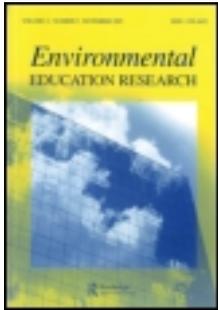


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Governing ‘eco-certified children’ through pastoral power: critical perspectives on education for sustainable development

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This article analyses how ‘eco-certified children’ are constructed as desirable subjects in teaching materials addressing education for sustainable development. We are interested in how discourses structure this cherished practice and how this practice has become ‘natural’ and obvious for us. A discourse analysis is carried out by looking at the material through the lens of Foucault’s notion of pastoral power. The analysis departs from teaching material addressing issues on sustainable development: (1) textbooks for primary and secondary school; (2) games targeted at preschool and school children; and (3) children’s books about sustainable development. The results show that the discourse of education for sustainable development is characterized by scientific and mathematical objectivity and faith in technological development. It emphasizes the right of the individual and the obligation to make free, however ‘correct’, choices. In the teaching materials, the eco-certified child therefore emerges as knowing, conscious, rational, sacrificing and active. This child is constructed through knitting together personal guilt with global threats, detailed individual activities with rescuing the flock and the planet. In a concluding discussion, we discuss how ESD is framed in a neoliberal ideology. With the help of ESD, an economic discourse becomes dressed in an almost poetic language.

Keywords: discourse; education for sustainable development; teaching material; power; governmentality

Congratulations! You are a very well-informed and curious consumer! You take responsibility for the environment and the future with your wise choices. It is thanks to people like you that development can be steered in the right direction. (WWF 2013a)

These encouraging words are heard if one succeeds in making environmentally sound choices in a ‘shop’ in the web-based game *Our ecological footprints*. The game is one example of many in the global effort to develop education for sustainable development, inside and outside formal educational institutions. Sustainable development is a concept that during recent decades has come to be taken for granted as the only way to approach the future. Opposing sustainable development is seen as equivalent to a betrayal of ‘Mother Earth’s’ very eco-system, as opposition to economic wealth and social justice both today and in the future: opposition to the very concept of goodness. To use the term coined by Callon and Latour (1981, 285), the ideologies and ideas providing the structural framework for this

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political stance have been ‘blackboxed’: ‘A black box contains that which no longer needs to be reconsidered, those things whose contents have become a matter of indifference’. It has become an almost ‘natural’ element of Swedish (and many other countries’) education, and is often described as a key factor in fostering good citizens.

The aim of this article is to illuminate how a hypothetical ‘desirable child’ is constructed and governed within the discursive order of education for sustainable development. This is done through studying how ‘eco-certified children’ are constructed in teaching materials; how certain characteristics and activities stand out as normal and desirable. The notion of ‘eco-certified child’ can be understood in terms of how we are governed by a specific cultural protocol of what it means to be environmentally friendly. Our aim is to problematize how this increasingly common construction of humankind is reproduced through governing techniques (Rose and Miller 2010). This notion is central to Foucault’s theoretical framework of governmentality, e.g. how individuals are governed through their souls, or internalized discourses of what is possible and desirable to think, say and do. We will now continue with a theoretical outline, where we elaborate on the concepts of governmentality and pastoral power. After that follows a methodological section before an analysis of how pastoral power operates in ESD.

Designing future citizens

This theoretical outline begins with the general question of how actions become ‘natural’ and obvious for us. Michel Foucault writes that these kinds of societal changes must be understood from how power operates in modern society. This power is found everywhere and all the time, and does not operate through outspoken prohibitions and force, but instead through our desires, through our willingness and obligations to make individual choices (Foucault 1983). Rose and Miller write:

Power is not so much a matter of imposing constraints upon citizens as of ‘making up’ citizens capable of bearing a kind of regulated freedom. Personal freedom is not the antithesis of political power, but a key term in its exercise. (Rose and Miller 2010, 272)

The design of the desirable human being is formulated inside the rationality of what Rose and Miller (2010) call ‘advanced liberal democracies’, in which the power operates through the ‘free will’ rather than against it.

Power is neither situated within any specific institution or individuals, but in ways of thinking and talking that are taken for granted and in the construction of desirable subjects inside these discourses (Hall 1996). To understand and discuss this discrete power, we use Michel Foucault’s theoretical framework of governmentality (Foucault, Senellart, and Davidson 2007; Rose and Miller 2010), how we are governed through our souls, through our wishes to be ‘normal’. The power of governmentality operates through techniques that produce ‘truth’ and thereby standards for the normal ‘human being’ (Hacking 2006). Foucault, Senellart, and Davidson (2007) have emphasized the inseparable relation between power and knowledge: the privilege to construct and uphold the truth. Natural sciences and mathematics own this privilege since long time in the western world.

