NORDIC RESEARCH ON ENVIRONMENTAL AND SUSTAINABILITY EDUCATION - AN AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVE

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THE QUESTION

"From your experience: What is specific with the Nordic research on environmental and sustainability education? What have you found interesting? What should be developed? How does it relate and differ from other traditions and countries?"
AN AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVE

- A partial view – both inside and outside the Nordic context

- Exploring anecdotal and personal experiences of research-in-the-making and connecting these to the question of the specificity of Nordic ESE research

- How did Nordic ESE research help me to address the topics in which I was interested?
ONCE UPON A TIME…

…I was an ESE policy advisor at the Flemish government (2002-2016)

Policymakers and practitioners struggling with pressing questions:

- “Should we strive to convince people to act and think more sustainable, or is that a form of inappropriate indoctrination?”
- “What to teach if even scientists and experts are not sure what the most sustainable solutions are?”
- “How much pluralism can we tolerate in the face of the far-reaching, severe consequences of the social and ecological crisis?”
THE START OF A RESEARCH JOURNEY

- PhD research at the University of Leuven – Laboratory of Education and Society (2009-2013)
The action competence approach and the ‘new’ discourses of education for sustainable development, competence and quality criteria

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Action competence has been a key concept in educational circles in Denmark since the 1980s. This paper explores the relationship between the action competence approach and recent discourses of education for sustainable development (ESD), competence and quality criteria. First we argue that action competence is an educational ideal, referring to the German notion of ‘Bildung’ and that the very essence of action competence can be derived from the notion of ‘action’. Second we emphasise that a particular focus must be put on education, when ESD is seen through the lens of the action competence approach. Next we suggest that the interpretation of ‘competence’ differs substantially in this approach from those connected to individualistic-oriented Human Resource Management theory, while some similarities and differences can be found in relation to subject-oriented notions of competence and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development-promoted DeSeCo (Definition and Selection of Competencies) perspective. Finally, we argue that quality criteria that are in concert with the action competence approach should: focus on enhancement of teaching and learning; reflect the democratic values that ESD seeks to promote; be co-elaborated by the relevant stakeholders; and foment institutional as well as individual learning and, thereby, instantiate the Bildung perspective embedded throughout this approach.

Keywords: action competence; education for sustainable development; competence; indicators; quality criteria; environmental education; Bildung
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Participation and Sustainable Development: The Post-ecologist Transformation of Citizen Involvement in Denmark

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ABSTRACT Since the 1970s, citizen participation has always been regarded as a crucial condition of successful eco-political change. However, the relationship between democracy and environmentalism is not unproblematic. How has this relationship transformed since the early days of modern environmentalism? This contribution investigates this question focusing on one particular country: Denmark. Based on empirical research on the mediating agents, i.e. those who have tried to involve citizens in environmental issues and sustainable development, a number of stages are identified through which a post-ecologist approach has taken shape. It is marked by an orientation towards consensus and laissez-faire and has marginalised any conflicts around the values implied in sustainable development. This transformation, it is argued, has not been strategically promoted by particular actors, but has come about in an inclusive process in which environmentalists themselves have played an active part.

The important point here is that there are no simple and obvious ways in which the tension between democracy and sustainable development may be resolved. In fact, the project of sustainability accentuates the basic tension between republican and liberal theories of democracy, i.e. the tension between citizenship as a matter of rights and citizenship as a matter of duties (Dobson, 2003). The objective of sustainable development places unprecedented emphasis on ‘the common good’ and thus heightens tensions with the private and personal. As the Danish environmentalist Claus Heinberg puts it:

May 2012: Workshop in Brussels
Sustainable development as a public issue. Challenges for education.

Education for sustainable development (ESD) is increasingly affecting environmental education policy and practice. In this article we analyze how the mainstream interpretation of educational challenges in relation to sustainable development runs the risk of translating sustainability issues into learning problems of individuals. Then, sustainable development is mainly seen as a problem that can be tackled by applying the proper learning processes. We present a different perspective on education in the context of sustainable development. In our view, the principal challenge for environmental education practitioners facing ESD policy and discourse is to present sustainable development as a “public issue”. From this point of view, education is strongly connected with democracy. We connect our democratic interpretation of the educational process that is needed with novel ways of thinking about citizenship education. The focus is no longer on the competences that citizens must achieve, but on the democratic nature of the spaces and practices in which participation and citizenship can develop.

Keywords: ESD; democracy; participation; citizenship
PEER-REVIEW AS AN EYE-OPENING PROCESS

- Entering the international ESE research scene: Discovering ‘new’ things
- A ‘pragmatic’ turn?
- A new style – compared to what I was used to
DISCOVERING NORDIC ESE RESEARCH

- Looking beyond the horizon of an inevitably biased research environment

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p. 3-4
The discussion about the difference between the fostering and the political is not at all new to the field of EE and ESD. Please take for instance a look at contributions from Swedish research (Öhman, Östman, Sund, Lundegård), who do the same kind of distinction between a normative fostering approach and a pluralistic.
PRAGMATIC TURN

- Purpose!
- Practice!

