
If a tree falls: business students' reflections on environmentalism

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Abstract: Environmental advocacy has a difficult position in environmental education (EE) and education for sustainable development (ESD). Proponents of pluralistic approaches to education see advocacy as a form of indoctrination. However, pluralistic education itself can be seen as a form of indoctrination. Its normative assumptions are based on the neo-liberal capitalist values that tend to view environmentalism as a threat to the established norms. In this paper, I will argue that environmental advocacy is, in fact, essential for educating critical citizens capable of addressing sustainability challenges. This argument will be supported by the written reports on the documentary film about the radical environmental movement presented to the students of International Business Management Studies (IBMS) of The Hague University of Applied Science (HHS). This case study will provide an example of how environmental advocacy and the objective of pluralistic education can be reconciled and explore the advantages of combining business education with education for deep ecology.

Keywords: deep ecology; education for deep ecology; ESD; education for sustainable development; environmental advocacy; EE; environmental education; pluralism.

Biographical notes: Helen Kopnina (Ph.D., Cambridge University, 2002) is currently employed at The Hague University of Applied Sciences in The Netherlands. She is a coordinator and lecturer of Sustainable Business program and a researcher in the fields of environmental education and environmental social sciences. She is the author of over 30 peer-reviewed articles and (co)author and (co)editor of nine books, including *East to West Migration* (Ashgate 2005); *Crossing European Boundaries* (Berghahn 2006); *Environmental Anthropology Today* (Routledge 2011); *Anthropology of Environmental Education* (Nova 2012); *Environmental Anthropology: Future Directions* (Routledge 2013); and *forthcoming Sustainable Business: Key Issues* (Routledge 2014); *Sustainability: Key Issues* (Routledge 2015); Major works in Environmental Anthropology; and Handbook of Environmental Anthropology.

1 Introduction

Sustainable development is often intertwined with ethics and advocacy, advocacy on behalf of the vulnerable social groups. Advocacy for social or economic equality is often widely accepted in sustainable development discourse as many adherents of sustainability would argue that elevating poverty is one of the key objectives of sustainable development (Elliot, 2013). Advocacy on behalf of the environment is less common. This paper will explore the question of environmental advocacy in environmental education (EE) and education for sustainable development (ESD), expanding upon the innovative potential of environmental advocacy not only to transform educational practice but to potentially address some of the greater sustainability challenges.

Saward (1998) has remarked that green imperatives, propagating the intrinsic value of the environment, operate as a 'strait-jacket' on democracy. This argument is well-established in EE and ESD journals. Environmental advocacy has an ambiguous position as some scholars perceive it to be at odds with democratic, pluralistic and open education. Publications in EE and ESD journals often emphasize the need to reflect on implicit normativity of education in general and of ESD in particular (e.g., Öhman and Östman, 2008; Kronlid and Öhman, 2013) and caution educators not to "tell others what is right" (e.g., Wals, 2010). Instead, the goal of a pluralistic education is to develop students' ability to become actively involved in the decision-making processes (e.g., Öhman, 2008). Advocacy is feared to undermine student's possibilities to actively participate and take responsibility for their own education as democratic citizens (Sund, 2008).

Associated with this fear of indoctrination is uncertainty as environmental education scholars have stressed the complexity of sustainability debates and inability to decide what exactly is needed to achieve it (e.g., Wals and Jickling, 2002). Curiously, discussion of population and consumption growth is often absent from the sustainable development debate, while it is precisely these two unsustainability factors that are identified as the largest threats to environmental sustainability (Rolston, 2015). Rather than addressing the human activity's threat to the biosphere and other species, as earlier environmental educators used to (UNESCO-UNEP, 1976), many ESD authors assert that we should learn from sustainable development (e.g., Van Poeck and Vandenabeele, 2012) and place concern for democracy and participation at the forefront of the current practice of EE and ESD.

Second, it is also acknowledged that pluralistic learning can be at odds with the increasing sense of urgency in dealing with sustainability challenges (e.g., Wals, 2010). Environmental advocacy can be seen as potentially endangering the established neoliberal industrial status quo in challenging the 'metaphysics of mastery' (Bonnett, 2013). Perhaps the most explicit mention of the fear of environmentalist advocacy is made by Wals and Jickling (2002, p.225):

"If we juxtapose more instrumental views of 'education for sustainability' with more emancipatory views of 'education for sustainability' we can imagine, on the one hand, an 'eco-totalitarian' regime that through law and order, rewards and punishment, and conditioning of behavior can create a society that is quite sustainable according to some more ecological criteria. Of course, we can wonder whether the people living within such an 'eco-totalitarian' regime are happy or whether their regime is just, but they do live 'sustainably' and so will their children. We might also wonder if this is the only, or best, the conceptualization of sustainability. On the emancipatory end of the continuum, we can imagine a very transparent society, with action competent citizens, who

actively and critically participate in problem-solving and decision making, and value and respect alternative ways of thinking, valuing and doing. This society may not be so sustainable from a strictly ecological point of view as represented by the eco-totalitarian society, but the people might be happier, and ultimately capable of better responding to emerging environmental issues.”

Following the spirit of this unusually non-academic and profoundly lucid statement, in this paper, I will criticize the position of advocacy-avoidance on the basis of three broad arguments. First, I will dispute the claim that environmental sustainability (“from a strictly ecological point of view”) will lead to ‘unhappiness’, especially taking into consideration *all* planetary citizens, including non-humans. Second, I will argue that propagating the fear of ‘eco-totalitarianism’ is also a form of advocacy and indoctrination. This argument is based on the assumption that no education is sim-free. ‘Emancipatory’ education preaches respect for “alternative ways of thinking, valuing and doing” at the cost of abandoning an effort at finding solutions to sustainability challenges. Third, I will propose that environmental advocacy is actually essential for educating critical citizens *and* finding viable solutions.