In our analysis of governing techniques inside education for sustainable development, the construction of desirable eco-certified child is in focus. Although

this practice is built on the best of intentions (aiming for a better world, now and in the future), it is inevitable that the operating discourse classifies students as desirable or dangerous in relation to what counts as ‘truth’. In light of this, we maintain that it is necessary to problematize this practice, how children are constructed as helpers of the world or as threats to the future through their way of living. (Popkewitz 2008)

Sustainable development through pastoral power

To analyse governing techniques in education for sustainable development, we use Foucault’s concept of pastoral power, a technology of power used by the church as well as secularized political institutions (Foucault 1983, 213 ff). Pastoral power operates through constructing humankind in need of salvation. This salvation becomes possible through modifications of the soul, for example, through feelings of guilt (Lazzarato 2010). To describe and exemplify how pastoral power governs education for sustainable development, we use Foucault’s four characteristics of how pastoral power operates: (1) the ultimate aim is to assure individual salvation in the ‘next world’; (2) individuals must be prepared to make sacrifices for the life of the flock; (3) it is a power that focus both on the flock and on each individual during the whole life; (4) the power operates through exploring people’s souls by making people reveal their innermost secrets (Foucault 1983, 214). Through exemplifying with the concluding paragraph in the textbook *Sustainable development: the threat against the environment*, we will explain how pastoral power can be used as a theoretical framework to reveal constructions of the desirable eco-certified child. This example serves both as an explanation of the theoretical background and as a contextualization of pastoral power into ESD discourse.

IT IS YOUR CHOICE!

A sustainable environment in the future is dependent on the choices people like you and I make. We have the possibility to change our way of living and get other people to realize how important these issues are. If we take our mission seriously a sustainable future is perfectly possible. (Bowden 2005, 45)

First, Foucault (1983) points out that pastoral power emphasizes the need for salvation in the ‘next world’. The Christian church has been characterized by demands on people to make sacrifices to become a part of the next world – heaven. As the quote above shows, the next world is also an important governing technology in the engagement of people in sustainable development. ‘Earth is not a heritage from our parents – it is a loan from our children’ is a well-recognized expression inside the Swedish environmental discourse. The next life is not about heaven; it is future generations that should be saved. It is for their sake our sacrifices (like saving energy) are made. This is difficult to oppose without appearing to be a selfish and ‘bad’ person.

According to Foucault’s second characteristic of pastoral power, the subject ‘must also be prepared to sacrifice itself for the life and salvation of the flock. Therefore it is different from royal power, which demands a sacrifice from its subjects to save the throne’ (Foucault 1983, 214). Through pastoral power, ESD is distanced from governmental politics. Instead of governing through laws and punishment, pastoral power in advanced liberal democracies operates everywhere and through everyone. The practice of education for sustainable development has a clearly expressed

goal, a better world for everyone – the flock. But pastoral power does not only use the flock as a tool in governing. The individual is also an important agent for change; the one who can make a difference through his or her actions. The Church has at all times demanded of its members to live according to its dictates – in every moment of their lives, otherwise punishment was to be expected in the next world. This is in line with Foucault’s third characteristic for pastoral power. The discourse of sustainable development directs a person’s ‘whole life’, as noted in the quote above. Common expressions are that *every* choice, *every* act makes a difference for the future of the planet. This is a governing technology that focuses on details (Foucault 1983), emphasizing the importance of constantly being conscious of how one acts from a perspective of sustainable development. This leads us to the fourth characteristic for pastoral power:

Finally, this form of power cannot be exercised without knowing the inside of people’s minds, without exploring their souls, without making them reveal their innermost secrets. It implies a knowledge of the conscience and an ability to direct it. (Foucault 1983, 214)

Modern human beings are governed through their souls. But the soul must also expose innermost secrets, to be governable. The exposure of the soul is achieved through the confession of sins and desires. In pastoral power, confession is a prerequisite for salvation.

Method

For the analysis, we use teaching material explicitly addressing issues on ‘sustainable development’. Since our aim is to analyse discourses, not one specific book or type of material, we move between different teaching materials in the analysis (described below). The data presented here is in other words a theoretical selection, representative examples illustrating a discourse rather than giving a comprehensive analysis of all teaching material. Certainly, one could find competing discourses and other governing techniques than the ones found by us. And children are of course subjected to several, sometimes competing, discourses in everyday life (Ideland and Malmberg 2012). We are aware that a problem with discourse analysis is that you easily find what you search for, instead of seeing complexities. However, our aim here is to analyse how the specific governing technique of pastoral power structures teaching material in ESD. One can also note that all the empirical data are from a limited Swedish context, but our hope is that this study could inspire to further research on how desirable subjects are discursively constructed in different educational settings around the world. We also wish for this paper to problematize taken-for-granted discourses, in order to open up for rethinking ESD. We will not propose solutions, but offer perspectives of how political ideologies are embedded in ESD, and how these ideologies are operating through ‘free subjects’.

