THE ACTION-COMPETENT CHILD: RESPONSIBILIZATION THROUGH PRACTICES AND EMOTIONS IN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT. This article problematizes the educational practice of action competence. This practice is said to be a way to empower students, making them willing and able to genuinely engage in environmental issues. The aim is to show how the notion of action competence culturally shapes certain kinds of desirable and undesirable subjects, i.e., defining who fits in as the child to entrust the future to, and who becomes the child at risk. The targets for analysis are five texts promoting teaching for action competence in environmental education. The article analyses responsibilization of the child; namely, how the notion of action competence inscribes what is to be acted on, experienced, and felt. The analysis focuses on how practices and emotions are cultivated and what kinds of subjects are made up as action competent. The results illuminate the ideal action-competent child as participating genuinely, having authentic experiences, and producing feelings as empowerment, empathy, and optimism, but s/he is also well planned and reasonable. This means that the abjected Other, the one in need of changing his/her way of living, is the powerless, pessimistic, and/or spontaneous subject. The article discusses how these standards for practical and emotional skills (re)produce social patterns in terms of race and social class.

Keywords: educational practice; action competence; emotion; responsibilization

The Danger of the Environmental Discourse

Environmental problems have been on the agenda since the 1960s: climate change, acid rain, dying seas, the depleted ozone layer, to name but a few. This development has called for political, as well as individual, change — everything from international agreements to recycling household waste. But

the fear of an unsustainable way of living and the hope for a better future have also materialized in educational efforts. In the field of Education for Sustainability and Environment (ESE),[1] different practices have grown all over the world with the intention of saving the planet. One of the pedagogical approaches, teaching for action competence, is the focus of this article. The intention of this practice is to help children and youngsters develop:

> ...an ability to, on the basis of critical thinking and an incomplete knowledge base, engage as a person and with others in responsible actions and counteractions for a more humane and merciful world. (Almers, 2009: 36, my translation)

At the core of teaching action competence lies the aim to foster "action-minded citizens" (Breiting et al., 2009), individuals willing and able to engage in environmental problems and who can contribute to social change now and in the future (discussed further in the next section). Teaching action competence thus appears a tempting way to organize education. As a university teacher and researcher I have been inspired by it, considering it as a way out of measurement rationalities and scientistic ways of handling sustainability issues. However, in this article, I will unpack and problematize this pedagogical notion and how it — through its good intentions to empower children — contributes to an implicit cultural protocol for how to act and feel in order to meet the standards required to be a good, environmentally friendly person. To draw on a quote from Michel Foucault, "My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad" (Foucault, 1984: 343). The intentions of ESE and development of action competence are far from 'bad' — just the opposite. But the discourse is still 'dangerous' in that sense that it *does* something with people; it organizes how one can talk, think, live, and feel — makes possible certain subjectivities. My aim is to show what research and education in action competence *does*, how it culturally shapes certain kinds of desirable and undesirable subjects; those who fit in as the child we entrust the future of the planet to and those who become the child at risk (for the world).

Relating to the problem discussed in this special issue, the complexity of what is often considered as practical knowledge, 'dangerous' can, in one sense, also be the same as 'useful' or ´practical'. If the idea of schooling is to foster a specific kind of citizen, then taken-for-granted discourses are helpful. Furthermore, the notion of action competence claims to be practice-related; the teaching model emphasizes practical work with authentic real-life issues. However, in this case, the closeness to practice and the emphasis on its usefulness are considered as governing technologies, ordering what is possible and normal. The challenge is to unpack commonsensical and harmonious discourses and open up for alternative ways of thinking about education for

sustainability and environment even if I realize that also these novel ways operate as governing technologies would fabricate normality. But to continue the quote of Foucault, "If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy, but to hyper- and pessimistic activism" (Foucault, 1984: 343).

Background: A New Paradigm for ESE?

