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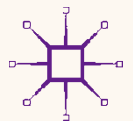


40. *Oak*

Ethical Literacies and Education for Sustainable Development

*Young People, Subjectivity
and Democratic Participation*

Edited by
Olof Franck and Christina Osbeck



Ethical Literacies and Education
for Sustainable Development

Olof Franck • Christina Osbeck
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Young People, Subjectivity and Democratic
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Editors

Olof Franck
Department of Pedagogical
Curricular and Professional Studies
University of Gothenburg
Gothenburg, Sweden

Christina Osbeck
Department of Pedagogical
Curricular and Professional Studies
University of Gothenburg
Gothenburg, Sweden

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PREFACE

FOUR TRACKS

This book highlights challenging perspectives on how to embrace the development of sustainability education, and focuses on ethical dimensions which transcend the four key cornerstones that are often mentioned with reference to such an education: the ecological, the economic, the social and the cultural.

One track within the chapters illuminates issues relating to the classical questions: what, when, how, for whom and by whom is sustainability education to be embraced with regard to ethical perspectives and ethical challenges in our time? Sustainability education is always, like all kinds of education, situated within certain ecological, social, cultural and economic contexts, which can be viewed and interpreted from various historical and pedagogical angles. There is no sustainability education as such; there is always room for interpretation, for discussion and for critical examination. This holds not least when it comes to questions about how the concept of sustainability may be understood across time and contexts.

A second track highlights a supposed tension between analytical and normative interpretations of the concept of ethical literacy. What is the aim of education which highlights the ethical dimensions of, for example, ecological or social sustainability? Is it to foster pupils into more or less well-defined patterns of moral behaviour and moral action, or is it to offer opportunities to carry out creative and independent analyses of diverse conceptions of good and evil, right and wrong? Is the aim for such education to perform the task of relating the concept of sustainability to more

or less traditional ways of approaching the question about what kinds of ability, skill or literacy pupils should be given opportunities to develop within an education where norms and values are in focus?

A third track explores the—ethical—question about what apprehension of young people’s integrity and freedom are represented in various positions with regard to the tension mentioned. Will the focus be on “children’s right to share and engage in sustainability development in various areas”? Will it be on an inspirational, but perhaps indoctrinatory, level where the practising of relevant action competence is highlighted as the main aim for education which contributes to the development of concepts of sustainability, or will the focus instead be on the striving for a presumptively impartial and objective education where the teaching aims to give pupils opportunities to discuss relevant facts, approaches, investigations and theories in order to develop personal standpoints and positions, whatever these will be?

A fourth track centres on discussions about the concept of sustainability education itself, and not least with regard to the commonly used formulation “education for sustainable education”. In particular, critical analyses of what may be conceived of as a “postmodern concept of sustainable education” will be in focus. Such a concept promises visions of a united dream of future harmony, justice and even love; a dream which is supposed to be dreamt by all and anyone, in spite of the fact that mighty and powerful interests will clash and collide wherever the concept of sustainability is used to catch sight of what needs to be done in order to make the world a better place to live in for humans as well as non-humans.

These four tracks together represent an approach which makes room for theoretical as well as practical, and critical as well as constructive, presentations and analyses that could be of interest and of use to anyone engaged in sustainability education or research in this field. The ethical dimensions transcending the four key cornerstones—the ecological, the economic, the social and the cultural—and highlighted in the book satisfy a need and contribute to filling a gap with reference to educational as well as research-based analyses.

THE CHAPTERS

In Chap. 1, Olof Franck examines what is described as the challenge of developing democratic education for sustainability, where the aim is not that the pupils should be fostered into taking specific moral position, but

rather that they should become aware of the right to deliberately choose ethical actions and strategies as moral and social subjects. At issue are various concepts of ethics education elaborated with reference to sustainability education. The often observed tension between “analytical” and “normative” approaches to education about ethical issues is claimed to be neutralizable if the focus is on the prerequisites for the pupils’ becoming engaged moral subjects rather than on expected “results” in terms of “moral positioning” and “moral action”. The concept of subjectivity is discussed with regard to the philosophical-pedagogical approach developed by Gert Biesta. Other inspirations for the development of the argument are Jacques Rancière and John Wall.