These three arguments will be supported by the case study of my own teaching experience that demonstrates the benefit of discussing environmental advocacy to business students. Finally, I will argue for the necessity to re-install environmental advocacy and deep ecology perspective as an essential element of environmental education.

The case study will focus on the students’ writing assignment on the documentary film *If a Tree Falls* about the Earth Liberation Front (ELF), a radical environmental organization, to students of International Business Management Studies (IBMS) of The Hague University of Applied Sciences (HHS). The analysis of students’ individual writing assignments as well as group discussions after viewing the film is then placed in the context of the discussion about the aims of education in relation to environmental advocacy. The rationale behind this approach is to provide an example of how environmental advocacy and the objective of pluralistic education can be combined – not necessarily one in service of the other, but as mutually supportive. The limitation of this approach concerns the small sample size – the class of 32 students – which leads to questions about the validity and reliability of their responses. However, since this case is conceived as an explorative qualitative study, the researcher found individual assignments and group discussions best suited to the task of eliciting the rich qualitative data provided below.

Prior to turning to the case study, we shall discuss one specific paper by Jickling (2005), in which the questions of individual commitment to the cause, environmental advocacy, education, and established an order of society are raised.

2 The case of Jickling and the wolves

Environmental advocacy in education needed to be approached with caution, as Jickling (2005) has reflected the paper explicating his personal and very honest experience with teaching. At the beginning of his paper, titled *Education and advocacy: A Troubling Relationship*, Jickling asks: “How does a person work on behalf of what he or she cares about – but in an educational way? Can you? If you remove care from the equation can you really have an educational experience? Or, if you want people to care – about each

other, the environment, ideas, and noble action – can education play a legitimate role?” (Jickling, 2005, p.91).

In reflecting upon the case of Yukon’s government’s plan to shoot wolves, and his own involvement as a schoolteacher in a local community, he felt that advocating his self-proclaimed deep ecology perspective (pro-wolf position) would be “neither practically viable nor educationally justifiable” (p.92). This concern was partially explained by the fact that Jickling faced the class of pupils with different values, some of whom had parents who supported a wolf kill the program. Another source of doubt was a concern with the question: “How can we ensure that educational programs provide a sufficient breadth of alternatives for learners to ponder, and use to construct meaning in the face of important decisions?” (p.93).

To present a scientifically balanced position Jickling adds that despite the need for neutrality, taking an ethical stance IS important, as it teaches students to be actively involved, moral citizens. Jickling asks: “But what if environmental thinking needs to transcend the boundaries of conventional thinking and counter more thought-provoking, even radical, ideas? How do we enable our students to push beyond the bounds of our own best thinking or the conventional wisdom of the day? How do we ensure that they can be exposed to more alternatives?” (p.93). In interpreting these questions, we can suppose that deep ecology (advocating for the wolves for the sake of wolves) can be considered to be one of those ‘radical’ ideas, and that the “bounds of our own best thinking” implies self-defense against angry parents or school administrators intolerant to such ‘radical’ ideas; and “conventional wisdom of the day” implies the anthropocentric approach to nature. If this interpretation is close to what Jickling meant, then the last question about exposing students to more alternatives remains rather open, as it could mean both *the* ‘radical’ alternative and any other alternative, which provide no guarantee of non-human rights.

Jickling reflects that educationist’s responsibility was served by open advocacy of those who spoke on behalf of wolves:

“If education enables social critique, reveals hidden assumptions for public discussion, and disrupts the status quo, then citizens who spoke on behalf of wolves certainly did that. There was a vigorous public debate. And many community members gained confidence in their non-conformist positions... This too has educational merit.” (p.109)

It is interesting to note that in this case, it was citizens and not educators, who served this function. It is also clear that Jickling sees advocacy as serving the goal of education, not another way around. At the end of his paper Jickling makes his position on what education should be about most explicit:

“In the end, our job is to tell good stories and to live good stories. In my own story, the politically charged atmosphere of the Yukon wolf kill demanded that more attention be placed on educational integrity. It was important that my public agenda did not pre-empt educational opportunities, that my students had the intellectual space to think about their own values and to disagree, if they wished, with the positions that I have publicly declared.” (p.110)

Thus, clearly, educational aims were served by advocacy. It is remarkable though those students were ‘taught’ about the non-conformist values, such as deep ecology, by activists outside the classroom rather than by educators whose goal seemed to have been education itself.

2.1 *Environmental ethics and advocacy in education*

Returning to the claim that environmental sustainability will lead to 'unhappiness' (Wals and Jickling, 2002) we need to note that this claim ignores environmental ethics that have been – and continue to be – part of EE and ESD (e.g., Jickling, 2000; Kopnina, 2012; Kronlid and Öhman, 2013). If environmental ethics should matter in the overall moral underpinning of education, the question of social and economic needs has to be weighed with arguments ranging between positions of deep ecology and weak anthropocentrism (Kopnina, 2013; Sund and Öhman, 2013; Kopnina and Meijers, 2014).