> After all, the ultimate goal of environmental education is to let students grow into responsible and actionminded citizens, capable of seeing beyond their own noses, and with the perception that they can have influence, if they earn it. Precisely this reflects in our explicit target for today's environmental education, namely to develop action competence in our students. (Breiting et al., 2009: 33)

The pedagogical idea of teaching for action competence was developed in the 1980–1990s, in the so-called MUVIN program. MUVIN is an acronym for 'Miljöundervisning i Norden' (Environmental Education in the Nordic countries) and was funded, among others, by the Nordic Council of Ministers. In 1997, *all* Danish schools received inspirational material on action competence, and 300 teachers and 3,000 students became deeper involved in a school development/research project. The project thus had impact on practice in Denmark, but a Nordic collaboration was established as well and the practice of action competence was developed also in Swedish schools (Breiting et al., 2009). This program was led by a group of Danish educational researchers working on the topics of health and environment.

Environmental education was, at that time, a focused area for international organizations such as United Nations and UNESCO. The practice had grown from an emergent awareness of environmental problems and their global character. This resulted in environmental conferences (Stockholm, 1972; Tblisi, 1977; Rio de Janeiro, 1992) as well as influential UN documents such as *Our common future* (1987) and *Agenda 21* (1992). 2014 was the last year of *UN Decade for Education for Sustainable Development*, which is an example of the educationalization of sustainability issues — the translation of a perceived social problem (which is not educational problems *per se*) into an educational problem. A consequence of educationalization is that individual teachers and students are made responsible for the social problem rather than politicians and companies (Tröhler, 2012; Ideland and Tröhler, 2015).

According to the researchers in the MUVIN project, the problem with the then existing environmental education was that it tended to focus on singular,

individual activities, such as theme days devoted to composting or recycling. Teaching for action competence is described as a "new paradigm in environmental education" (Breiting et al., 2009: 16). Its epistemological roots are connected to German critical theory and American sociologist C. Wright Mills' concept of sociological imagination. The intention is to work with "visions for the future" (ibid: 17) rather than trying to convince students of how to live their lives in the present – as in the "manipulative environmental education" (ibid: 16):

> At the same time, the concept of action competence parts with the notion that the primary teaching goal is to impart 'correct, environmentally friendly' actions to the students. This is for two reasons. Firstly, no one can actually tell what kind of 'environmentally correct' actions will be needed twenty years from now. Secondly, action competence involves more than what relates to displaying a specific behaviour in concrete terms. (Breiting et al., 2009: 33)

This distinction from "modifying" students' behavior is a recurring theme in the texts from the MUVIN group (e.g., Breiting & Mogensen, 2006; Jensen & Schnack, 2006). The novelty of action competence was, instead, to develop students' skills for handling environmental issues and to prepare them for an uncertain future with new problems demanding new solutions (Breiting et al., 2009: 56). Hence, the target for the 'new' environmental education is not the environment in itself; but rather, it is the individual and his/her resilience, adaptability, and preparedness to act. The individual becomes not just a tool for reaching sustainability; the changed individual is the sustainability goal:

> ESD calls for practical actions and decision-making – schools cannot only speak about the future but must act for the future. Nevertheless the main aim of school actions is not the physical/technical outcomes but the students' learning and involvement. (Breiting et al., 2005: 16)

In upcoming sections, I will analyze how this expected — and desired — individual is shaped and fashioned through technologies of responsibilization. It may be that this teaching/research model is limited to a specific historical and geographical context; the Nordic countries around the turn of the twentieth century. The specific conditions for environmental education in this context comprise a curriculum emphasizing education for sustainability as well as a strong national identity in being 'sustainable' (Ideland & Tröhler, 2015). My wish is that the following analysis can serve as example of how educational practices in our time make up standards and thus subjectivities for how to be a good student and citizen. However, before

entering the empirical study, I offer some theoretical and methodological staging.