In the analysis, we started by examining a large amount of material from three categories. After this overview, we analysed a limited number of books and games more closely. The material can be classified into three categories: (1) textbooks and book chapters for primary and secondary school; (2) games targeted at preschool and school children; and (3) children’s books about sustainable development. Concerning category one, we made a first brief analysis by reading textbooks in

geography, civics, biology and sustainable development from different publishers. Since the books represented a quite similar discourse, we found no need to include all books. The textbooks cover a wide range of issues, and one can of course analyse them in another way than we have done. Our point is however that together with the other kinds of materials, they illuminate a discourse. In the second category, games, we have studied two interactive games from WWF's website as well as two 'traditional' board games focusing on sustainability/environment, found in Swedish stores. The WWF material is directed to schools, and at least one of the board games has an outspoken aim to be used in schools and preschools. The third category embraces three children's books on the theme 'sustainable development' *What is happening to the earth?*, *Look after your planet*, and *Ride a bike, recycle and save a polar bear*. They all have an obvious pedagogical aim, but are not only directed to school (c.f Larsson 2012).

We do not make any explicit comparisons between the categories of empirical material, neither between primary and secondary schools nor between material developed by NGOs and material edited by publishers. All the empirical data are treated in a similar way, since we hold that the discourse is not limited to a certain publisher, NGO or age group of schoolchildren. Rather, it operates in many places at the same time. The analysis intends to illuminate the discourse: what is possible to say and do, what subject positions become available and how the desirable child is constructed.

The discourse analysis is carried out by looking at the material through the lens of pastoral power (Foucault 1983). This means that we have used notions of salvation, sacrifices, guilt, soul, the 'whole life', and finally the relation between the individual and the flock as analytical instruments. The intention with the rest of the article is to discuss how the intersections between the flock and the individual, the global project and individual actions are knitted together with help from different governing techniques. We want to show how these techniques operate in the construction of the eco-certified child, and they are analysed in the empirical sections *The powerful choice*, *Confessions and promises*, *Mathematical rationalities*, *Mapping the planet*. In a concluding discussion, *Poetic market economy*, we finally discuss how these techniques are framed in a neoliberal ideology.

The powerful choice

In this first empirical section, we depart from WWF's game, *Our ecological footprints* (2013a). Here, the gamer is challenged to make choices in a virtual shop. The game can be considered as practice in consuming. The choice in the virtual shop is described as essential since 'everything we consume impacts our environment' and leaves 'ecological footprints' of different sizes. Therefore it is important for the individual to make the 'right choice'. Points can be won by consuming eco-certified products and answering environmental questions correctly or by calling for the shop owner to protest against 'bad' products. The game emphasizes consciousness about the consumption choices made during 'an ordinary day in the store'. To avoid guilt and to rescue the flock, the gamer must choose in a sustainably correct way.

This game is an illustrating example of how education for sustainable development aims to construct desirable and eco-certified consumer-citizens, who are supposed to feel free to choose, but who in fact are limited by powerful norms of what is valuable knowledge, morally right and wrong, environmentally friendly or not.

The game is an example of how the choice itself becomes a governing technique directed to the soul.

Governing through freedom of choice often operates with help of the power of knowledge. Through talking about the choices, and the options in terms of knowledge and evidence, truth is constructed. In the game described above, the truth about the eco-certified child is produced through calculations of ecological footprints, scientific ‘facts’ about cause and effects concerning environmental problems and prognoses in terms of statistics. In the introduction, we stated that one should not look upon freedom of the individual as a contradiction to political governance, but rather as a precondition for it (Rose and Miller 2010). Since the free choice must be the ‘right’ choice to avoid guilt, the possibilities for the eco-certified child are still limited. In this game, the eco-certified child emerges as well informed and active, since knowledge is used rationally. It is also willing to act for the sake of the flock.