Although as humans we cannot know what makes non-human animals 'happy', we may be too easily brushing aside the very consideration of whether abandoning sustainability efforts is fair to those who cannot speak for themselves. In the rendering of non-human world as 'natural resources' (Crist, 2012) entailing habitat destruction, extinction of species, and intensive animal farming (CAFOs) that present the current model of economic development, arguing for abandoning efforts of sustainability through education can simply mean resigning to the existing power hegemonies. While deliberative democracy offers an opportunity for *human* democratic participants to deliberate the finer points of environmental policy, it does not provide the platform for non-human representation (other than through human representatives). As Brett Cherniak has argued:

"If we want to achieve a sustainable future, we cannot rely on a deliberative democratic education. There is no guarantee that within the classroom, green values will triumph. More importantly, there is no guarantee that green values will triumph in the democratic society at large." (Cherniak, 2012, p.30)

In this paper, I shall argue that if environmental advocacy is indeed a threat to pluralism, perhaps the normative assumptions that tend to view environmentalism as a threat should be critically examined in the first place. Could it not be that the educators themselves were affected by the subtle form of indoctrination, stemming from what the founding fathers of environmental sociology Catton and Dunlap (1978) called the Dominant Social Paradigm (DSP). The DSP is comprised of a number of basic beliefs:

- that sustainability challenges will be resolved with continued pursuit of technological and industrial advancement (also termed ecological modernization theory)
- that economic growth will enhance care for environmental problems (also termed post-materialist value theory)
- humans are morally more worthy than members of other species, and social equality issues should be politically prioritized.

Within DSP, normative assumptions include essentially the anthropocentric vision of the world whereas humans are exempt from environmental constraints by the virtue of their technical ingenuity. In this view, 'pluralism' is reserved for one species only.

These anthropocentric tendencies are reflected in the neoliberal education in general and ESD in particular which often engages in social advocacy for racial, gender, and economic equality. Examples of Western ESD include a number of indicators that testify to the predominance of social and economic concerns (e.g., <http://www.esdinds.eu/>). In non-Western countries, many 'development universities' have sprung up, focusing largely on economic development objectives (e.g., Wals and Blewitt, 2012). Generally, ESD indicators do not include measures addressing population growth or consumption.

Rather, ESD focuses on issues such as health and eradication of poverty with pronounced concern about the carrying capacity of the Earth to feed the growing human population.

The extinction of the species, destruction of habitats, and intensive animal farming intensified by the expansion of human population and consumption are rarely addressed. Biospheric egalitarianism, or justice between species, as well as deep ecology perspective (e.g., Næss, 1973) that assigns intrinsic value to non-human species is simply ignored in most EE and ESD (with the notable exception of the Earth Charter initiative). In this dominant paradigm, at best, environmental advocacy and deep ecology perspective can be viewed as one of many pluralistic perspectives. At worst, environmentalism can be seen as a threat as it challenges the position of human supremacy embedded within the dominant political and ideological hegemonies (Crist, 2012).

3 The case study

To illustrate how this can be achieved we shall now turn to the case study of the written reports on the documentary film about the radical environmental movement presented to the students of a sustainable business minor at International Business Management Studies (IBMS) of The Hague University of Applied Science (HHS). The 32 students (20 males, 12 females) who viewed the film in November 2013 were between 22 and 24 years of age. Majority of the students were Dutch, followed by German, French, Moroccan, Bulgarian, Pakistani, American and other predominantly European or North African nationalities. The students were asked to write individual reports summarising the film (see a sample of summary in the written assignments below)¹ reflecting on the questions raised by the film. The film was shown as part of Politics, Business, and Environment module, with the objective of eliciting individual responses to environmental advocacy perspective presented in the film.

“The film *If A Tree Falls: A Story Of The Earth Liberation Front (ELF)* by Marshall Curry (2011) tells the story of Daniel McGowan was arrested by Federal agents in a nationwide sweep of radical environmentalists involved with the ELF – a group the FBI has called America’s “number one domestic terrorism threat.” According to the synopsis description the ELF – operating in separate anonymous cells without any central leadership – had launched arsons against dozens of businesses they accused of destroying the environment: timber companies, car dealerships, wild horse slaughterhouses, and a ski lodge at Vail, Colorado.”

“With the arrest in 2005 of Daniel and thirteen others, the government had cracked what was probably the largest ELF cell in America and brought down the group responsible for the very first ELF arsons in this country. The film tells the story of the rise and fall of this ELF cell, by focusing on the transformation and radicalization of one of its members. And along the way, it asks hard questions about environmentalism, activism, and the way we define terrorism. Drawing from striking archival footage – much of it never before seen – and intimate interviews with ELF members, and with the prosecutor and detective who were chasing them, *IF A TREE FALLS* explores the tumultuous period from 1995 until early 2001 when environmentalists were clashing with timber companies and law enforcement, and the word ‘terrorism’ had not yet been altered by 9/11.” (<http://www.ifatreefallsfilm.com/If%20A%20Tree%20Falls-Press%20Notes.pdf>)

The students have submitted their written assignments on 15 December 2013. The written reactions to the film are presented below (original grammar and spelling preserved).

3.1 Written assignments

The written assignments could be classified into two broad categories: those who supported Daniels' cause but disapproved of his methods, and those who understood the motivation but did not support the cause and the methods of ELF.

The overwhelming majority supported the cause but disapproved of the methods, reflected by this Dutch male student: "I certainly respect his aim in protecting the environment. However, violence is never a way to accomplish that". German male students reflect this point: "I understand that people want to act against environmental destruction, but I could never justify those actions. There has to be a better, more civilized way of stopping the big companies". A Romanian male student agrees: "Even though it is quite frustrating to see that the authorities have no respect and responsibility for the environment, after their protests it does not give [ELF] the right to destroy other people's properties. It is important to realize how far you can go with these protests toward the environment and where to stop". Other students expressed similar thoughts:

"According to a ranger, 95% of the woods in the USA were cut down, so the opinion that the environmentalists are radical is mistaken and there is an emerging question if environmentalists or the industry are radical... I understand that ELF members felt like they needed to change the situation. I was really resentful after seeing some recordings of the police attacks on the protesters. But on the other hand, I don't think that destruction is the way to doing things right." (Bulgarian female)

"It is honorable that ELF strives to better the environment. However, the way they do that, by that, of course, I mean setting businesses on fire is a crime and should not be allowed." (Dutch female)

"This film was very interesting and gave me a great insight into the thought pattern and the reasons behind the more extremist environmental activists. It was interesting to see the reasoning behind the actions taken by the ELF and to realize that their initial intentions were quite harmless. Later on, however, they got bolder and more radical with their protests against environmentally unfriendly companies. Nonetheless, they always had a 'good' reason for taking the actions that they did, and they seemed to believe that they were truly making a difference in the name of preventing harm to the environment.