Chapter 2 by Marie Grice explores relational perspectives of transdisciplinarity and education from a theoretical angle to raise epistemological and ethical issues regarding ESD. *Philosophizing with* is then used as an analytical tool in the epistemic exploration from concept to educational context where systems thinking provides common ground for ethics and ESD competence. Through critical thinking and moral literacy, teachers are claimed to understand the role of ethics in the co-creation of knowledge. Teachers and students learn through a relational process involving epistemic, ethical and practical boundary crossing in which the educative moment, *le moment*, might reveal itself.

In Annika Lilja’s Chap. 3, the focus is on the school’s task to foster pupils’ ability to develop knowledge, and also values such as equality, solidarity, human rights and democracy. It accentuates the difficulties of teaching ethics in school in ways that influence the pupils’ resources for taking action. Teachers testify that during lessons pupils reason wisely about how to act in a moral way and how to choose between good and bad, right and wrong. Then in breaks the pupils go out in the schoolyard and do just the opposite. It is as if the pupils do not see the connection between what they discuss during lessons and how to behave in practice. The chapter reports on how ten pupils talk about how they learn moral competence in school and how they value education in school.

Chapter 4 by Christina Osbeck investigates what kinds of ethical discourse of sustainability are offered to tweens in Sweden through fiction reading. An empirical analysis of four books is presented. Ethical literacy is here understood in relation to sociocultural perspectives of moral development, and it is perceived as being connected to the repertoires of discourses that the individual has access to through the discursive practices where they are active, but also as related to the specific con-

text of a situation—that is, what discourses can be privileged and used in this context. Fiction reading may, it is argued, be a way to expand one’s repertoires of discourses beyond those which one appropriates through the discursive practices where one lives one’s everyday life. The special opportunities that fiction reading offers when it comes to expanding one’s available discourses are elaborated with reference to Mark Tappan’s socio-cultural approach and Martha Nussbaum’s philosophical and virtue ethical theories.

In Chap. 5, Anna Lyngfelt investigates what opportunities children have to act as moral subjects within the school context, while working with fiction at school. Theoretically, Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and George Herbert Mead are referred to, since they, by contributing to phenomenological theories of “acts”, seek to explain in what ways social agents constitute social reality through language (and other symbolic social signs). The idea that discourse creates linguistic structures to construct the self is essential, as well as the concept of identity as unstable and non-coherent; identity is regarded a performative accomplishment, where the act that one “does” (performs) does not start with classroom discourse. To be able to discuss the opportunity to act as moral subjects, Lyngfelt discusses fiction and focuses on social issues from a variety of positions. The texts analysed are all extracts from textbooks used in Swedish compulsory schooling, discussing moral standpoints stressed by the curriculum (i.e. equality in terms of gender, ethnicity and social background). Since the extracts are presented together with exercises in the textbooks, the result of the analyses of text extracts (including exercises) are compared with analyses of the full-length texts. In this way the opportunities for students to act as social subjects are discussed, as well as the constraints of the classroom discourse.

Chapter 6 by Margaretha Häggström examines life-world perspectives on art-based environmental education (AEE) and sustainability. In focus in her discussion is the view of so-called “plant blindness” and how school pupils might connect with natural environments through AEE. The chapter starts out from a phenomenological perspective with a focus on the concept of the life-world and how to understand plant blindness in relation to pupils. The main purpose is to contribute to the debate about plant blindness by discussing pupils’ life-worlds concerning AEE. AEE is here seen as a didactic tool to embrace bodily knowledge and to meet the demands of sustainable education, according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’s (UNESCO’s) policy

documents and Swedish curricula. One conclusion from the discussion is that nature and sustainability need to be experienced bodily repeatedly to be a part of pupils' life-worlds.

In Chap. 7, Kassahun Weldemariam traces the discourse within early childhood education for sustainability (ECEfS) from historical trend, policy, curriculum, pedagogy and research perspectives. Intrigued by contemporary post-human thinking, he poses fundamental questions about the ontological, epistemological and ethical starting points which call for a rethinking of sustainability discourse at large and ECEfS in particular. Drawing on the post-human perspective, the chapter identifies and elucidates one of the deep-rooted and inherent problems within environmental sustainability discourse—its human-centric characteristics—and indicates the need to recognize the more-than human and the non-human world. In so doing it challenges the existing dominant human-centric discourse and calls for the ECEfS field to consider and adapt to the ontological, epistemological and ethical shifts that the post-human turn has introduced.