Fabricating the Action-Competent Child

In order to understand how the well-intended practice of action competence makes up subjects as desirable or non-desirable, I build on Foucault's, and later Rose's, theories on power and governmentality (Foucault et al., 2007; Rose and Miller, 2010). The focus of my interest is how the notion of action competence inscribes standards for what to think and be acted upon, experienced and felt (c.f. Popkewitz, 2008). Targets of power are emotions and actions — things which appear to be individual and even intimate, but are socially organized and managed (Zembylas, 2002). In what Rose (1999) characterizes as an advanced liberal society, the principle of responsibilization is operationalized in the fabrication of desirable citizens. Public and private ethics merge and individuals become personally accountable for the common good. For instance, in a general environmental discourse, the relation between the actions of individuals (e.g., buying organic food and/or recycling) and ecological sustainability is repeatedly emphasized; the individual is the problem and the solution. Rose (1999; cf. Foucault et al., 2007) has shown how this feeling of being personally responsible (or guilty) for bigger problems is inscribed in individuals' souls and thus govern how to be and act as a conscientious person.

During different historical contexts, the child has been culturally made up either as a miniature version of, or as significantly different to, the adult (Nadesan, 2010). Since the 1990's the figure of 'the competent child' has a prominent position in educational discourses, producing a rupture in the view of the child. Children are constructed as equal to adults and competent enough to participate in society — human beings rather than human becomings (Ellergard, 2004: 178). Brembeck et.al state that since the 1990s:

> A new understanding of the child has been presented: that of a social and cultural being, an adequate member of society, who acts, reflects and contributes to its own growth as well as the growth of society. Children are attributed agency, and constructions of subjectivities are understood as ongoing processes where identities are negotiated. (Brembeck et al., 2004: 18)

In educational discourses, the child has transformed from being subjected to teachability and developmentality to being subjected to accountability and sociability; now it is a reliable child, worth listening to (Hultqvist & Dahlberg, 2001; Brembeck et al., 2004). The child is sometimes fabricated as even more responsible and reasonable than adults – instead of being an

imperfect adult. This is especially prominent in the discourse of ESE, which fabricates the child as a 'pure' environmental agent, the future citizen. The child is not yet contaminated by cynicism and capitalism but as a 'pure soul' shapeable as well as closely connected to the nature that s/he should protect (Johansson, 2004; Ärlemalm-Hagsér, 2013; Sjöstrand-Öhrfelt, 2014). This discourse operates through documents from international organizations as OECD, the EU and UN as well as in national curricula and local practices (Kryger, 2004). However, Brembeck et al. (2004) claim that 'the competent child' is particularly prominent in the construction of a Nordic identity as Protestant, progressive, and egalitarian, distancing itself from a Catholic, conservative, and capitalist Europe. Both the newness and the Nordicness of this figuration of the child can be questioned. For instance, there are obvious similarities with Popkewitz's notion of the cosmopolitan child: a child who embodies a cultural thesis in which human reason and rationality change the world and people for the better, and that the future can only be planned by ordering the present (Popkewitz, 2009b: 252). This culturally desirable human kind appears as a dream, but just as any other cultural theses, it limits normality and make up categories of children as non-desirable. Embedded in the good intention to include all children is the exclusion of the Other – the child threatening the world. This risky Other often partially coincides with children outside normality in other ways, from lower social classes and/or minority races, and can redefine or reinvigorate them (Popkewitz, 2008; Nadesan, 2010).

A Cultural Protocol for Emotional Skills

The notion of the 'competent child' opens up a potential for children's agency at the same time as they become pointed out as subjects for responsibilization (Popkewitz 2007; Kampmann, 2004). Fantasies of agency, empowerment, and practical work govern the desirable child (Wright, 2012: 291), entangled in a web of emotional rules on how a responsible citizen should feel (Zembylas, 2002). Concepts such as emotional intelligence, emotion management, and emotional literacy operate in educational discourses. On the surface, these concepts seem to contest ideas of objectivity and rationality in education, through inviting emotions. But this 'emotional turn' in education functions alongside its binary opposite, scientization, and they are intimately intertwined in the fabrication of citizens (Burman, 2009). The notion of emotional literacy appears as "a way to corral and contain it [emotion], to subdue and correct it within the rationality which it might otherwise exceed" (Kenway & Youdell, 2012: 132). In this instance, we can speak about emotional rationalities inscribed upon students' souls (Gillies,

2011). It is a way to govern individuals, implying a political model through a political economy of emotions (Burman, 2009).

