Clarifying the Ethical Tendency in Education for Sustainable Development Practice: A Wittgenstein-Inspired Approach

Johan Öhman, Örebro University, Sweden & Leif Östman, Uppsala University, Sweden

Abstract

This article aims to contribute to the debate about the moral and ethical aspects of education for sustainable development by suggesting a clarification of ethics and morals through an investigation of how these aspects appear in educational practice. The ambition is both to point to the normative dangers of education for sustainable development and the possibilities to enhance pluralism. The Wittgenstein-inspired approach used means that ethics and morals are regarded as expressions of a particular human tendency—the ethical tendency—that is observable in communication. The findings suggest that the ethical tendency appears in three different kinds of situations: personal moral reactions, norms for correct behaviour, and ethical reflections. *We discuss the diverse learning conditions of these situations and take specific notice of the risk of indoctrination.*

Résumé

Cet article vise à participer à la discussion sur les aspects moraux et éthiques de l'éducation pour un développement durable en vue de clarifier ce qu'est l'éthique et la morale par un examen du comment ces dernières apparaissent dans la pratique pédagogique. *D'une part, le but est de montrer les dangers normatifs de l'éducation pour un développement durable et d'autre part, les possibilités de mettre en valeur le pluralisme. L'approche employée, inspirée de Wittgenstein, veut dire que l'éthique et la morale sont perçues comme l'expression d'une tendance humaine particulière – la tendance éthique – observable en communication. Les résultats indiquent que la tendance éthique se manifeste dans trois sortes de situations :* les réactions morales personnelles, les normes pour un comportement correct et les réflexions éthiques. *Nous discutons des diverses conditions d'apprentissage de ces situations et prêtons une attention particulière au risque d'endoctrinement.*

Keywords: ethics, education for sustainable development, moral learning, value judgement, Wittgenstein, environmental education

Introduction

In recent years, education for sustainable development has been launched as a new comprehensive educational program. A significant characteristic of this

program is the strong emphasis on the value aspects of environmental and developmental issues (see for example UNCED, 1992; Baltic 21E, 2002; UNESCO, 2005). 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.

Although it would be difficult to imagine that anyone would be opposed to a sustainable future, sustainable development issues often contain conflicts between different ideologies, values, priorities, and strategies that are not possible to resolve by simply referring to scientific investigations.[1] This ethical and moral dimension of education for sustainable development has received little attention, both in the debate itself and in research concerning the philosophy of education (Reid, 2002). This is worrying, since without an elaborated and critical discussion regarding the moral and ethical dimension of education for sustainable development teaching and learning, there is a risk that education for sustainable development will become a political instrument that supports a specific ideology created by politicians and experts in power, and that education accordingly turns into indoctrination (see Jickling & Spork, 1998; Wals & Jickling, 2000; and Jickling, 2003).

The question is how to teach value-related issues where no consensus prevails, and still avoid the pitfall of indoctrination. The ambition of this article is both to point to the normative dangers of education for sustainable development and the possibilities of teaching education for sustainable development in a way that enhances pluralism and promotes students' critical thinking and democratic action competence (see Fien, 1995; Huckle, 1999; Sterling, 2001; Gough, 2002; Rauch, 2002; and McKeown & Hopkins, 2003). In order to do that, we find it necessary to investigate and clarify the different types of situations that involve moral and ethical judgements in educational *practice*.

A Wittgenstein-Inspired Approach

In order to clarify ethics and morals in practice, we use an approach inspired by the philosophical methods that Ludwig Wittgenstein developed in his later works (1953/1997 and 1969/1997). What Wittgenstein draws attention to here is the way in which the meaning of expressions and words are connected with their use in different situations: "A meaning of a word is a kind of employment of it" (Wittgenstein, 1969/1997, § 61). By using the term "language-game," Wittgenstein brings into prominence the fact that the use of language is part of an activity or a form of life. Thus, the meaning of words and the circumstances in which words are used are interconnected in a way that precedes the analytical separation between the world (the circumstances), the use of words, and the meaning of the words when we speak. Therefore, when clarifying the meaning of words, Wittgenstein advises us to ask questions like:

> How did we learn this word ("good" for instance)? From what sort of examples? In what language-games? Then it will be easier for you to see that the word must have a family of meanings. (Wittgenstein, 1953/1997, § 77)

This observation that we do not usually differentiate between the words we use, their meaning, and the reality they refer to means that ethics and morals are not necessarily to be seen as hidden in the minds of human beings, but rather that they are often clearly visible in our everyday activities. This point has crucial methodological implications for our study, namely, that *in situ* analyses can be used to gain a better understanding of how ethics and morals appear in our lives.

