

Eco-certified students? The governance of souls in Education for Sustainable Development

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Abstract

Today is the term "Education for Sustainable Development" (ESD) tainted by with notions of the "exemplary life" and "desirable future". This practice is exercised in school all over the world. The aim with the paper is to unveil how teaching materials in ESD are governing students through different technologies of the self.

The paper departs from the idea that discourses decide what is possible to think, say and do in a specific historical and cultural context. To understand how these discourses are internalised into peoples thinking, saying and doing we study a process of *governmentality*. This process must be understood on three levels: *Political rationalities; Political programs; Technologies of the self*.

Our paper problematizes the concepts of "the good person" and "the exemplarily life". We are analysing three different types of teaching material often used in ESD. One criterion for the choice is that the material use science and mathematical calculations for the representation of sustainable development, since we are interested in how these rationalities are used in the process of governmentality.

The teaching material is analysed through discourse analysis.

In the result can we show how diagrams and mathematical calculations used in the teaching material can be understood as governing technologies for four different political rationalities: 1) Individuals are free and obliged to make choices in the modern society; 2) Eve-

ryone is responsible for a common future; 3) Belief in scientific and technological solutions; 4) Idea of the progress. Calculations and Diagrams are instruments in governing the modern human being. These – scientific – representations of ideas of how society should be organised, of how an expected future can be met and how individuals should act are governing our souls, how we want to be in order to be seen as good and “eco-certified” people.

Keywords: Education for sustainable development, Discourse analysis, Teaching material, Governmentality

Background and aim

Today is the term "Education for Sustainable Development" (ESD) tainted by with notions of the "exemplary life" and "desirable future"? This practice is exercised in schools all over the world. The question is how students come to understand and practice the discourse of the "exemplarily life" and the need of "saving the world". How are people governed in a way that they change their lives voluntarily? What kinds of technologies are used to define how to be an environmentally friendly – or as we say: eco-certified – person? The aim with the paper is to unveil how teaching materials in ESD are governing students through different technologies of the self, e.g. ways of making people internalise discourses, or as Thomas Popkewitz (2004) writes: "produce social and personal progress through remodeling the child, or what I have called changing the soul". In other words, this paper discusses how teaching material in ESD is steering human beings through their souls (Foucault, 1982)?

Rationale

The paper departs from the idea that discourses decide what is possible to think, say and do in a specific historical and cultural context (Foucault, 1982). To understand how these discourses are internalised into peoples thinking, saying and doing we study a process of *governmentality*. This process must be understood on three levels: *Political rationalities; Political programs; Technologies of the self* (Rose & Miller, 2010). A political rationality is a taken for granted view on how to understand the world, and is related to a moral, epistemology and idiom (language). The rationality become visible in a political program, which is a context where problems and solutions

are defined and suggested, one example is Agenda 21 and curricula. Through these programs, people's lives become administrable and open for technologies of the self. This is done through formulations of "the good and responsible person" and "the exemplary life". By defining ideals, people voluntarily establish themselves into the practices, otherwise they become constructed as persons "at risk", threatening "our common future". Our paper problematizes the concepts of "the good person" and "the exemplarily life" by analysing teaching material in ESD.

Method

ESD is emphasized in the national curriculum for Swedish schools. It is covered in traditional textbooks, and science textbooks often have special chapters about the topic. There are also a huge number of teaching materials from NGOs available. We have chosen three different types of teaching material often used in Swedish schools. One criterion for the choice is that the material use science and mathematical calculations for the representation of sustainable development, since we are interested in how these rationalities are expressed in the process of governmentality. One material is from a webpage produced by Swedish World Wildlife Fund (WWF) dealing with how to calculate one's own contribution to global warming (WWF 2013). This is done through an interactive inquiry through which the participants report activities within four different areas; food, travelling, home and things. On the webpage is it also possible to give an environmental promise. Another teaching material is a textbook in science for Swedish upper secondary school (Karlsson et al 2005). We analyse a chapter with the title Sustainable develop-

ment. The third one is from The Confederation of Swedish Enterprise (CSE), which is business federation for Swedish companies (Demervall 2009). This includes both teaching instructions and students' workbooks.

The teaching material is analysed through discourse analysis. In the first analytical step we are identifying types of technologies of government (Rose & Mille, 2010) used in the teaching materials. We are asking questions by what means, mechanisms, procedures, techniques and language the discourse is constituted and internalized. Next step is to relate these technologies to political programs, e.g. policy document concerning sustainable development and school curricula (will not be presented in this specific paper). This is discussed in relation to a wider political rationality and from there discuss how the discourse of "the eco-certified child" is constructed.

Results

The results show how diagrams and mathematical calculations used in the teaching material can be understood as governing technologies for four different political rationalities: 1) Individuals are free and obliged to make choices in the modern society; 2) Everyone is responsible for a common future; 3) Belief in scientific and technological solutions; 4) Idea of the progress. These rationalities are not exclusive for the ESD practice, but are taking different shapes in different parts of society and are hegemonic discourses in the construction of "good and rational persons".

In WWF's calculator for ecological footprints, the user is asked to make a kind of confessions of his/her use of natural resources. In the end s/he get to know how many globes that should be needed if everyone has the same consumption pattern as "you". In this discourse the individual choice is certainly in focus. But at the same time, this elevated choice is limited by the responsibility rationality. Yes, you are free, but if you are a good person, you make the right choice.

In the science textbook and in the teaching material from The Confederation of Swedish Enterprise, these rationalities are present, but the other two rationalities are even stronger. Diagrams are used to show the increase of environmental problems (e.g. parallel increase of CO₂ and global temperature). Besides these scientific calculations, there are also diagrams emphasizing environmental technological progress (e.g. Freon in fridges). Especially in the material from Swedish Enterprise, these diagrams are common. Progress is also represented in diagrams showing breaks in the timeline (e.g. decrease of sulphur dioxide emissions), which indicate the power of human being's willing to change.

Calculations and Diagrams are instruments in governing the modern human being. These – scientific – representations of ideas of how society should be organised, of how an expected future can be met and how individuals should act are governing our souls, how we want to be in order to be seen as good and environmentally friendly people. This ideal is covering the "right choice" as well as the "solidarity with the world" and "rational and progressive thinking". Through communicating these rationalities in schools, individuals will become in-

cluded or excluded in the ESD practice and these results intend to problematize the construction of the "eco-certified child" in school.

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