



Sigtuna Think Piece 5

Climate Change within Education for Sustainable Development: Ethical Tendency Discourse Analysis as a Tool

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Abstract

This think piece describes a way of including climate change within education for sustainable development (ESD), with a specific ambition to illuminate the moral dimension in a locally relevant way in the teaching. A method – ethical tendency discourse analysis – for creating a locally relevant teaching content that illuminates the moral dimension of climate change is described. This method has the potential to also, through an international collaboration, incorporate the global dimension in the teaching content.

Introduction

The purpose of this think piece is to suggest a possible way of handling climate change within the concept of education for sustainable development (ESD). A significant characteristic of ESD is the strong emphasis on the value aspects of environmental and developmental issues (see for example UNCED, 1992, Ch. 36:2; Baltic 21E:12; UNESCO, 2005, Annex I:3). These and other policy documents require educators to develop educational practices where students are given an opportunity to learn how to make ethical judgements and act in morally conscious ways.

Education for sustainable development is a context-sensitive education, since what is considered to be sustainable development varies between geographical locations and cultures.

In the following section I sketch out a way of including climate change within ESD, and especially focus on how to illuminate the moral dimension in a locally relevant way in the teaching. The sketch includes the description of a method – ethical tendency discourse analysis – that can be used to create a locally relevant teaching content that specifically focuses on the moral dimension of climate change. I also indicate how an international collaboration regarding such analyses can incorporate the global dimension in the teaching content.

The Ethical and Moral Dimension

As Joas (2000) reminds us, morals and ethics can assume a number of different expressions. In order to clarify ethics and morals in educational practice, Öhman and Östman (2008) developed an approach inspired by the later works of Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953/1997 and 1969/1997). Other than in 'A Lecture on Ethics' (1993), Wittgenstein did not say very much about ethics and morals (see further Rhees, 1970/1996). Rather, our work has been inspired by the philosophical method he used in his later works, i.e. his way of investigating 'ethical'

forms of life and language games. In the eyes of Janik and Toulmin (1973), such an application is reasonable:

For might one not have urged that, on his own later principles, that the very *intelligibility* of words like *good* and *right* is as dependent as that of all other linguistic expressions on the acceptance of those shared language games and forms of life within which they are given their standard uses, and by reference to which alone we can understand one another's choices, decisions and scruples? Surely, his own later position implies that the concept of 'values' itself relies for its meaning on the existence of certain standard and recognizable modes of 'evaluative' behaviour. (235)

Wittgenstein used the term 'language-game' because in his investigations he wanted to be true to the idea that the use of language was part of an activity or a form of life. By doing so he forces us to focus on how the meanings of expressions and words are connected to their use in different situations: 'A meaning of a word is a kind of employment of it' (Wittgenstein, 1969/1997:61).

The background to this way of working is that Wittgenstein did not believe that it was possible to step out of our language: we live in the language. The consequences of this starting point is that the meaning of words and the circumstances in which words are used are interconnected in a way that precedes the analytical separation of the world (the circumstances) and the use and meaning of words when we speak. In line with this approach, we do not approach ethics and morals as theoretically demarcated concepts (as though they only have one 'true meaning'), but rather as a feature of human thinking and behaviour – which we, with inspiration from Wittgenstein (1993:44), call the ethical tendency. Many different forms of moral and ethical expressions can be found in the ethical tendency (see below). Thus, the purpose of this way of approaching ethics and morals is to open a way for investigations into the various ways that ethics and morals can appear in practice.

In Öhman and Östman (2008) a categorisation, resulting from an investigation of communication in educational settings, is presented. The backing for this categorisation was the observation that, in conversations, two different ways of using judgements are evident – which Wittgenstein (1993) referred to as relative and absolute judgements. The former concerns judgements that are made in connection with actions undertaken within a practice that are governed by well formulated rules and purposes. For example, when we say that someone is skilful horse rider, we do not normally interpret this as a moral judgement. But if someone states that it is wrong to insult or offend a human being, or that we have to take responsibility for future generations' wellbeing, we usually make such an interpretation. We do so because the person communicates that the judgement has a universal validity; a validity that is beyond particular circumstances and people's views or standpoints. Even though we communicate this universality regarding our judgement, it does not mean that moral judgements are universal, or that in practice we do not often take into account particular circumstances as an exception. The expression 'white lie' is an example of that. Thus, the important thing to pay attention to

is that when we use absolute judgements we communicate that we are dealing with morals and ethics.

Absolute judgements can also be expressed in three different types of educational situations, which Öhman and Östman (2008) call moral reactions, moral norms for correct behaviour and ethical reflection.