Whether they were justly accused of being (eco-)terrorists is hard to say. Personally, I do not believe that the actions that were taken by the ELF should be compared to those of actual terrorists. While ELF has dozens of businesses, not once there was a human casualty or harm to innocent bystanders; only property damage. Actual terrorists, on the other hand, actually intend to do harm to people and do so in order to create chaos and malice; I do not believe that the actions of the ELF can be compared to such crimes, even if their actions are (by definition or legally) classified as terrorism by the government." (Dutch male)

"Personally, I already knew that environmental activists nowadays act quite aggressive to get their views in the attention of media and the government. But in this film, I came to the understanding of how a peaceful act of protest is forced to become a protest which is ethically and morally wrong. The motive of

all the steps taken by the movement, I believe are right, but the actual steps that they have taken are nothing better than what the government is actually doing. In my opinion, the movement started off right but ended up on the wrong side.” (Dutch/Pakistani male)

Many students were sympathetic to Daniel’s personality and motivation.

“A good thing that the film does is showing the viewer how a seemingly normal young man turns into an ‘eco-terrorist’. A big issue when it comes to environmental conservation is that individuals feel powerless when it comes to making a change. Members of the ELF tried as much as they could to make a change in a peaceful way, but these peaceful acts were answered by violence from the government. If trying in a peaceful way to defend what you believe in gets you pepper-sprayed in the face, and beaten, then it might not come as a surprise that one would become more violent himself in fighting for his beliefs. Though I do not agree that setting fire to buildings is ever an answer, I can understand the viewpoint of those members of the ELF who did so.” (Dutch male)

“What I liked was when Daniel participated in freeing the wild horses by burning their slaughterhouse. Animal interests have to be considered, and until this radical action, they were not. I actually see [Daniel] as a nice guy, kind to others, he does not make a profit from his actions.” (Columbian female)

This sympathy was mostly expressed through students’ discussion of (un)fairness of Daniel’s prison sentence, especially in relation to Jake Ferguson’s:

“The thing that struck me most was [Daniel’s] very intelligent and peaceful attitude and his honesty about the arsons and the way he got involved. He seemed to be more of an intelligent idealist than a drug using hippie, contrary to Jacob Ferguson. Surprisingly the judge gave Daniel 7 years of prison while Jacob got away without any prison sentence. This was also due to the fact that Jacob collaborated with the police.” (Dutch male)

Applying the example of ‘prisoners’ dilemma, a French female student reflected:

“At first you see that all the members think they are on the same page, that they wouldn’t betray each other if they ever got arrested. However, more towards the end, you see that one by one they all kind of cave in order to get less jail time. We learned this theory called prisoners’ dilemma in economics which fits perfectly in this situation. In my opinion, it was quite unethical of [Jake] to go undercover and deceive his friends like that, but then again he was only looking at his own best interest.”

Some students have considered the efficacy of the ELF action, considering their radical choice of methods:

“All the testimonies give real strength to the movie; it was not a few isolated incidences of radical activism but a well-organized revolutionary force. A truly poignant documentary, very well done and leads the viewer to ask questions constantly. It exposes the motivations, values, and risks of environmental activists, as well as from our shares to be allocated to our demands, facing a blind system, which definitely requires a re-questioning [of our own interests]... Daniel recognizes that some of these actions were a mistake with too many ‘collateral damages’... There are other ways to make their voice heard. The violence, in my opinion, is never the right way to make your point. They wanted the population to react, but by engaging in such radical actions, the

majority of the population becomes less interested. People are just concerned about the action but not what is behind it.” (French female)

“Even though I do not sympathize with such violent acts in general and I also do not see the point in burning houses (burned synthetics stressing the environment), being environmentally committed myself I am definitely on the side of ELF since – apart from their rampages – stand for something good in my book.” (German male)

“In my opinion, this film has two obvious sides. The first side is of the ELF's, that want to make a statement and want to protect the environment. At first, it is non-violent and it is kind of peaceful. However, later on, it becomes violent, they actually ‘fight’ against police cops and they damage property, they, for example, burn whatever they can, as long as no one gets hurt of course. This damaging and violent part is, in my opinion, contradicting to what they fight for. I understand that they want to make something clear and that opposing parties are aggressive as well, but when damaging property, for example, it releases emissions which aren't very good for the environment. (Thinking of burning plastic for example). Also, when something is burned it cannot be recycled or re-used so it does not do any good for the environment. So I get their passion for the environment and I totally back them up for that part only. Their acts are not very favorable in my opinion, it is too aggressive in my opinion.” (Moroccan female)

In thinking about the motivation of Daniel outside of concrete judiciary discussion, a Spanish female student quoted Theodore Roosevelt in her report “We have become great because of the lavish use of our resources. But the time has come to inquire seriously what will happen when our forests are gone, when the coal, the iron, the oil and the gas are exhausted”. This student reflected that

“Every day we use resources and ‘empty’ nature by taking what we need from it. Very often we are involved in the vicious cycle, where we take more and more not even thinking whether we need all that or what each of us individually could do something differently. All that can lead to the fact that very many valuable things are destroyed.”

Fighting against the destruction of valuable things was seen as a justifiable motivation by the Colombian female student:

“I think it's good that Danny fights against those loggers... They say they replant the forest – of course, they do, they make money on that. Yet, it takes many years to regrow the trees, and the trees that they have felled were huge, they were a hundred years old. You cannot replace those.”