> …policy-makers' attentions have shifted away from structures and processes, towards a focus on personal skills and self-efficacy. From this perspective, the state would facilitate the production of resourceful, agentic, ethically, responsible and emotionally competent citizen. (Gillies, 2011: 186)

Talking about emotional literacy indicates that feelings can and must be tamed and analyzed from a distance. Only certain emotions are valid and legitimate in certain spaces in the emotionalized society. Anger and excitement, for instance, belong to the private sphere, perhaps because they are too uncontrolled. Instead, positive feelings like self-efficacy and wellbeing are valid in education — an implicit cultural protocol for 'emotional skills' (Ecclestone & Hayes 2009; 376; see also Zembylas, 2002; Gillies, 2011).

The ideals for the good — active, responsible, and (moderately) emotional — citizen also have their opposites. Through defining the qualified child as competent, brave, and environmentally friendly, the discourse simultaneously disqualifies children with other characteristics (Popkewitz & Lindblad, 2000; Friedrich, 2014). They become *abjected*, fabricated as those who do not pass the cultural protocol for, in this case, the action-competent child, but operate as the non-desirable Other. Abjection processes have a certain function in the construction of normality; with help from them privileged social groups make up themselves as good, which means that at the same time as abjected Others are rejected they are impossible to live without (Popkewitz, 2008).

Methodological Staging

In the search for the fabrication of what I call the 'action-competent child', I have studied scientific texts (articles, books), policy texts (quality criteria for ESD schools) and pedagogical texts (student/teacher textbooks) explicitly promoting education for action competence. Texts from different genres are treated the same, regardless of their scientific claims. They are all produced inside a system of reason (Popkewitz, 2008), in which certain ways of thinking and discussing are considered reasonable and true and thus condition possible subjectivities. All texts (including this) are inside an order of discourses; it is more or less impossible to write outside its borders (Foucault, 1971), therefore, the challenge is to illuminate these borders and deconstructing the fabrications of human kinds.

Five texts have been chosen as objects for closer analysis: *1) Action competence, Conflicting interests and Environmental education – The MUVIN Programme* (Breiting et al., 2009, 238 pages); 2) *The action competence*

approach in environmental education (Jensen & Schnack, 2006, 15 pages); 3) *Quality criteria for ESD-schools. Guidelines to enhance the quality of Education for sustainable development* (Breiting et al., 2005, 48 pages); 4) *Action competence and environmental education* (Breiting & Mogensen, 2006, 15 pages); and, finally, one text in which the model is operationalized; 5) *Handlingskompetens på schemat [Action competence on the schedule]* (Björneloo, 2012, 14 pages). From these texts, I have analyzed how teaching and researching action competence fabricate a specific kind of desirable child through processes of responsibilization. The analytical focus is how the subject is fabricated in terms of appropriate practices (actions) and emotions, which are, for instance, represented in a model often used in texts promoting education for action competence (developed in Mogensen, 1995):
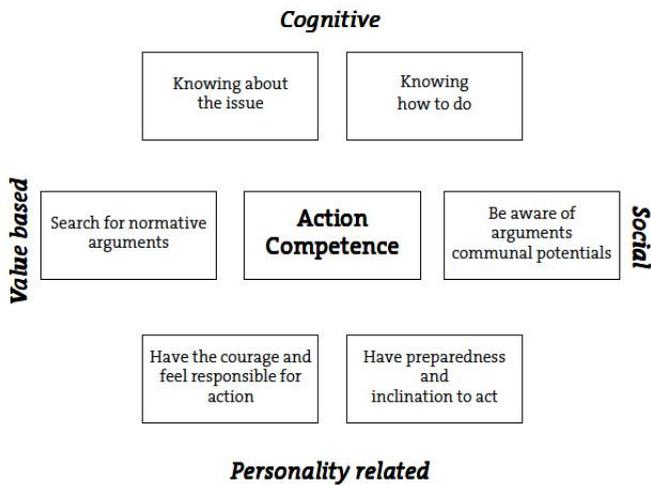