A moral reaction is a personal, immediate, spontaneous emotional reaction that includes responsibility for someone or something and can be expressed in terms of remorse, anger, shame or love and care. Here we are reminded about situations such as when we see someone hitting a child, ill-treating an animal, or when someone, without consciously calculating the risks, spontaneously dives into the water to rescue a drowning person. In other words, they are bodily reactions that we have little control over: they just happen. In linguistic terms we often pay attention to other people's moral reactions because they use strong aesthetic words and expressions – like 'how awful', 'how disgusting' – in specific situations. In the teaching context, moral norms are often about the teacher trying to get the students to learn social rules about how to treat people and nature in a correct and proper way. Ethical reflection is to do with what we can call rational ideas and thoughts about moral reactions, moral dilemmas or moral norms for correct behaviour. 'Rational' means that moral reactions, dilemmas, etc., are discussed in general terms.

In order to describe the ethical tendency within a class, local society etc., we can use the metaphor of landscape. An ethical tendency landscape can be described with the help of the categories of moral reactions, norms for correct behaviour and ethical reflection. By investigating which actions and events are 'objects' for norms for correct behaviour, moral reactions and ethical reflections, we acquire information about both the topography and content of the ethical tendency. The result of such an investigation can be used to create a local relevant teaching content regarding the moral dimension in education for sustainable development (see below).

It is important to pay attention to the fact that an ethical tendency landscape is not static. The objects for norms, moral reactions and ethical reflections can both change and vary between different cultures and geographically different positions. Moreover, the same object can have different locations in different cultures. Dewey (1922/1988) formulated the principle for this dynamic in the following way:

The foremost conclusion is that morals have to do with all activity into which alternative possibilities enter. For wherever they enter a difference between better and worse arises. ... Yet it is a perilous error to draw a hard and fast line between action into which deliberation and choice enter and activity due to impulse and matter-of-fact habit. ... every reflective choice tends to relegate some conscious issue into a deed or habit henceforth taken for granted and not thought upon. Potentially therefore every and any act is within the scope of morals, being a candidate for possible judgement with respect to its better-or-worse quality. (279)

In some places climate change will transform the ethical tendency landscape, while in other places there will be no change at all. Furthermore, the transformation will probably look different in different places and communities. It might also be the case that changes in the ethical tendency landscape vary between different social groups in a local community. We can illustrate this by imagining a place where there has always been plenty of water for both cattle and people. Some of the people have access to the water via a lake, others from a stream running into the lake. Since the amount of available water has been plentiful it has not been included in the ethical tendency landscape. However, changes in the climate have led to a drastic reduction in the amount of available water and those most affected by this are the people living around the lake: the people living upstream still have some water. Although this change has led to changes in the ethical tendency landscape, the changes vary according to the different geographic positions and thereby different access to water. It is easy to imagine how this might create a tension in the local community.

Creating Local Relevance: Ethical Tendency Discourse Analysis

In order to situate the moral dimension in climate change education, an analysis of the local ethical tendency landscape can be helpful. A suitable methodology for such an analysis is discourse analysis, since it focuses on patterns over time and space. While this is not the correct forum for elaborating on the actual technique of discourse analysis, some general procedures can be mentioned. One obvious way of creating data is to conduct semi-structured interviews with individuals or groups of people. When conducting such interviews it is important to create an atmosphere in which it is easy to talk about values and changes of values in relation to physical changes in the environment or other changes as an effect of physical change. In the analysis it becomes crucial to identify situations where the informants use absolute value judgements and, by looking at the circumstances in which the absolute judgements are located, to categorise them into moral reactions, norms for correct behaviour and ethical reflections. It is also important to pay attention to the time-line of the informant's story in order to acquire knowledge and information about the transformation of the ethical tendency landscape. When identifying a pattern, if there is one, it is also important to make comparisons between individuals or groups. In making such comparisons, the basic topography of the ethical tendency landscape in a local community can be identified without losing sight of the differences.

Local and Global Relevance

Dealing with climate change justly and effectively means that there is also a need to encourage the engagement and involvement of people in local issues as well as distant problems: problems that concern other people. Some of the causes of climate change in developing countries have their origins in the actions of people in developed countries. This means that it might be necessary for some of us to take other people's wellbeing into consideration – people whom we have never met – when deciding how we want to live our lives. In line with this it might also be

important to consider the question of how to include the dimension of 'distance responsibility' in the locally relevant content created by the ethical tendency discourse analysis. One way of doing this would be to create an international collaboration, where the focus would be to develop cases of ethical tendency discourse analysis with people in local contexts from different places. These cases could be arranged in relation to similar ethical tendency landscapes, in accordance with similar vulnerabilities or in accordance with the production of climate change and the consequences of such changes. Such arrangements can create possibilities for ethical reflections on the relationship between the local and global in different ways.

Although in this very rough sketch I have restricted myself to the ethical tendency landscape, a change in the ethical tendency landscape will naturally have consequences for the political landscape: who is able to set the agenda and who is not, etc. Including this dimension in the teaching of climate change is very important – and a theme for another sketch.

Notes on the Contributor

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