Not all students were positive about the motivation or actions of Daniel and ELF. Disapproval of both action and motivation was best expressed by these students:

“In my opinion the prison sentence was correct. Even though a company is harming the environment there is no reason to harm these people and their businesses. I find the protest exaggerating and think that these people only think as an environmentalist rather than thinking like human beings. Sometimes sustainability can influence people so badly that they take such actions as Daniel did.” (Dutch male)

“From the other perspective, the ELF's view of the world is not realistic. They do everything to prevent trees from getting cut down, even though it is obvious that the world needs lumber. Lumber companies also plant new trees to replace the ones they cut down, and they have clear quotas and regulations that they

have to keep to. In my opinion, the actions of the ELF against these companies are in no way justifiable...

In my opinion, it's always wrong to use violence if you fight for a better world, even if your peaceful attempts are being answered by violence. By resorting to violence themselves, ELF lost all credibility in their fight for a better world in my opinion. Even though it is debatable if setting the fire is an act of violence, there is no way that it can be used to do good." (Dutch male)

"I did not particularly empathize for [Daniel] or felt bad for him going to jail... He committed serious crimes that can simply not be allowed. I did like to see the point of view from ELF, but in my opinion, their actions were too extreme." (Dutch female)

The approval or disapproval of the motivation led students to reflect upon the issue of judicial justice and relativism of the 'right' perspective were also discussed:

"The film closes with the thought of how people like activists from the ELF are called terrorists and are put into jail while companies polluting and exploiting the environment pay a fine and keep on doing business. Like everything also this depends on the point of view because, of course, someone sympathizing with their ideas would never see ELF as terrorists." (Dutch male)

"I can not judge which side is the right one. The world is full of color and not only black and white. There are different perspectives from which the case can be assessed. But the phrases "one mans terrorist is another mans freedom fighter" and "extreme situations call for extreme measures" describe my point of view best possible." (German male)

The realization that "everything depends on the point of view" is well-reflected in this American female students' relativizing report:

"This film was probably one of the most controversial and well-made films I have ever seen. The directors did an amazing job of connecting with individuals across the whole story, from the former revolutionaries and their families to the police. This gave the story a real feeling of weight, without all these testimonies it would seem like a few isolated incidences of radical activism rather than the well organized revolutionary force that it was. Growing up in the Pacific Northwest gave me a different perspective for this film, I was born just a few hours south of Eugene, and the ELF story is still well known in these areas. In Oregon demonstrations and protests are as much a part of the culture as the forests themselves, so it is quite easy to see how a revolutionary force like this could develop.

Showing the public how many of the protests that were completely peaceful and within the law were met with brutality helped give an understanding of the arsonists, personifying their struggle and sharing their motives. These individuals took a radical stand against actions they perceived to be unjust, doing what they believed to be their civic duty to protect their lands. In this view, they are true revolutionaries, a protectionist force rather than a terrorist force."

Police brutality shown in the film was also the cause of Bulgarian male student's understanding of the deficiencies of the 'system' and the arbitrariness of the (American) legal system:

"In my opinion, this case/film illustrates how broken the system is in today's world. When activists start to peacefully protest some kind of issue, the police

and law enforcement starts to use power against them, which only escalates the activists to start acting aggressively as well... But each time the ELF made sure nobody was being hurt by their action... After the court, these people get a huge sentence since their action are labeled terrorism. But how is that a terrorist? When they can be viewed as freedom fighters by others. Always making sure no one is being hurt and only pointing at the broken system. Despite this, the main subject Jake Ferguson receives no prison time even though he was one of the initiators of the whole ELF, and being a drug addict which clearly will do more harm being free than normal people which by his action will be in prison for numerous years which just fight for the right thing."

The same police brutality has also brought into question the legitimacy of anti-environmentalists actions:

"It is quite shocking to see policemen spraying pepper spray in the eyes of people who don't endanger them in any way. However, after in my opinion, inappropriate police intervention during protests that had a simple aim – to give the environmentalists opportunity to speak at a public hearing – lots of people shared the radical point of view on the situation. They started believing that working with the system was questionable." (Bulgarian female)

Reflecting on the difficulty of assigning a 'terrorist' label a German male student reflected:

"Even so [Daniel] burned down a building, I don't see him as a terrorist. A terrorist wants to hurt as many people as possible, but he just tries to get awareness and wanted to stop companies to do things, which are bad in his mind. In addition, I also think that his punishment (7 years in jail) is a bit too long and also the fact that he is marked as a terrorist for the rest of his life, isn't fair."

The Moroccan female student reflected that it is not easy to say who is a real terrorist in the film since "95% of the forest/trees are being cut down in the USA, so the FBI states that ELF is radical, but actually the fact that 95% of our source of oxygen is being eliminated is radical. The [ELF] focused on economic sabotage because the companies that ruin the environment only think about their profits". The Bulgarian female student reflected:

"There is also a question of terrorists vs. heroes emerging. How are we supposed to perceive environmental terrorists? On one hand, it is necessary to give ELF credit for making sure that no one's life or health would be endangered. The activists were trying to change the environmental problems within the country where thanks to bureaucracy and corporations lobbying, no sufficient actions would be made. However, the property damage was far-reaching and moreover, people were scared that they might be targeted.

I can't decide whether the radical environmentalists should be labeled as terrorists or not. They did commit acts that generated terror of producers across the country. Nonetheless, the document is quite personal and it is rather obvious that the intentions of ELF were good – to protect the environment."

Romanian male student felt that the intention to protect the environment was good and assigning activists the terrorist label is difficult:

"The world's natural resources and habitats are consumed around us, this movie was perfectly timed, especially for us.... All this represent people that fight against corporation and government action, peacefully and creatively without

hearing anyone. On the other hand, they are humiliated and beaten by the authorities in the process and all their work was for nothing because in the end the trees were still cut.