One of the philosophical methods Wittgenstein uses is to describe recognizable situations as reminders of the basic features of our language-games—features that we usually take for granted in everyday communication. In this way, one could say that this method consists of "assembling reminders for a particular purpose" (Wittgenstein, 1953/1997, § 127). Wittgenstein's method is thus *descriptive* and *a posteriori* to human practice (see Fann, 1969; and Monk, 1991). By pointing to the different ways the phenomenon appears in practice, Wittgenstein attempts to *clarify* the philosophical problem more in the vein of *dissolving* rather than solving it.

In his later works, Wittgenstein did not explicitly handle ethical issues with the aid of his new method.[2] Here we have been inspired by the reasoning of Janik and Toulmin (1973), with regard to what using his later methodology on investigations of "ethical" forms of life and language games might imply:

> 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? (Janik & Toulmin, 1973, p. 235)[3]

In line with Wittgenstein's recommendations, we do not approach ethics and morals as theoretically demarcated concepts, but rather as a feature of human thinking and behaviour—which we term *the ethical tendency.*[4] The purpose of this way of approaching ethics and morals is to open the way for investigations on the *various* ways that ethics and morals can appear in practice.

Our method is to use examples to create a clarifying description of the ethical tendency in education for sustainable development practice by pointing to three different "recognizable modes of 'evaluative' behaviour" (Janik & Toulmin, 1973, p. 235) and the specific conditions for meaning-making that prevail in these situations.[5] In this sense, the aim is to remind ourselves of those things we generally take for granted when we communicate that

which we believe to be good, valuable, really important, and so on. However, education for sustainable development addresses a broad spectrum of ethical and moral issues that relate to social, economical, and ecological aspects (and their interrelation). Within the remit of this article, the examples used mainly focus on relations between human beings and the natural environment. In the final section we relate the created typology of the debate about education for sustainable development and discuss how these situations can be treated in order to avoid indoctrination and strengthen pluralism.

Value Judgements: A Conceptual Clarification

The question we would initially like to address is what makes us recognize a situation, a question, an utterance, and so on as being ethical or moral? In other words, how might the characteristic features of an everyday communication that concerns the ethical tendency be described? In order to clarify this question, we take a concrete example from educational practice as a reminder of the specific function of value judgements connected to this tendency, and compare these judgements with the function of other judgements.

The excerpt below has been taken from a videotaped lesson in a secondary school, where the teacher initiates a discussion by announcing that there are plans to build a nuclear power plant close to the students' home town.[6] This announcement is followed by an intensive exchange of opinions among the students. Initially, the discussion mostly deals with the advantages and disadvantages of nuclear power as compared to the usage of other energy resources. For example, one boy argues that nuclear power is preferable because "electricity produced in wind power stations is more expensive than electricity produced in nuclear power plants."

In this statement, wind power is judged against the purposes of power production in a modern society, namely, to produce power in an efficient and competitive way. One could say that claiming that wind power is more expensive than nuclear power is to make a judgement about how different energy sources fulfil a certain standard. These types of judgements have the function of statements of fact and can be compared with judgements about a person being a good pianist or a good high jumper. In everyday communication, such judgements are usually not considered as moral or ethical.

However, in the middle of the lesson, a girl (Eva) introduces a different reason for her particular stand:

> Eva: But then wind power is much more environmentally friendly. Everybody says that you have to think of the environment and that it will be ruined if we don't improve.
> Britt: Why should we destroy it even more then?
> Adam: We will not be alive to see it.
> Eva: But others will be living then, won't they?
> Adam: It is a pity for them then.
> Eva: Yes!