Figure 1 Model for action competence (Mogensen, 1995)

The content of the boxes framing action competence are all related to the individual and his/her types of knowledge, values, and emotions. As discussed above, sustainability is to be reached through changing the subject, his/her behavior and inner self – not the school activities or knowledge content. This result came out of readings of the texts mentioned above. But the analysis also focused what is expected from the action-competent child; how one should act and feel in this specific pedagogical practice and how this (re)produces a cultural protocol for who is entrusted the future and who is fabricated as the child at risk. I use the notion of fabrication in order to emphasize that constructions of desirable and non-desirable subjects both can be seen as fictions and creators of things and subjectivities (Popkewitz, 2004: 13).

In the following analytical sections of this article, I will first look into how the analyzed texts fabricate a certain kind of desirable, environmentally

friendly child through defining what a valid action is. Next follows an analysis of how descriptions of valid emotions contribute to the construction of desirable and undesirable subjects. Finally, in the discussion, I further consider what the discourse of the action-competent child, and processes of responsibilization, do in the understanding of children.

Responsibilization through Authentic Practice

The 'action', as illustrated in the model in the section above, is the node for the whole discourse of action competence. The action in itself is described as necessary for learning when it comes to knowledge, as well as socialization into citizenship. However, the goal for learning is not what happens in school-organized actions, but rather, the development of students' willingness and preparedness to act in the future. This is an important distinction from earlier environmental education. However, to reach this goal of action competence, the pedagogy involves actions with certain characteristics (Jensen & Schnack, 2006: 481). Not just any action or practical work is valid in the fostering of action-competent children. What are the requirements for appropriate action and how do those requirements operate in the fabrication of the responsible and competent child?

The first criterion for the useful action in this discourse is that it has a wider aim than just schooling and grades. The MUVIN researchers make a clear distinction between *activities* and *actions*. 'Activities' are associated with traditional schooling, with abstract, non-authentic goals related to school itself. 'Actions' are, on the other hand, real. Examples of actions described in the literature are "direct actions" such as "sorting of garbage, construction of compost heaps, economizing on water and energy consumption" as well as "indirect" actions like "letters to politicians and companies, organizing debate evenings on environmental conditions, editorials to the local paper" (Jensen & Schnack, 2006: 479).

In the distinction between activities and actions, Breiting et al. (2009) point out the importance of *intentionality*. Actions must be "conscious, reflected, and targeted. /.../ Actions are intentional" (Breiting et al., 2009: 44). Actions do not just simply happen. They are the result of careful considerations and planning and should be defendable through logical reasoning. Sorting garbage can, for instance, be counted as an activity if unintentional, but as an action if it is reflected on. The action-competent child is not only active and vigorous, but also self-managed and knowledgeable (c.f. Breiting et al., 2005). What we have here is a materialization of the cultural thesis of cosmopolitanism: "by (re)visioning Enlightenment hopes about reason and rationality through an agency directed to ordering the present and the future" (Popkewitz, 2009b: 258). The reflective practitioner is not the teacher; it is the action-

competent child who knows why s/he acts like s/he does, can reflect upon it in a reasonable and responsible way, and make difference in the real world. The abjected Other thus becomes the spontaneous, non-reflective, unknowing child — the childish child. This also answers to other aspects of childhood in what is usually referred to as the knowledge society. In this cultural setting not only perceived societal problems but also childhood in itself is educationalized. Children are expected to engage in learning, not only in school but also on leisure time, fabricating subjectivities constantly being able to use knowledge, and to be observant on learning possibilities.