It is good to know that during their vandalism operations no person was harmed or killed. On the other hand, the owners of the locations destroyed claimed that they felt under terror from this movement while the police were calling them terrorists as well. This is quite difficult to appreciate whether they can be called like that or not since their goal is to protect the environment and not to destroy it.”

Two German male students felt that the environmentalists could be labeled terrorists, even without human victims:

“The main dilemma of this case is if the actions of the ELF can be seen as terrorism or property destruction. On the one hand they managed to make sure that during all these explosions not a single person was hurt. On the other hand, you have to consider the threat that people who own these companies had to face. For them, it clearly must have felt like terrorism, even though their lives were not in danger. What also has to be taken into consideration is the question if there have to be human victims in order to call it terroristic actions. In my opinion, the actions of Daniel and the ELF have to be seen as terrorism. First of all, if you burn down factories of the size they did you can never be absolutely sure that nobody is going to be hurt. Secondly, they did not just bomb one factory to send a message but burned down many what is a threat to all owners of businesses of that kind.

What I personally really like about that film is that it shows how regular people who care about things can be radicalized and do things nobody would expect them to do. It also gets you to think about the term terrorism and forces you to make up your mind about it.

My personal opinion about this movie is really hard to explain and I think this is why it is a good movie, because after you watched you ask yourself different questions. In the beginning, I have to say that in my eyes Daniel is nothing else than a kind of every man, who tries to improve the society but definitely picked a bad destructive strategy... However, the actions he and the ELF took are in my eyes terrorism. Of course, nobody got hurt and they burned down empty factories or slaughterhouses, but that is in my eyes, not the point... Somebody said to me that it is no terrorism because it was for a cause. Al Qaida also has a course when they fly into two towers, they want to destroy western society and this is the reason why I think it has also to be seen as terrorism.

The fact that the ELF tried to do ‘good’ things for the environment must not hide that they definitely chose the wrong actions. Sometimes it helps to fight fire with fire but in my opinion not in this case.”

Yet another German male student disagreed: “If we call property damage terrorism we should seriously question where our values lie. In my view, calling [Daniel] terrorist is simply wrong, since he did not do any harm, except for the bad system”. The question of the agency of harm, as identified in the segment below, was also discussed. Aside from ‘polluting and exploiting companies’ some students have focused on the role of regular citizen/consumers, and environmentalists themselves:

“Very often we blame not ourselves, but institutions, organizations, and companies for the destruction of our natural resources and environment, but we

do not see that all that is used to produce products and services that we consume ourselves.

People were caught and punished as criminals, which probably was right. Nevertheless, the story in the movie touches more complicated and subtle issues than terrorism. In general, there is an issue that people have a tendency to fight the consequences not to change the system in order to prevent the appearance of consequences. Also, the movie shows that too much energy is wasted on wrong objectives that do not give the expected results. The destruction of businesses did not change the fact that forests were cut down; it did not change the society's attitude or behavior. The acts of terrorism did not change anything, actually, it damaged the local economy, which leads to an even higher need for and consumption of the resources. It can be argued that that there was a need for radical changes and means to attack the problem and the terrorism was seen as the only alternative. But with regret have to point out that the groups were not willing to see other alternatives that probably would have been more difficult." (Spanish female)

Realization of the complexity of finding the guilty party or the responsible agency has led students to reflect on the difficulty to justify both actions of the eco-terrorists and the government officials involved in police brutality: "In the film the ELF started by using largely peaceful methods of protest until the police started to introduce force and brutality" (English-Pakistani male). A Dutch male student focused on the agency of companies and regular citizens, as well as the failure of the capitalist system:

"The question of whether the actions were effective and justified is hard to answer. My personal opinion is that the destruction of property is an improper and ineffective way of acting. It's improper because the destruction causes a person to build and buy the property again, which causes more raw materials to be used. It's ineffective because on one side you harm the reputation of environmentalists, and on the other hand the system of destruction is not stopped. I think destruction is never caused by one particular person or company. Destruction is caused by the capitalistic system that works with supply and demand, and scarcity of materials causes the government to give more forest to the loggers.

The documentary shows this system clearly. The loggers themselves don't think they do wrong, because they replant the forests they log, which is logical because they need the new forest for logging again in a few years. The shop owners don't think they do wrong, because they work hard to earn money and in their work, they are honest people. The ELF don't think they are wrong, because nature is indeed destroyed, and they are trying to stop that, first by peaceful protesting and when that doesn't work they use arson."

The same student continued reflecting on the agency that can make a have a positive impact, in his view, the government:

"The only place where this destruction could be stopped is in the government. The governors can oppose the capitalistic system by protecting the forests with rules and regulations. They need to stop believing in liberalism concerning nature and resources. Unfortunately, the government in the USA uses money from capitalistic companies to fund their elections. This makes the governors vulnerable to the system. Therefore the system has become uncontrollable and this makes it so hard for the USA to commit to climate agreements such as the Kyoto protocol." (Dutch male)

A Dutch female student has reflected that it is not just the government but better communication that can enable positive change:

“In my opinion, communication is way more effective than setting things on fire. Rather than ‘hurting’ these companies, they should take verbal action against these companies... Moreover, it is kind of contradicting what ELF, since setting buildings on fire is very harmful to the environment, it releases a lot of toxins in the air for instance.” (Dutch female)

An English-Pakistani male student was less optimistic of the role of government to change things, who reflected: “Personally I do not believe that violence and destruction are necessary in the current age of technology however it is becoming increasingly difficult to be heard by governments of modern times”.