Confessions and promises

The WWF game governed the gamer through knowledge and conscious choices. Another common technology of government within education for sustainable development has its departure in the everyday life of children. This is achieved through checklists of individual behaviour. Often, these confessional checklists are combined with promises on how one intends to improve oneself, e.g. through sacrifices. One example is from a children’s book called *Look after your planet* (Child 2008). The book tells a story about how Lola learns about recycling and how she initiates a project in school, engaging children to collect garbage. In addition, the reader is given the opportunity to make own promises through a checklist. Examples of things that the reader can ‘really promise to do’ are:

- to switch off the light when you leave a room
- to recycle things instead of throwing them away
- to pull on a sweater instead of complaining if it is a bit cold indoors
- make your presents and birthday cards for your friend using things you find at home
- turn off the tap when brushing your teeth
- encourage all friends, parents and neighbours to recycle plastic bags. (Child 2008)

These kinds of confessions are found in many different educational materials and children’s books. WWF’s interactive web-based material is no exception; through this it is possible to make promises concerning the environment, and also to learn how effective the action is in relation to global warming (WWF 2013b). For example, one learns how much effect one can have through using cotton bags instead of plastic bags, and to what extent this is effective depending on the number of persons promising to do the same thing.

One can also talk about this kind of governing in terms of individuals becoming administrable through revealing their innermost secrets in checklists that connect confessions and promises. They are directed to the soul (Popkewitz 2008). The paradox associated with this type of governing technique is that the examples of how children can influence their everyday lives are often described in terms of empowerment. The transformation of complex environmental issues and global justice into

everyday actions, such as turning off the tap when brushing one's teeth, is seen as a way of empowering children by making them feel as participants in a world-saving practice. But from a Foucauldian perspective on governmentality, a paradox emerges. Similar to the idea of 'freedom to choose', the idea of empowerment governs through illusive-free but culturally enforced actions.

The 'empowering' actions asked for in *Look after you planet* on WWF's web pages and, for example, in textbooks on home-economics are very similar. Easily recognizable everyday activities are the focus. But what kind of desirable eco-certified child emerges through these checklists? It is a child that recycles, but also a creative child who can use garbage to create new things. Above all, it is a conscious child, a knowing child constantly ready to support a good environment through making evidence-based sacrifices. Once again, knowledge and consciousness are central attributes in the construction of the eco-certified child in combination with willingness to change and act for the sake of the flock.

Mathematical rationalities

The simplicity and purity that characterize the checklist are also present in another common governing technique, diagrams and time lines. In the book *Biology* (Karlsson 2005), time lines illustrate a parallel change between the lifestyle of humans and environmental changes. On one page (71) there are 12 diagrams showing the lifestyle changes between the years 1750 and 2000 under the titles: 'Population', 'Population in cities', 'Global GDP', 'Foreign investments', 'Stemming of rivers', 'Water use', 'Paper consumption', 'Cars', 'Phones', 'International tourism', and 'McDonald's restaurants'. All show upward curves. On the next page, the same upward curve is found in diagrams showing environmental changes concerning air, water, climate and organisms. These diagrams are symbols for the 'rapid change' seen in the last centuries. This statistical language, e.g. used by Gore in the film *An inconvenient truth* (2006), is considered by many as the start for public engagement in the climate change issue. The curves point to doomsday. However, diagrams are also used as evidence for the possibility for salvation. The *Biology* book, for example, shows how the upward curve for sulphur dioxide emissions in Sweden was stopped.

These mathematical calculations might not seem like language speaking directly to our souls. But it is through the imagined objectivity they become powerful governing techniques. The political rationality that is expressed through the diagrams is characterized by a belief in mathematical calculations. The need for scientific evidence and a trust in people to act in line with this evidence are instruments in the production of truth.

A similar governing technique is found in mathematical comparisons:

For example, if all the people in the EU decided to do such a simple thing as to replace their old incandescent bulbs with CFLs, it would reduce carbon emissions by 25 million tons per year. There would still be just as much light as before. If everyone also began to turn off lights that are unnecessarily turned on, emissions would be reduced even more. And that is not so hard either. (Spolander 2008, 16)

Numbers govern through their mathematical precision, their claim to objectivity and through our trust in them. They also connect the individual with the flock; 'if all the people in EU decided ...' it is possible to achieve important changes for the

common global project. With the help of Foucault, we can also talk about how security of the flock is used as an instrument to govern ‘everyone’. An early definition of governmentality is:

... the ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics that allow the exercise of this specific, albeit very complex, power that has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument. (Foucault, Senellart, and Davidson 2007, 144)

In these efforts for security, the sacrifice of the individual is central, and we can add this attribute to the desirable eco-certified child. Besides being knowing, conscious and active, the desirable child must be willing to make sacrifices for the flock.