Dawn Sanders' Chap. 8 examines the window and its environs as a point of departure for children's sense of agency and sense of place between home and the wider world. The discussion is framed by three children's books from Sweden, Australia and the UK: *Linnea's Windowsill Garden* (Björk 1978), *Window* (Baker 1991) and *The Flower* (Light 2006). Two of the books focus on growing plants; Björk makes border crossings between fiction and non-fiction in an intergenerational story of a girl and her grandfather growing a windowsill garden in their apartment, while Light offers a dystopian view of a grey monochrome world in which growing flowers from seed is seen as a transgressive act. Baker presents the view through the window as "a metaphor for the changes happening in the world". The books were chosen because they represent two ethical concerns for contemporary childhood: sense of agency and sense of place. Sanders explores how each book can be interpreted as an ethical tool in a range of learning contexts, both in and beyond the classroom.

In Chap. 9, Eva Nyberg investigates how aesthetical and ethical dimensions seem to be present in sensory experiences that constitute the basis of parts of science education. With reference to her previous research and, not least, to her long experience as a teacher in science education, she develops a reconstructive analysis of how the basis mentioned could be interpreted and elaborated. Starting with the indications from her earlier studies that taking care of, and observing, living things in the classroom can elicit emotional values and have a positive impact on pupils' interest in organisms

that they previously considered uninteresting, Nyberg discusses how both aesthetic and affective experiences, through personal encounters, observations and guided explorations, seem to play a role in children's perception of plants. She presents and explores two case studies, one with 11-year-old children studying blueberry plants during an outdoor excursion; the other with a group of student primary teachers growing and observation pea plants. The data consist of diaries, photos and video observations.

RESEARCH AND EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

The chapters in this book call attention to research-based examinations as well as pedagogical approaches with reference to educational practice in, for example, the use of children's books in sustainability teaching, and ethical and aesthetical dimensions of environmental education. One area rarely treated with reference to educational contexts—namely, post-human perspectives within early childhood education—is carefully discussed and analysed in one chapter. In another, phenomenology is originally used to bring AEE and sustainability into focus, with special regard to a life-world perspective.

A key benefit of this volume is that ethical dimensions of sustainability education are raised, analysed and discussed with respect to various relevant challenges to such education. By focusing on the concept of ethical literacy, which is central to issues regarding sustainability and sustainability education in practice, and with reference to relevant research areas, the chapters offer valuable contributions to the ongoing discussion about ethics, education and sustainability.

This book aims to present fresh and creative perspectives on how ethics and issues regarding ethical literacy can be elaborated with respect to democratic sustainability education. The intended audience is researchers and practitioners (teachers) in the fields of ethics and sustainability education, but the project should also be of interest to students participating in, for example, teacher education.

Department of Pedagogical
Curricular and Professional Studies
University of Gothenburg
Gothenburg, Sweden

Olof Franck
Christina Osbeck

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACECQA	Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority
AEE	Art-based environmental education
DE	Descriptive facts about ethics (approach)
ECE	Early childhood education
ECEfS	Early childhood education for sustainability
ESD	Education for sustainable development
MF	Moral fostering (approach)
OMEP	World Organization for Early Childhood Education (Organisation Mondiale Pour L’Éducation Préscolaire)
PE	Philosophical ethics
RE	Religious education
UN	United Nations
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Olof Franck is Associate Professor of Philosophy of Religion and Senior Lecturer in Subject Matter Education in Social Studies at the Department of Pedagogical, Curricular and Professional Studies, University of Gothenburg, Sweden, where he also is Assistant Head of research. He has been engaged as a subject expert by Skolverket in the school reforms Lgr11 and Gy11, and in the national IT strategies project with a focus on digital competence in Swedish policy documents for upper secondary school. He is the author of a range of articles and books relating to the philosophy of religion, religious education, ethics education, and issues regarding multicultural and gender perspectives on education. His main research focuses on various issues within ethics education, religious education and education for sustainable development (ESD). He is engaged in a research project financed by a grant from the Swedish Research Council for 2015–2017: *What may be learnt in ethics? Varieties of conceptions of ethical competence to be taught in compulsory school (Dnr 2014–2030)*.