2. On achievement ...
Most questions concerning ESD or the environment are indeed public in the sense of Dewey and they have no straight solutions. How we should value them as citizens is never just a question of knowledge (information). But, as you refer to Dewey, in his sense the final solution is never either/or. Sometimes people need to achieve knowledge (information), and sometimes there is also a democratic right for them to get it (always by participation, because learning is participation, in one way or another).

5. As I see it the author(s) try to argue for a third way to conceptualize democracy in ESD, which they refer to as radical democracy. A problem with an arguing article like this is that it sometimes tends to fall into the same trap that it tries to escape. While the authors’ recommendation is, that democratic deliberation should take its point of departures from concrete issues, their own discussion is mostly held on a formal, rational, general level with only a few practical examples. Some people would say that the question about democratic participation, as either something to learn for, or something to learn from, could never find its solution on a rational level; it is always an empirical question. I would say that, “the answer depends on the circumstances (the concrete issues they face). .”
STYLE – AND ITS PERFORMATIVE CHARACTER

- Encouraging

Referee 3:
I am grateful to be asked to review this important paper. This draft contains an interesting discussion about education on democracy building upon Dewey’s definition of the public sphere and public equals and Rancières conception of radical democracy. The topic is of great consequence to the international community of EE and ESD. However, I still find the methodology and framework a bit unconvincing and it isn’t really clear yet what the aim of the article actually is? I am not clear on what is being inquired (researched) or how. My recommendation is to accept it, but with a major revision.

Referee 2:
I enjoyed reading the article and I think the topic is in general relevant and interesting. This is a theoretical paper presenting an alternative perspective on environmental education in the current context of sustainability, which is related to rethinking about environmental education ontology and epistemology and readdress methodologies to achieve a democratic perspective. However there are several weaknesses in this article that must be addressed.
STYLE – AND ITS PERFORMATIVE CHARACTER

- Patient

Unfortunately, on balance, this second revision has created more problems albeit clarifying uncertainties of the first version. As it now stands, the paper is too

Thus, as the paper now stands, it is clearly becoming weaker in all of these aspects. Theoretically it lacks originality, mostly refers to others reasoning. Methodologically it is lacking a distinction between the approaches within the field, an argumentation for the benefits of this method in relation to the other approaches and the motivation. Empirically we of course would need to know more about the context of the study was conducted, a thorough analysis and result section should really like to encourage the authors to continue to work on this interesting and important paper which definitely has the potential to raise the ESD debate to a higher level.
STYLE – AND ITS PERFORMATIVE CHARACTER

- Constructive (11 pages of ‘supervision’)

The article deals with a number of oppositional concepts, such as:
Normativity – pluralism
Democracy (citizenship) as achievement – democracy (citizenship) as participation
Knowledge as the basis for deliberation – deliberation as the basis for knowledge

It would certainly help the reader if the authors made those oppositions/distinctions more visible and elaborated each of them further.

Below I list five issues which I think need to be elaborated or nuanced.

If you want to follow my recommendations you also have to adjust the structure and your headlines more tightly to the three steps above it.

So, in recommending revising the paper once more, I suggest the authors structure the paper somewhat differently and delete some parts:
• After the introduction start with the section “Education and citizenship beyond a socialisation perspective” and develop this theoretical perspective in order to create analytical concepts and tools.
• Use these concepts and tools in the next section to analyse the ESD debate (the 64 references). Move the text about teaching on p 11 to this section, this part belongs to the debate.
• Put some more effort in the conclusion section develop more clearly what the radical democracy perspective and citizenship-as-practice could mean in ESD. This could be divided into theoretical (how to understand ESD), practical (how to teach and learn ESD) and methodological (how to study ESD) conclusions. In this way action competence, pluralism and other approaches within ESD can be criticised and the originality can be increased.
• Delete the case study from this paper and develop its methodological points and empirical findings in a separate paper.
NORDIC INFLUENCES CLEARLY VISIBLE IN THIS FIRST ARTICLE – THE BASIS FOR MY PHD THESIS
A SIGNIFICANT LIFE EXPERIENCE

12th INVITATIONAL SEMINAR ON ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION RESEARCH 2013
Uppsala University, Sweden, June 6-9 2013

Call for:
In order to facilitate good discussions the number of participants will be around 50. As such, we are looking for 10 senior doctoral students who will be invited to take part in the seminar.

Number of participants
Limited to around 50. The call for participation will be issued to a group of 10 senior doctoral students who will be invited to take part in the seminar.