Other criteria for the required way to take action are *authenticity* and that the students *participate genuinely* (Breiting et al., 2005: 30). The action-competent child works with authentic problems, solved in authentic ways, resulting in authentic experiences. The opposite is traditional (abstract and theoretical) schooling, with made-up problems, solved for the sake of the teacher, resulting in learning for tests and grades (Jensen & Schnack, 2006: 484). The subjects fitting into this discourse are seen as only responsible for themselves and not for the world. The literature on action competence is filled with examples of teachers' practical work with authentic projects that oblige genuine participation from the students (Breiting et al., 2009; Björneloo, 2012). This is not unique for action competence teaching; just the opposite, much educational research and practice advocate this. For instance, in the field of science education, work with socio-scientific issues (SSI) has been promoted (e.g., Ratcliffe & Grace, 2003; Zeidler et al., 2005; Ekborg, Ideland & Malmberg, 2009). For similar reasons and with similar methods as action competence teaching, SSI aims at developing students' abilities to handle complex issues, combining scientific knowledge with critical thinking, ethical evaluations, and something often referred to as 'other knowledge'. Also, practices such as everyday mathematics and PISA's intention to measure scientific knowledge in relation to real-life problems are materializations of the authenticity discourse and the idea that it is possible to predict what can be considered as a real-life challenge for a teenager (Tröhler, 2012). OECD's framework for PISA even states that students performing at or below "level 2" in the PISA test are not likely to be able "to participate effectively and productively in life" (OECD, 2010: 29; cf. Serder & Ideland, 2015). Compared to these harsh words, action competence might be seen as non-governing of citizens. However, considered as a governing technology (Rose, 1999), action competence still includes and excludes through defining what is a valid action but with help from beautiful-sounding words such as authenticity and participation.

What differs action competence from SSI — and even more, the PISA framework — is the belief in *experience*, a practical, embodied knowledge arising from the 'action' in itself. Doing and being constitute each other and

the subject. Popkewitz (2008) states that the cosmopolitan child is not born, but made – a cultural thesis embedded in the texts on action competence: "Experiences and action are thus very closely linked. Without action competence, one cannot become rich in experiences, which in their turn can help to qualify action competence" (Jensen & Schnack, 2006: 475). To reach the goal of action competence, experiences are articulated as more or less necessary, they take a "special role in a person's consciousness and personality formation" (Breiting et al., 2009: 60). Interesting to note in the responsibilization of the student, is the amalgamation of cognitive and societal perspectives on education. The work forms are directed to the societal practices (authentic problems, 'real' actions, and genuinely participating). At the same time, the focused target is the individual and her/his inner self — the soul. The future of the society is subjected to the child, whose character and actions are constructed as necessary for saving the planet, and, as if that is not enough, there are silent criteria for the students' own experiences, to feel a certain way. In the next section, I return to the emotional turn in education (Leathwood & Hey, 2009: 430), a powerful technology in the responsibilization of the action-competent child.

Responsibilization through Emotional Skills

> It is unavoidable that within learning for sustainable development there is a normative aspect, but if students are to learn to think for themselves and develop their own action competence, then perhaps the teachers' 'solution' can do them a disservice. To do what the teacher thinks is right is not the same as choosing the same thing when one leaves school later. The big challenges for teachers in this project are the following questions: How can one get the students to want to do the right thing? How do I teach this? (Björneloo, 2012: 148, my translation)

This quote derives from a chapter in a textbook for teachers and teacher students on how to work with action research and how to develop evidence-based teaching. The questions posed in the end are illuminating for the inherent dilemma in action-competence teaching: how can one make the students willing to do "the right thing" without steering them in a specific way? How do students become responsibilisized through emotions? How are emotions being cultivated, demanded, and rewarded in the action competence discourse? (Gagen, 2013: 3). What kinds of subjects are made up as action competent?