Margaretha Häggström is a doctoral student in pedagogy in the Faculty of Education, University of Gothenburg, Sweden. She began her PhD work in 2015 after four years of teaching at the teacher education programme at the same university, six years of teaching in high school and twelve years in preschool. Her subjects are visual arts and Swedish (language and literature). She has a multimodal perspective on teaching and learning, and her research focuses on aesthetical values in relation to students' experiences of being surrounded by natural settings. She is also

editing a book that addresses multimodality and visual knowledge as teaching and learning tools in all school subjects.

Annika Lilja has a PhD in pedagogical work. She has many years of experience as a teacher in Swedish compulsory school. She has also been working with the national tests in religious education for some years. Her research interests include pedagogical relations, and issues to do with values education and ethics education. Between 2015 and 2017 She is engaged in a research project financed by a grant from the Swedish Research Council for 2015–2017: What may be learnt in ethics? Varieties of conceptions of ethical competence to be taught in compulsory school (Dnr 2014–2030). She is also Director of Studies in the Department of Pedagogical, Curricular and Professional Studies, University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

Anna Lyngfelt is Associate Professor in the Department of Pedagogical, Curricular and Professional Studies, University of Gothenburg, Sweden. She has 20 years of experience in school education research, including research on teaching and learning in primary and secondary schools. She also has experience in school governance and innovative school practices, and pedagogies and teaching methods. Her research projects for 2012–2015, *Läsa mellan raderna* [Reading between the lines] and *Digitala arenor i läs- och skrivpraktiker i grundskolans tidigare år* [Digital arenas in literacy practices in early primary school] were both intervention studies, including teachers. She has experience of qualitative research methods and the combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods, especially from her work with reading assessment and literacy development. Originally being a teacher at secondary school, she has a MA in language education.

Eva Nyberg is a PhD and Senior Lecturer in the Department of Pedagogical, Curricular and Professional Studies, University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Her teaching and research concern science education, especially biology, in primary and secondary school, and in higher education, especially aesthetic and affective dimensions in teaching and learning science. She is also interested in environmental and sustainability education throughout the educational system, as well as outdoor education. Through her thesis work she developed an expertise and interest in formative assessment, especially in the context of teachers' professional development. She is engaged in a research project focused on learning about plants: Beyond plant blindness: Seeing the importance of plants

for a sustainable world, funded by the Swedish Research Council (Dnr 2014–2013). She has extensive experience of teaching in upper secondary school, in teacher education and in in-service training of teachers.

Christina Osbeck is a PhD, Associate Professor in Religious Studies and Senior Lecturer in Social Studies Education, as well as Deputy Head in the Department of Pedagogical, Curricular and Professional Studies, Gothenburg University, Sweden. Her research is focused primarily on religious education and values education, which may both be said to include issues relating to ethics education. Ethics education is also a central aspect of the department's research in education for sustainable development. Her main research at present concerns the project What may be learnt in ethics? Varieties of conceptions of ethical competence to be taught in compulsory school (Dnr 2014–2030), of which she is the principle investigator, funded by the Swedish Research Council. She has been working in teacher education since 1993 and her dissertation, delivered in 2006, focuses on pupils' life interpretations, and how bullying is working as a shaping and homogenizing tool of life interpretations.

Dawn Sanders is Associate Professor in the Department of Pedagogical, Curricular and Professional Studies, University of Gothenburg, Sweden, and a Fellow of the Linnean Society of London. Her doctoral study at Sussex University in 2004 examined the educational role of botanic gardens, a study inspired by her ten years as an educator at the Chelsea Physic Garden, London. She trained as an artist before completing her botanical education and draws on both in her academic work. She is a scientific associate of the Natural History Museum, London. Her recent publications include *Darwin-Inspired Learning* (Sense, 2015), of which she is both a co-editor, along with Prof. Michael Reiss and Dr Carolyn Boulter, and author/co-author of four chapters. Her chapter in this anthology draws on her teaching work with early years educators at Gothenburg University and her current research work, specifically Beyond plant blindness: Seeing the importance of plants for a sustainable world, funded by the Swedish Research Council (Dnr 2014–2013), a cross-disciplinary project for which she is principal investigator.

Arjen Wals is Professor of Transformative Learning for Socio-Ecological Sustainability at Wageningen University, the Netherlands, and Guest Professor in Education for Sustainable Development at Gothenburg University, Sweden. He also holds the UNESCO Chair of Social Learning