Abstract to EERA-ECER, Istanbul Sep, 2013

EERA: Discussing Education for Sustainable Development among Teachers: The challenge of subjectification

Author(s): Helen Hasslöf (submitting/presenting)

Conference: ECER 2013, Creativity and Innovation in Educational Research

Network: 08. Research on Health Education

Format: Paper

Session Information

08 SES 03, Professional Competences and Development in ESD and Health Promotion in Schools

Paper Session

Time: 2013-09-10

17:15-18:45

Room: D-504

Chair: Katrine Dahl Madsen

Contribution

Discussing Education for Sustainable Development among Teachers:

The challenge of subjectification

Helen Hasslöf, PhD student, Faculty of Education and Society. Malmo University, Sweden.

helen.hasslof@mah.se

3-5 keywords: Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), Environmental education, subjectification, pluralism, teachers

General descriptions on research questions, objectives and theoretical framework

Research on education for sustainable development (ESD) put forward the complex and conflicting views of sustainable questions. The uncertainty and complexity of the future, and the many different cultural contexts makes a dynamic approach desirable. Pluralism is often put forward as a means of handling ‘competing visions of the truth’ and to take different opinions, knowledge and conflicting views into account in ESD (Breiting, Mayer, and Mogensen, 2005; Jensen and Schnack, 1997; Lundegård and Wickman, 2007; Rudsberg and Öhman, 2010; Scott and Gough, 2003; Öhman, 2006).

The aim with my study is to reveal teachers’ repertoires for creating opportunities to challenge students’ thoughts and ideas in issues connected to ESD. The paper departs from the distinction Gert
Biesta (2009) makes between three different functions of education. He refers to three functions as qualification, socialization and subjectification. The function of qualification has to do with the domain of knowledge and skills and how students may become more qualified through e.g. learning fact about issues in ESD. Socialization is connected to the many ways we becomes a part specific social, cultural and political order of a community, and are connected to ones identity and ways of acting. The function of subjectification can be understood as a counterforce to socialization. It is not about introducing newcomers to be participators in a community. Rather it is a way to express agency and independence to the orders of a community.

How these functions of education are interrelating and in tension when teachers discuss the teaching of ESD, is the focus of the research questions of this study.

• In what way are the teachers expressing empowering opportunities for students to challenge their views (subjectification) of sustainable issues?

• In what way are the educational functions of qualification, socialisation and subjectification interrelating in teachers’ meaning-making of education for sustainable development, and how could this be interpreted in relation to a pluralistic approach of sustainability?

In this study (in progress) teachers’ reflection on ESD, is analysed to problematize the tension between subjectification (becoming a subject), qualification (knowledge, skills and dispositions) and socialisation (become members of and part of particular social, cultural and political ‘orders’) – as defined by Biesta (2009).

Methodology
The empirical data consists of discussions between teachers from different subjects working in secondary and upper secondary school in Sweden reflecting about their teaching. I have followed five seminars comprising 3-6 teachers in each group. The teachers in each group were teaching the same students and represented different subjects; with the exception from one group engaged in an international ESD-project that represented different classes. During the seminar the teachers were reflecting on education for sustainable development with a point of departure from some semi-structured questions – constructed and put through by the researcher of this study. The teachers discussed education and teaching in the light of ESD in general and in relation to a recently completed thematic work of ESD. Each seminar lasted during one hour and were audio recorded and transcribed (verbatim transcription). Biesta’s (2009) theoretical framework of qualification, socialisation and subjectification makes up the basis for the analysis of the teachers’ meaning-making of education in relation to sustainable issues.

Expected outcomes/results
In the analyses of the conversations, some patterns are revealed in the meaning-making discussion. The first preliminary results show expression of different purposes of the teachers’ educational goals. Different and conflicting goals are coming through in the discussion. The desire to empower critical thinking as a key competence of the students is revealed as an important educational goal. A broad definition of critical thinking is expressed; embracing the questioning of the subject based knowledge, media, authorities as well as questioning the teachers themselves. “To empower the students to think independently and by themselves” is a periodic statement from the conversation. At the same time the
need for “basic” subject knowledge (fact-based) in the natural sciences is emphasised as a prerequisite before discussing issues of sustainability.

This could be interpreted as the critical thinking is put forward as an emancipatory tool in the process of subjectification, at the same time the fact-based education representing the view of the science teaching is showing a normative rationalistic worldview, guiding the “right” way of decision making. This is an interesting tension from the preliminary results to work with in the continuing analyses of the study during this spring.

References


