental education that pays more attention to the possibilities of everyday experiences. Andrejs Kulnieks also examines a particular summer camp, this one serving a post-World War II Latvian diasporic community. Through storytelling, singing, dancing, and other artistic endeavours, camp residents grapple with displacement from ancestral landscapes and familiarization with the new.

The pedagogical potential of displacement is addressed in the next two papers. Sean Blenkinsop offers a narrative of his own experience in an unfamiliar landscape, the Coppermine River in the Canadian Arctic. Paddling in this environment allowed him to ponder his own assumptions about that particular place, the Arctic, as well as his assumptions about perception and environmental and outdoor education. The critical questioning modelled by Blenkinsop was part of what Timothy Leduc and Traci Warkentin hoped to encourage in their university students. In their paper, they describe the “creative disruptions” encountered by their students and by themselves on their journeys of critical self-reflection.

The following two papers also offer critical analyses of environmental and outdoor education practices. Kathleen Pleasants outlines a series of pedagogical concerns with the widespread use by environmental educators of Dr. Seuss's *The Lorax*. Arguing that more attention should be paid to the pedagogical needs of particular places, she describes a text she considers better suited to the colonial and environmental history of Australia. In the next paper, Andrew Brookes provides an analysis of the hidden curriculum of safety guidelines associated with various organized outdoor activities. He ponders the decontextualized nature of, and militaristic approaches implicit in, such guidelines, and their potential to generate particular and perhaps counterproductive understandings of places.

The final paper, by David Zandvliet and David Brown, describes a teacher training institute they designed to best take advantage of the pedagogical potential of a particular place, *Haida Gwaii*. They focus on the ecological, sociocultural, and technical influences on their pedagogical efforts.

While place inadvertently emerged as a theme peppering the eight general papers, there were many other ideas raised, of course. As always, we are delighted to see in these eight papers, and in the religion papers too, a diversity of approaches to environmental education, to inquiry, to sources of inspiration, and to forms of representation. We will continue to encourage such diversity in future volumes. As you will see in the call for papers for *Volume 12*, we also welcome responses to any of the themes that have emerged in past volumes so that these fascinating conversations can continue.
BJ & CR

Reference

White, L. Jr. (1967). The historical roots of our ecological crisis. *Science*, 155, 1203-1207.