

# Lightning Talk: Social Ecology & Education

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## What is my research about?

- My name is Jason van Tol and I'm a PhD student at UTS
- My research is about how young people navigate two related tensions arising out of a capitalist economy: one in relation to the environment, and the other in relation to education.
- For this, I've developed a model of education based on Murray Bookchin's principle of social ecology, published in 3 papers, which I elaborate during the main conference
- Very briefly: the core principle of social ecology is ecological problems stem from social problems; hence the name: *social* ecology.

## What are my questions & methods, and what have I found so far?

- First research question, addressing the ecological problem, is about how young people understand the conflict between economic growth and ecological sustainability, for which there's a major gap in the literature.
- Through interviews, very preliminary results suggest economic growth means a variety of things to young people, but that with few exceptions, they do see it as conflicting with ecological sustainability
- Yet according to the principle of social ecology, this ecological problem stems from social problems, which, in my research I've interpreted as education for employment, because of the subordinated role that employees have at work, and which are reflected in conventional student-teacher relationships.
- So the Australian government defines employees as those who: "perform work, under the direction and control of their employer" – sounds like a social problem to me.

- The proposed solution is to make active citizenship a much more effective aim of education, creating a second conflict, or tension; BUT this one a social, specifically educational tension.
- So my second research question is about how young people understand this tension between education for employment and active citizenship education, for which there's also a major gap in the literature.
- Again, very preliminary results – for this question are inconclusive, but raise other important related questions, about what citizenship, and citizenship education means to young people, for which there seems to be a lot of confusion.

### **Why is my research important?**

- This research is important as it will contribute to the subsequent development of teaching resources that address both the goal of ecological sustainability, as well as the means of active and informed citizenship education, which itself is a longstanding Australian educational policy goal.
- Thanks for listening!