Seminar in Sweden is the goal of creating an open and informal atmosphere, enabling constructive discussion of the issues you find most urgent and interesting to address within (and beyond) the overall 2013 invitational theme of the 'transboundary'.

Kadien Van Poeck

The democratic paradox in environmental education
EE Invitational Seminar
June 7, 2013
A SIGNIFICANT LIFE EXPERIENCE

Centrum voor Duurzame Ontwikkeling
Centre for Sustainable Development - Ghent University

Scientific research network 'Public pedagogy and sustainability challenges'
HOW DID IT HELP ME?

HOW DID IT AFFECT MY RESEARCH?
PhD thesis: Addressing the democratic paradox in ESE with concepts developed in Science & Technology Studies

- Bruno Latour: ‘matters of concern’
- Noortje Marres: ‘public-isation’ versus ‘privatization’

→ Shifting focus towards theoretical traditions in educational research

→ Discovering Dewey with a detour via Latour
THEORETICALLY

Did I try to re-invent the wheel?

Didaktik och didaktiska modeller för undervisning i naturvetenskapliga ämnen

METHODOLOGICALLY

My PhD research as a continuing quest…

“Dear Doctoranda,
Dear Katrien,
‘Education as a response to sustainability issues’. The title of your doctoral dissertation. You did not convince me. Not at all. But that was not your aim either. Your aim was to do research – and you kept on searching until the end.”
(Maarten Simons, member of the Doctoral Jury)

→ from a broad perspective towards detailed attentiveness to interactions in concrete practices
METHODOLOGICALLY

Something was lacking...
I was left without tools, except mere interpretation
METHODOLOGICALLY

Studies of Meaning-making in Educational Discourses

ANALYTICAL METHODS

DATA

THEORETICAL MODEL

METHODOLOGICALLY

PRACTICAL EPISTEMOLOGY ANALYSIS

EPISTEMOLOGICAL MOVE ANALYSIS

TRANSACTIONAL ARGUMENTATION ANALYSIS

POLITICAL MOVE ANALYSIS
Developing an empirical research attitude:

- Empirical ‘friction’ on theoretical constructions
- Respect for practices and practitioners (and their purposes)

They are inevitably decontextualized, whereas change agent practices should always be reflected, developed, and assessed in relation to specific historical processes, as well as current structures, cultures, and dynamics. In our case, the ideal types served to make some kind of order in the many registered roles of change agents and allowed us to reflect on how these ideal types relate to different approaches to learning and to sustainability. Applying them to empirical cases, our aim is not to illustrate and confirm the ideal types, but to discuss whether they make sense as heuristic tools, as well as where our empirical material adds to or even contests the value of the presented change agency roles and ideal types. From this perspective, we next compare the ideal typology with empirical examples: one stemming from our case study of a grassroots community center in Belgium, and three examples from a Danish national scheme for local green guides.
Critical mass:

- Many ESE researchers (e.g. GRESID)
- In several research environments
- Focussing on a variety of settings, subjects…
- Inspired by a plurality of theoretical and methodological perspectives
SUMMING UP…

WHAT IS INTERESTING?

WHAT SHOULD BE DEVELOPED?
SPECIFIC STRENGTHS

- Fruitful interaction between the theoretical and the empirical: Moving the field beyond abstract, ideological discussions
- Development of sophisticated analytical methods: Facilitating investigations that can challenge and progress theoretical constructions
- Investing in research and capacity building: Critical mass of empirical studies
SPECIFIC STRENGTHS

- Focus on ‘didaktik’: Connecting teaching and learning, opening-up the black box that remains closed in effectiveness studies (‘What works?’ → ‘How does it work?’)
- Strong research environments: Valuable support for emerging researchers – and international guests
- Generosity: E.g. peer review, applications, invitations…
“ALSO GOOD WORK CAN BE IMPROVED”

- More widespread application of the developed analytical methods in empirical studies: Optimally using the ever-growing toolbox

- Strengthening international collaboration and networking
  - Advancing research agendas, setting a high standard
  - Building capacity, increasing the workforce
  - Spreading risks

Research Focus

Attention is placed on research that challenges traditional educational discourses which focus narrowly on learners' attitudes and behaviours. Instead, the research that will be examined and promoted within this network, will critically explore socio-cultural and other contextual determinants that influence learning processes regarding sustainability issues in educational settings in all sectors of an education system, and on individual, organizational and system levels. In this way, the network engages with wider educational issues such as participatory approaches, community partnerships, professional competencies, sustainable learning outcomes, policy transfer, and organizational learning.
“ALSO GOOD WORK CAN BE IMPROVED”

- Exploring fruitful connections between research on ESE in different settings (schools, higher education, non-formal learning)

- Looking beyond the classroom:
  - How does education enable or constrain the transition towards a more sustainable society?
  - Can we investigate this empirically? What does this require?
  - Can we bridge the gap between educational research and sustainability transition / governance studies?
THANK YOU!
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