If we examine Eva's contribution more closely, we can detect that her judgements function in a different way to those in the initial part of the conversation. When she supports her stand by claiming that we have a responsibility towards future generations, this judgement is not specifically connected to the purposes of power production. She rather expresses this judgement as if it is *something that ought to be a concern for all people in every situation, beyond the purposes of any activities*. Rhees (1970/1996) holds that it is not meaningful to ask whether such a value judgement has been confirmed by something that has happened or has been discovered. In other words, whether such a value judgement is true or false lacks meaning (see also Johnston, 1989). In everyday communication, these types of value judgements have a specific function that can be called ethical or moral, and they can thus be regarded as a manifestation of the ethical tendency in human lives. Consequently, it is judgements of this kind that we focus on in our investigation.

It is, however, important to underline that expressions of the ethical tendency do not have to be understood as a matter of linguistics, i.e., what kinds of words we use. The ethical tendency can rather be regarded as a practical matter and something that amounts to *what we try to communicate*. If we hear somebody say "that is a living thing!" to another person, we would probably conclude that this is a statement of fact. However, if we knew that this comment was being made while somebody was hurting an animal, we would be more likely to regard this as a statement of correct or incorrect behaviour. What makes a statement function as an ethical or moral value judgement does not simply depend on the actual words used. It is rather the case that words, facial expressions, and gestures assume their meaning in connection with the circumstances of the event (see Wittgenstein, 1953/1997 and 1969/1997). Consequently, when using language, we generally do not separate the words (gestures, et cetera), their meaning, and reality. This is why most of us would probably *immediately* understand the meaning of expressions like "that is a living thing!" in the circumstances described above, without having to go through a rational process where we first ascribe the words with specific meaning and then relate them to the situation.

This practical aspect of the ethical tendency means that the function of value judgements does not have any metaphysical implication: it is rather an anthropological observation of the way we communicate certain actions as being right or wrong.

An additional point we would like to make is the fact that we can generally understand other people's value judgements without sharing the same opinion. We understand them because we have had *similar* experiences in *similar* situations, although this does not necessarily mean that we have to make the *same* value judgement. Hence, it is important to differentiate between a shared usage of language and the opinions that different people hold (see Wittgenstein, 1953/1997).

The Ethical Tendency in Different Educational Situations

In the previous section, we suggested that the ethical tendency could be understood as value judgements related to the specific circumstances of an event. This means that the ethical tendency appears in numerous different ways, and that the language used in these appearances is as complex as human life itself. If we compare two situations, it is likely that we will find both similarities and differences. If we add a third situation, we might find that other differences and similarities appear, and so forth. It accordingly seems difficult to describe the ethical tendency in terms of a general formula, i.e., to find a number of features common to all situations in which the ethical tendency appears. Instead, it is as though the different situations form a family of resemblances—a complicated network of differences and similarities that overlap and criss-cross each other (see Wittgenstein, 1953/1997).

In relation to a particular purpose, however, it is possible to create a certain order among these family resemblances. Our studies of educational practice show that there is reason to speak of three different kinds of situations in which the ethical tendency appears, namely, *moral reactions*, *norms for correct behaviour,* and *ethical reflections*. We suggest this order as a way of enriching the understanding of the ethical tendency in education for sustainable development practice. This order is accordingly not to be apprehended as *the* order of the ethical tendency, but one of many possible orders (see Wittgenstein, 1953/1997).

Moral Reactions

During an ecology class at a Swedish university, the students were collecting animals on the shore in order to put them in an aquarium for further studies.[7] The following conversation took place between two of the students:

> Karin: Hell, for crying out loud. It feels awful when you pull them loose.
> Ellen: So what is it?
> Karin: A sea urchin.
> Ellen: It's stuck.
> Karin: I don't know. It seems weird. We've got to learn to pick them off with our hands.
> Ellen: I picked up a stone. Then he settled on it.
> Karin: He's so darned stuck.
> Ellen: Take him this way. Can you do that? (Karin gives it to Ellen, who puts "him" in the bucket.)
> Karin: Yeah.