The Spanish female student thinks that responsibility lies with citizens-consumers and with the environmentalists as part of the wider society that could drive innovation and change:

“Instead of terrorizing, the group could have come together and developed new products that could substitute the wood in construction or plant trees specially for lumber materials or generate other nonviolent ideas that could at least try to solve the tree-cutting issue. The main message of the movie was to say that businesses and companies destroy our environment and valuable nature, which has to be stopped and a group of ordinary people who have taken on the function of judges execute the terrorist plan. However, the unsaid message of the film is about what ordinary people do in order to become more sustainable themselves. Do they consume less? Do they try to achieve zero-impact on nature? Have they changed their way of thinking and behavior? Unfortunately, the terrorist groups are trying to shift the responsibility of the environmental destruction of multinational companies rather than on themselves, because it is so easy not to see their own mistakes and flaws.”

In the same vein, Dutch male student considered “how to hate for people/companies exceeding love for the planet. If (Daniel) really cared about this subject he could have tried to connect with people having a lot of influence, or act just as Greenpeace, which balances on the limits of the law”. Turkish-Dutch male believes that strategically important alternative could be “an issue of economic benefits vs. ecological damage”:

“The way economies work is not sustainable but for it to become sustainable technology has to be developed. In order for technology to be developed money is needed. I do not wish to condemn Daniel for his actions however I am disappointed that he took the way of vandalism.”

Somewhat similar to this view is the reflection of the Moroccan female student which stresses the role of ‘good education’ and the strategy from tackling the ‘system’ from within:

“I would use the system against them, like instead of sleeping in front of a forest they want to destroy, I would make sure I have a good education (using the system) get into a company, having a good position, good attitude etc, so that you can use that gained respect and power AGAINST the ones that destroy the environment. It is more helpful to show a company alternative that is cost-effective than sleep in front of a forest like a hippie...

The second group is the police and others that are hired by the companies to get rid of the ELF’s, they work for the government and are hired by the companies and they are just doing their job, so it was sad to see that they got involved even

though they might understand and agree with the fact that the environment is very important.” (Moroccan female)

3.2 *Reflection on assignments*

As the experience from the writing assignments in the case above shows, the business students appreciated the complexity of the issues presented. Students' perception of the 'system' has revealed a number of (sometimes opposing) preconceptions and assumptions, as well as the ability to question them. In referring to a “blind system, which definitely requires a re-questioning”, or a ‘broken system’, or a ‘bad system’ many students have however questioned how legally or morally justifiable – and using what methods – environmental action can be.

Students have also doubted who profited from the system or who could be to blame. While one student thought that “destruction is never caused by one particular person or company” but by the “capitalistic system that works with supply and demand”, another student thought that the demand is justified because “it is obvious that the world needs lumber”. Another example of the difference is the assessment of the justification for the destruction of the old growth trees. While on the one hand some students noted that the loggers satisfy the demand and obey regulations, others have noted that loggers “replant the forests they log, which is logical because they need the new forest for logging again in a few years” and “yet, it takes many years to regrow the trees, and the trees that they have felled were huge” and irreplaceable.

Unfortunately, the scope of this paper does not allow for the analysis ensuing in-class discussion after viewing the film. However, the diversity of views and the evidence of the critical ability of these students offer support to the idea that discussing environmental advocacy can be beneficial for both pluralistic learnings, and for recognizing the moral complexity as well as the urgency of certain environmental issues.

While the film has not converted students into what Wals and Jickling (2002) feared to be ‘eco-totalitarianism’ and doubtfully has made them support deep ecology perspective, it has triggered their critical ability and recognition radical environmentalist perspective. Exposing students to environmental advocacy had a positive effect on the appreciation of the passion that some human advocates feel for their cause.

Yet, educators might want to go further and stimulate students to engage with other issues, such as the extinction of the species, destruction of habitats, and intensive animal farming. Reflecting more generally, it is not hard to embrace the notion that a diversity of belief and tolerance of dissent must be at the heart of any democratically embedded educational practice. It is harder to comprehend that the apparent diversity of opinion masks the power hegemonies in which anthropocentric bias rules supreme. As long the Human Exceptionalism Paradigm that lies at the heart of neoliberal industrial capitalism remains unchallenged, no amount of pluralism will help address our planet's environmental predicament.

Let us return to Jickling and the wolves. Let us imagine another time and place – for example when acceptance of slavery was embedded within the social norms. Would it also be appropriate for educators to ‘tell good stories’ without condemning slavery, even if they believed that it was abhorrent, and to allow students the “intellectual space to think about their own values?” Would students develop their own values in the first place when the society around them – including their families AND the teachers – did not dispute the destiny of ‘the silent ones’ (the slaves)? Speaking up for the slaves at that

time would entail worse things than Jickling has encountered at the time of the wolf kill—not just the threat to be fired from a teaching position, but a chance to be torn apart by the angry mob.

Today, we cannot imagine how an educator can advocate a different perspective – namely, the one *in support* of slavery, without being fired (or declared insane). Yet without the courage of abolitionists slavery might still be around today. We, as educators, busy typing these papers, may have an important role to play in supporting social movements that we deem noble. In my own mild effort to expose students to environmental advocacy by showing the film, I hope that the audacity with which we condemn those ‘radicals’ (or ‘eco-totalitarianists’) who speak for the silent ones will be challenged.

Without engaging in the lengthy discussion of environmental ethics, brushing off concerns about non-human species as one of many (marginal) perspectives, ignores the severity of our planet’s predicament. Non-humans can never engage in these learned pluralistic discussions. If we were to imagine that biospheric egalitarianism deserves as much attention as social equality, environmental advocacy needs to be put at the forefront of EE. We need to seriously address the very urgent moral concern with this wonderland biosphere with all true plurality of its planetary citizens (Rolston, 2015). Showing the film about committed environmentalists can serve as a starting point of engaging students with deep ecology and biospheric altruism perspectives.