In the above-mentioned practice of SSI, the belief in knowledge is overwhelming. In the texts on action competence, knowledge and emotions are however described as closely intertwined. In an argument against beliefs in

rational deliberations and calculations (as in the case of SSI), Breiting et al. write about other aspects than knowledge to consider:

> These personality-related aspects are the willingness, courage, and inclination to involve oneself. And this is also a matter of taking responsibility for one's own and others' lives and trusting one's own power of action or influencing possibilities. Hence, action competence is seen as a personal capacity embracing rather more than the intellectual-cognitive domain. It involves the entire personality, including many of the mental performance potentials and dispositions. (Breiting et al., 2009: 50)

In this quote, as well as in the above-introduced model from Mogensen (1995), willingness and courage are emotional skills promoted. Other feelings recurring in relation to the desirable child are empowerment, engagement, and self-efficacy. These might be considered as productive or beneficial emotions; however, the standards for useful emotional skills also constitute the possibility to fail emotionally. In earlier studies on ESE, the feeling of guilt is pointed out as a governing technology of the self. In the individualization of environmental problems, a pastoral discourse directing the soul is used to knit together personal guilt with global threats, detailed individual activities with possibilities of rescuing the flock and the planet. (Ideland & Malmberg, 2015; c.f. Foucault, 1983). The expectations of the competent child to produce emotions such as compassion and engagement turns back onto him/her and guilt comes into being if s/he does not feel adequately compassionate and engaged (Johansson, 2004: 234). The discourse of action competence, with intentions to foster students' emotions into courage and willingness, protect the students from guilt. This protection is shaped through practical work like recycling and writing letters to politicians. Participating in democratic practices in education becomes a way to meet the standards for a responsible person and in that way cleanses the soul (Popkewitz, 2008; Tröhler, 2012).

Guilt is, inside the empowerment/agency discourse, a non-approved emotion. It challenges cultural theses on the child as on the one hand 'pure' and on the other hand 'empowered' and 'competent'. Other forbidden emotions are "apathy and despondency," since they are said to combat the "ultimate goal of environmental education," namely to "let students grow into actionminded citizens, capable of seeing beyond their own noses, and with the perception that they can have influence, if they earn it" (Breiting et al., 2009: 33). Gillies (2011) provides an interesting example of how to fail in relation to the standards for emotional literacy. She has studied a school class with only non-white English students in a stigmatized area when they discussed the news reporting on the missing white, privileged girl, Madeleine

McCann.[2] Gillies points to how one of the students expressed the 'wrong' feelings, he was angry about the injustice in the news reporting, claiming that if he "was kidnapped nobody would make this much fuss" (Gillies, 2011: 194). Anger was a failure in this situation; compassion would have been the right reaction. In similar ways, the action-competent child has his/her criteria for valid and invalid emotions, even if the emotional curriculum is not explicit. Perhaps it could best be described as hidden behind the open and well-intended language of creating possibilities for courage and willingness — as an opposite of behavioral management. Through this discourse, emotions are governed in the responsibilization of the child so that they are "seeing beyond their own noses" (Breiting et al., 2009: 33) or wanting to do "the right thing" (Björneloo, 2012: 148). The action-competent child feels and embodies responsibility in a structured and 'reasonable' way. Just as in the case of actions, the child's emotions in the discourse of the knowledge society must be intentional and defendable through reasoning; feelings become skills, possible to domesticize and measure.

Inclusion and Exclusion through Knowledge, Action, and Emotions

In one sense, action-competence teaching is far from practical. Breiting et al. (2005: 9) state that it is not possible to refine the framework into performative indicators or measurable learning goals. On the other hand, its usefulness lies in its performed openness and flexibility — in the non-formulated knowledge outcomes. This is what gives the practice legitimacy and allows it to operate as a powerful governing technology in a non-regulated so called knowledge society (Rose, 1999). Instead of educating for a specific, outspoken, behavioral change, the discourse governs through fabricating reasonable and responsible actions, emotions and thus, subjects. In an attempt to summarize the characteristics of the desirable subject who is supposed to save the world in this specific discourse, s/he is actionminded. This means that s/he is willing to act, empowered, brave, optimistic, engaged, empathetic, and genuinely participating in order to achieve authentic experiences. But the action-competent child is also controlled, critical, well planned, and domesticizes her/his feelings. It is a subject answering to the standards for the competent, as well as the cosmopolitan, child; the one whom we can entrust the future to (Brembeck et al., 2004; Popkewitz, 2008).