In this example, we can see that Karin has a specific *moral reaction* to the task of pulling the sea urchins loose. Karin's reaction is obviously spontaneous, and is one in which her attitude about how to treat sea urchins becomes apparent. This reaction concerns her *personal* experience, and the way she

reacts indicates that this is something she really means—the kind of reaction that "goes deep with me when I say it" (Rhees, 1970/1996, p. 98), and that is often even physical, like a "gut reaction."

What we thus want to bring to mind here are those situations of unpremeditated reactions where we take an absolute responsibility for someone or something. We are particularly thinking about those reactions that are not consciously forced or evoked by rational argument. If, directly after a moral reaction, we are asked why we reacted in this way, we can normally only express this in emotional terms, such as care, shame, agony, gratitude, or guilt. Accordingly, personal moral reactions to our own and other human actions cannot be appropriately recognized in terms of rational considerations, or following certain prescriptive rules.[8] For instance, whether sea urchins have nervous systems that allow them to suffer, or whether it is necessary to collect the creatures in order to study them properly, is irrelevant for Karin and her feelings. The moral reaction has happened and cannot be traced back to knowledge or be altered by knowledge.

Sometimes, these reactions arise immediately and spontaneously in the actual situation, as in the example above, or when a person, say, plunges into freezing cold water to save a puppy from drowning. But it is also possible to imagine cases where we experience a sudden moral reaction some time after an event, such as when we realize that we have done something completely wrong. Furthermore, we can imagine moral reactions in situations where things are happening before our very eyes, as well as situations where we are listening to recitals, watching television programs, reading newspapers, et cetera.

In comparison with situations where we adjust our actions to expectations from our social environment (see below), the situations we call moral reactions can be characterized as "non-intentional": these reactions cannot in any simple sense be perceived as being in the control of will.[9]

Norms for Correct Behaviour

Imagine a situation where a pre-school class takes an excursion to a nearby forest. Some of the boys become separated from the main group and suddenly find an anthill. They pick up sticks and start to poke the anthill and throw stones at the ants. When the teacher sees them, she gets upset and comes running towards them shouting: "Don't do that! That's a mean thing to do!" After experiencing a few similar situations, the boys change their behaviour and never again treat animals in a cruel way during excursions.

In this example, the boys adapted their behaviour to suit the socially accepted way of behaving in this particular activity—excursions with a preschool class. In using this example, we want to evoke the kinds of situations where we relate our actions to social conventions connected to the ethical tendency, or, in other words, to the *norms for correct behaviour*. One could say

that these norms consist of common attitudes to the correct way of acting in certain kinds of situations.

This points to an important difference between following a social norm and reacting morally. A moral reaction is a spontaneous personal reaction to what one *ought* to do or not do in a specific situation, whereas the following of norms has to do with what we know we *should* do to fulfil the expectations of our fellow beings. The norms can often even be formulated in terms of rules for the way we are supposed to act.

The existence of social norms for correct behaviour can be understood in that the way we act has consequences for the lives of our fellow beings.[10] This means that our social environment puts certain demands on our actions. Through our participation in social life, we learn what is expected of us by the way both authorities and peers actively respond to our actions by encouraging, condemning, neglecting, answering, questioning, making gestures, et cetera, in relation to our actions. Thus, norms for correct behaviour can be recognized as the result of human beings living together, rather than ideals slotted into the lives of human beings (see Dewey, 1922/1988). When learning norms for correct behaviour, we learn what issues and situations are seen as ethical and moral, and with knowledge about norms, it is also possible to know how we should deal with these issues and situations.

A norm for correct behaviour is generally connected to a particular social activity, and the validity of the norms is therefore linked to the doings of a particular group of people. Throughout our lives, we participate in many and various activities, and thus experience different norms concerning the correct behaviour related to these activities. For instance, most young children gradually learn to distinguish the norms of school and the playground from the norms that prevail at home.