Returning to the fears of advocacy expressed by Jickling (1996), Öhman (2008), Sund (2008) and Wals (2010), the case study discussed suggests that exposing students to environmental advocacy does not clash with the objective of educating to be students’ active citizens, to consider other’s points of view and to reflect upon own positionality. In fact, advocacy enhances the students’ possibilities to actively take responsibility as democratic citizens.

4 Conclusion

Evidence from this case study indicates that environmental advocacy is essential for educating critical citizens capable of addressing sustainability challenges. In returning to Jickling’s question: “How do we enable our students to push beyond the bounds of the conventional wisdom of the day?” we can reply “By daring to go beyond conventional bounds of mainstream ethics and commitments, in abandoning caution of political correctness, and in daring to defend – in front of class – that which needs protection”.

We need to acknowledge the role of environmental advocacy as crucially important if the interests of all planetary citizens – and not just one species – are to be taken seriously. I have argued that the plurality of predominantly anthropocentric perspectives is not enough to push the bounds of conventional wisdom. We need to move beyond advocating democratic learning as a goal in and of itself, and since we are teaching students to be prepared for effective participation in our society, “we must teach them theory and method that *is* effective” (Cherniak, 2012, p.30). We also need to transcend the conventional boundaries and counter more thought-provoking, even radical, ideas.

This is not to say that discouraging divergent perspectives or undermining democracy² in favor of some imaginary eco-totalitarianism is the right way. However, to move beyond the conventional boundaries, the students need to be asked: What about the wolves? What about the trees? What about those who defend them? What about the

system that breeds us all – consumers, loggers, politicians, environmentalists? In their writing assignments, the students have shown critical ability to ponder these questions. Returning to Jickling's assertion that at the end it is our duty to tell good stories and to live good stories, the film *If A Tree Falls* has done just that. It has also revealed students' ability to both engage in democratic learning and to start appreciating – or at least recognizing – alternative perspectives.

Yet, the main lessons from the paper are that plurality of opinion can be beneficial to and simultaneously supportive of bolder and more radical ideas, yet educators and researchers need to be careful not to make such ideas subservient to plurality as a goal in and of itself. Future prospects need to be considered. EE and ESD educators and researchers need to ponder the moral relativity of their own positions. Could conventional sustainability approach that aims to balance social, economic, and ecological objective equip students with knowledge, skills and ethical background to address ecological needs? Does the “triple P’s (Profit, People, Planet) adequately address habitat destruction, species extinction, and intensive animal farming? Since the wolves and the trees are ‘the silent ones’, the unique role of human advocates who speak for them needs to be considered. Showing students a film that opens up questions about what is radical and what is normative in the established system is a start. Students can handle it, and so should we, as educators.

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Notes

¹The summaries are omitted as they are mostly descriptive. However, one of these summaries that describes the story is presented below (by the Dutch male student):

"Daniel lived a fairly normal life he graduated from college with a degree in business until one day he started attending concerts that proceeded were donated to the running of a peaceful environmentalist movement, he was shown a movie which "blew his mind", this lead him to start protesting peacefully by writing letters and attending peaceful demonstrations. With the environmentalist movement, he traveled to Wisconsin and got his real first taste

of nature. Soon after this trip, he was arrested while on a peaceful protest. The group was outraged by how the government treats nature and how "trees were being looked at as if they were crop". After many events of unnecessary police brutality such as the W.T.O protests which saw the movement attack consumerist shops in order to make an impact. The first major incident in the film was the burning down of Oakridge station which became the largest domestic case of terrorism. The film portrays Daniel as a very moral man... as he believed "no change could come without force" and "the police and governments actions erode the people's belief in change".

Tim Lewis, an activist filmmaker settled in western Oregon, talked about how the evolution of protest went from a hippy-type of approach to a more drastic one with ELF. He first met Danny when there was a huge demonstration including blockades of protestors against the clearing of a forest in Eugene. A wall out of wood was built to keep the trucks out. Having stayed there for one year the protesters were carried out by officers of the Forest Service and the wall was destroyed. Tim Lewis found that ironical since he always thought [the Forest Service] was there to save the interest of the forest. After this event the first attack of the ELF movement took place when a ranger station was set on fire with Jake Ferguson, pictured as an outlaw type of guy, setting the stage motivation-wise.

In a short sequence, the director shows Bill Baron of the Native Forest Council taking a look at a huge, 500 years old tree arguing that it is not radical to save the last five percent of standing wood referring to the actions of ELF.

After setting the ranger's office on fire ELF exceeded its concern from main trees to wild horses which were endangered by the government. They were slaughtered in such an extent that sometimes the water treatment facility of Oregon had to be shut down. After the activists became aware of the factory was burned down resulting in the company not able to continue operating. This gave ELF a massive boost. From now on they were doing two major protests per week and after the police had hurt people protesting against the World Trade Organization in Seattle, they vandalized the city's shops. From that point on ELF was labeled as 'Eco-Terrorists' by the media, raising doubts that someone who had always considering life like the activists always did, could be termed 'terrorist'.

Also, the company 'Superior Lumber' of a lumberman who ran it in the third generation fell prey to the ELF when it was burned down. He stated that there was not justified attacking his company. For him, it would make no sense cutting down the last tree since the forest meant his existence.

The downfall of the Earth Liberation Front came when six members were arrested and mentioned that they may testify against other activists. And after years of searching in the dark investigators succeeded and also arrested Jake Ferguson. Though not having enough evidence for putting him into jail he was taken in by the police bluffing and delivered them, Danny. Also, Danny eventually closed a bargain with the police and now faced potentially eight years imprisonment from which he received seven in the end.

²We may recall Churchill's famous dictum: "Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time" (from a House of Commons speech on 11 November 1947).