Mapping the planet

Illustrations of the earth are an established part of the discourse education for sustainable development. From the moment when humans could see the earth from space, it became recognizable as a ‘fragile entity’ (Lovelock 2005). This way of describing the earth is also expressed through metaphors like ‘planet earth as our common home’. Satellite photos of changes in the landscape are used as evidence of the problems and the need for immediate actions. Examples of this are pictures of how arctic ice melts and of how energy consumption is unevenly distributed between the northern and southern hemispheres. These are examples of a faith in facts talking to the soul; that information will lead to responsible action. But the talk about the suffering planet must also be understood in terms of security, how the future should be saved and what kinds of sacrifices are required from the individual to rescue the flock. Maps of energy use indicate that it is our part of the world that is ‘guilty’; the eco-certified child must therefore be willing to sacrifice comfort to rescue other parts of the world.

The influence of scientific knowledge and mathematical calculations to the exercise of pastoral power must be seen in the light of the roles that science and mathematics play in society and their privileged position in the production of truth. These disciplines can be compared to a modern religion, where rationality and authority is impossible to question (Foucault 1983). In this discourse, the desirable child is a rational child, using calculations and facts to save the world, and who is willing to make sacrifices.

Poetic market economy

To conclude, in the teaching materials the eco-certified child emerges as knowing, conscious, rational, sacrificing and active. This discursive child is constructed through knitting together personal guilt with global threats, detailed individual activities with rescuing the flock and the planet. In this discussion, we would like to reflect on consequences of the focus on the individual inside ESD teaching material. Lazzarato (2010) points out a societal shift, from considering problems as a kind of shared responsibility to the idea that ‘you are the problem’ (30). The sovereign power has been replaced with discrete power, operating through for example surveillance of oneself. Power is exercised through details in everyday life: nothing is too

insignificant to be left behind – not even private issues such as choosing a shampoo in the supermarket. Confessions are made through checklists of different kinds. These can be compared to individual archive maps for small – but significant – choices. We would like to compare this to the governing mechanisms Lazzarato discusses from *The Process*: ‘We’re opening a file on you, Josef K’ (Lazzarato 2010, 30). Surveillance of oneself is done through confessions and promises. We are opening up files on ourselves, in which our sins and goodness are made visible. When this exposure of the soul is done inside an educational setting, such as in education for sustainable development, the border between the individual and the flock disappears and the classification of the individual becomes perhaps even more powerful.

Another pastoral governing technique is guilt, operating through the knowledge that it is always possible to make wiser choices, to be better informed and to sacrifice more. In other words: to be a better person. If humans carry a constant feeling of guilt, they become administrable and possible to govern (Lazzarato 2010). The individual feeling of guilt can however be eased through education. Popkewitz (2008) writes about salvation cultures in curriculum as well as in school practices, and how students can cleanse their souls by participating in democratic practices and responsible actions. Engaging in the common good is considered to make you a desirable person. Tables and prognoses of the flock’s ‘deeds’, for example emissions of greenhouse gases, illustrate this need for sacrifice. Salvation is to be reached in the next world – if and when the doomsday curve is flattened through individuals’ good deeds and sacrifices. This means that the discourse education for sustainable development constructs the eco-certified child as knowing, conscious, rational, sacrificing and active. At the same time, the discourse constructs ‘the dangerous child’ as an opposite and as a warning example, which threatens the future with his or her way of life (Popkewitz 2008). We would like to see a deeper discussion about what this classification of the abnormal means in an educational context. Who becomes constructed in terms of undesirable and threatening the common good?

From our examples, we would like to stress how the discourse education for sustainable is impregnated by a neoliberal rationality. The first aspect is the strong focus on the individual: *You are the problem for our common future*. The individual becomes responsible for ‘everybody’s’ security and for the ecological system of the world. This individual focus tends to make conflicts of interests or ideological standpoints invisible. The political project of sustainable development becomes apolitical and impossible to resist. The other neoliberal aspect is how scientific and mathematical rationalities contribute to the depolitizing of the issues (Mouffe 1999). Through references to statistics, facts and knowledge, problems become discursively constructed as objective and possible to solve through sensible actions.

In other words, the discourse of education for sustainable development is characterized by scientific and mathematical objectivity and a faith in technological development and consumption. It emphasizes the right of the individual and the obligation to make free – correct – choices, but also that individuals are responsible to the global community, both now and in the future. The discourse is expressed in an interesting combination of seemingly objective mathematical statistics and emotional – almost religious – expressions like ‘our common future’, ‘save the world’, and ‘coming generations’. It is a neoliberal rationality, operating through pastoral power. This is a way of governing souls into ‘reason’ and adaptation to market economical ideals. With the help of education for sustainable development, an economic discourse becomes dressed in a poetic and irresistible language.

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