Once we have learned the norms of an activity, we generally take them for granted and do not have to consciously recall them every time we are about to act. In this way, the following of norms form a *habit*—a way of responding to and interacting with our environment. Thus, by participating in different communities, we can acquire a wide range of patterns of possible actions that help us to maintain a dynamic balance with our environment (see Biesta & Burbules, 2003).[11]

It is, however, also possible to imagine situations where we distance ourselves both from the norms for correct behaviour of particular activities and our personal moral reactions, and start to make general reflections as to why a certain way of behaving is considered right and certain values are seen as good. This takes us to a third kind of situation in which the ethical tendency appears: ethical reflections.

Ethical Reflections

An observed lesson in a Swedish upper-secondary school contained an exercise in which the teacher made statements of environmentally ethical sig-

nificance.[12] The students then took stands in relation to each statement and, in the ensuing discussion, defended their individual standpoints. Statements made by the teacher included: "Man and animals are of equal value; it is always wrong to kill an animal!", "No life must be sacrificed as a result of environmental pollution!", and "Everybody has the right not to sort their garbage!"

A characteristic of these statements is that they do not refer to moral reactions of any particular human beings or norms of any particular activity. Instead, the statements are formulated as if they were valid for everyone everywhere and every time, without any concern for the circumstances. This is particularly apparent in the way the teacher uses formulations like "…it is *always* wrong to kill an animal!", "*No* life must be sacrificed…", and "*Everybody* has the right…".

According to our studies of classroom activities, this seems to be a common way of teaching about value-related issues. Such kinds of exercises can be regarded as a particular manifestation of the ethical tendency that could be called *ethical reflections*. Ethical reflections can be understood as the activities in which we make rational and systematic reflections about the reasons for our moral actions, and make a *general* enquiry into what is "good" and "right."

Thus, in ethical reflections, the ethical tendency appears as a rational insight into moral issues. This means that ethical reflections are usually made at a distance from situations where human beings actually perform actions that can be viewed as correct or incorrect. That is, moral issues and dilemmas are treated as being disconnected from the conditions of the specific situations in the lives of individual human beings.

These characteristics of ethical reflections are particularly obvious in the academic discipline of ethics that traditionally represents a determination to find general, and often universal, ethical *principles* that are able to guide humans through their moral problems, and to put these principles together in a logical and comprehensive ethical system.

Indoctrination versus Pluralism in Education for Sustainable Development Practice

In this study, we have focused on situations in which the ethical tendency appears by means of a number of both real and imagined examples that deal with the relationship between human beings and the natural environment. The reason for this was to remind ourselves of the various ways in which we communicate this tendency in our lives in general and in educational activities in particular. The basis for this method was the observation that, when speaking, we do not usually differentiate between the words we use, the meaning of the words, and reality. The ethical tendency is therefore not regarded as necessarily being hidden in the minds of human beings, but as often

being clearly observable in their actions.

In the following, we summarize the main findings of our inquiry and discuss some of the implications of these findings in relation to the education for sustainable development debate, and what is expected from ethical and moral learning as outlined in the education for sustainable development policy documents.

We initially highlighted some fundamental practical aspects of the ethical tendency, namely, that this tendency can be understood as the communication of judgements in which certain values and actions are treated as something that ought to be of concern for all people in every situation, beyond the purposes of any activities. We furthermore found it important to underline that the meanings of the words, facial expressions, gestures, et cetera that we use to communicate the ethical tendency are connected to the specific circumstances of the event.

Thus, from this practical perspective, fulfilling the intentions of the education for sustainable development policy documents basically means to offer various kinds of situations where students can display, and experience others displaying, what they regard to be the correct way of acting and the values they believe in. In this way, opportunities are created for students to increase their sensitivity to the subtle nuances of language when it comes to communicating the ethical tendency (see Monk, 1991). However, this communicative learning is not automatically accompanied by the learning of a specific attitude to what is good and right, but merely means that people learn a common way of understanding different expressions of the good and the right.

In order to clarify the conditions of this learning further, we found it fruitful to distinguish between three different kinds of situations in which the ethical tendency appears in educational practice.

First, we pointed to situations that involved *moral reactions*. These reactions can, for instance, be recognized as spontaneous and emotional expressions of shame, agony, anger, and so on, when experiencing someone or something being treated incorrectly or unjustly, or as our way of impulsively showing care and taking responsibility for someone else. We thus wanted to bring to mind those reactions that are non-intentional: reactions that are not a result of our choices, and which are often later described as something that "just happened."