In the fabrication of reasonable subjects, the production of the abjected Other is (as always) unavoidable. The Other occurs as the normal's opposite, embodying the undesirable citizen, and qualifying some students as objects of inclusion. Reason and control become markers to differentiate and divide, separating, in this case, those who care for the future from those who are not only "at risk" (Popkewitz & Lindblad, 2004: 232), but also "risky" for the

society and in this specific discourse – the planet (Nadesan (2010). The abjected Other, the one in need of being saved, is in other words, powerless, cowardly, pessimistic, spontaneous, emotional, and/or a passive subject — paradoxical characteristics, but which are all outside the cultural protocol for the desired human being. This is the child with no agency or the wrong agency (Popkewitz, 2007: 70), in some ways, the image of the childish child. But the shaping of the child at risk also includes anger and despondency, emotions that may be understandable inside the narrative of environmental crisis and an insecure future. However, according to the cultural standards for emotional skills, these are incorrect emotions not useful when striving for a better world.

Taking the analysis one step further, I discuss how educational discourses, with action competence as the example, (re)produce race and social class, and thus fabricate desirable subjectivities. Despite the progressive touch of this pedagogical model, it demarcates those who possess skills for feeling and acting in a certain way from those who do not. Through fabrication of subjects, the texts on action competence structure what subjects may inhabit the spaces for inclusion and respectively, exclusion (Leathwood & Hey, 2009). Deconstructing and restraining the scientific discourse in ESE and emphasizing the role of emotions may be seen as an entrance to education challenging established social patterns. For example, feminist scholars have stressed the importance of elevating emotions in education (see, for instance, Burman, 2009 for references). On the other hand, the attention to affect could be seen as a masculine, colonial heritage promoting certain actions and emotions – such as logical reasoning and self-efficacy – as an "imperial mimicry" (McElhinny, 2010: 312). Simultaneously, emotions that traditionally contribute to make up the Other – either this is the woman or the 'savage' (McClintock, 1995) – are defined as 'wrong' for the action-competent child. Ahmed (2004) conceptualizes this kind of cultural processes as an affect economy for which emotions are valued and which are not. Ahmed recognizes how this affect economy (re)produces whiteness and class. I would like to add 'academic-ness', regarding to the emphasis on knowledge-based actions. In the introduction, the relation between Nordicness and the figure of a competent child was stressed. Gitz Johansen (2004) has shown how non-Nordic immigrant children are culturally made up as non-competent through connecting them to tradition, religion, and authorities. Their personalities are constructed as opposites of the modern, rational, self-managed, and engaged competent child. These undesirable subjects, represented as the child who is not action competent, reflect the child who "*embodies processes of abjections – fears of not fulfilling the dream of including the excluded and fears of populations jeopardizing that future who are rendered abject by their modes of living*" (Popkewitz, 2008: 126, italics in original). These children function

as abjected Others in the responsibilization of those who can belong inside the discourse on reasonable environmental actions.

To sum up, practices and emotions are often described as phenomena from which the 'truth' can be revealed; they have a cultural aura of being authentic. In this study, I have not analyzed practices or emotions as 'real', but as materializations of cultural theses of the child. The aim has been to discuss how assumptions of intentionality, authenticity, participation, experience, and emotion in themselves are fabricating the 'normal', modern life. Educational practices (in research, as well as teaching) such as action competence, inhabit cultural standards not only for what to learn and how, but also how to act and feel. These standards are not explicitly stated in curricula and syllabuses, but operate through beautiful words such as future, democracy, sustainability, compassion, and accountability. Practices and emotions are discursively produced and therefore claims of authenticity must be problematized in order to challenge cultural certainties of who lives the good life and who needs to change to fit into education.

NOTES

1. This field includes, for example, practices named 'environmental education', 'education for sustainable development', and 'education for sustainability'. Palmer (1998) describes the development of this educational practice.

2. The story of the British child Madeleine McCain has had extensive media cover for a few years, since she was abducted from a hotel room during vacation in Portugal.

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