By paying attention to moral reactions, a more specific understanding of the potential dangers of education for sustainable development, as highlighted by its critics, can be obtained. For example, it does not seem reasonable to take up students' moral reactions in deliberative discussions where they are supposed to defend their reactions with rational arguments in order to discover the best argument and thus decide the proper way to react in a certain situation. It would be even more serious if we set up an educational practice where we systematically tried to inculcate specific ways of reacting to certain

situations. This would indeed turn education into indoctrination. The same would also be the case if we systematically denied, neglected, or argued against students' moral reactions, or their experiences of such reactions.

However, one way of involving moral reactions in education while avoiding indoctrination is to make it possible for students to *express and share* experiences of moral reactions, but without moralizing or attempting to convince anyone. By sharing narratives of situations with moral reactions, the students are offered opportunities to expand their awareness of different moral reactions and their ability to understand the varieties and complexities of deep, existential questions.

The second situation we highlighted was that of acting in relation to *norms for correct behaviour,* i.e., when we adapt our behaviour to social conventions consisting of shared rules for how we *should* treat other humans and the natural environment. Most people would probably agree that it is possible to systematically learn to follow norms for correct behaviour, not least from their own experiences of education. A straightforward transference of norms can also be regarded as a form of the indoctrination that education for sustainable development critics warn against. From a pluralistic perspective, it is therefore essential that the norms are discussed and the motives for the norms presented, and also that students are given an opportunity to critically reflect upon and influence those norms. We do believe, however, that it is important to point out the differences between norms and reactions. While reactions are something that personally affect us, we can learn norms in terms of acquiring social knowledge about how to behave. Furthermore, when we learn norms, we often learn that these norms are specifically connected to a particular activity and community. When certain norms are introduced to the students—such as how to behave in a way that is regarded to be in line with sustainable development—these norms are primarily valid within the particular context in which they have been learned (i.e., in school, or even just within certain lessons with a certain teacher). Whether, and in what way the adoption of certain norms in school will affect individual students' behaviour in their lives outside the confines of school, is thus an open question.

The third kind of situation we highlighted was that of *ethical reflections*—when moral problems are rationalized and discussed as general problems, i.e., decontextualized and separated from real situations where individuals have moral reactions or experience a moral dilemma. Thus, moral problems relating to human life are transferred to a discussion about general ethical principles, where logical and conceptual considerations about moral issues are made.

It is reasonable to assume that participation in ethical discussions contributes to students' awareness of different ethical standpoints, and that this awareness can increase students' abilities to develop a critical attitude to the norms for correct behaviour of the activities in which they participate or of which they become aware. In this way, the integration of ethical reflections

in educational practice can be seen as one of the possibilities of education for sustainable development as emphasized by its supporters. On the other hand, if in our teaching practice we stressed that there are *certain* ethical principles that in themselves (by reference to a foundation beyond human practice) are more sustainable than others, we would then limit the ethical diversity and education for sustainable development would narrow rather than broaden future possibilities.

It is also important to keep in mind that when confronting a moral problem or dilemma in real life, it is generally, as Stenlund (1999) and Winch (1972) point out, of little help if someone else (e.g., a moral philosopher) structures the situation, explains the values involved in the different alternatives or clarifies the morally relevant aspects, and so forth. To the person involved, the problem is not a variant of a general moral philosophical problem, but rather it is a *real* problem, and the attitude this person will have to his or her choice will thus be affected by the way things turn out (see Rhees, 1970/1996). Hence, Stenlund (1999) concludes that we do not solve the majority of our moral problems by intellectual processes of consideration where we choose between ethical principles (if we strictly could and would follow ethical principles in life, no problems or dilemma would even occur). The solution is rather something that we discover in real life. Neither can life's problems be calculated or avoided by rational planning—they just turn up in the lives of most human beings. If this sounds reasonable, it means that it is not possible to predict the extent to which the learning of ethical principles will influence the more crucial existential decisions that manifest themselves in students' lives.

Conclusion

The purpose of making practical clarifications of the ethical tendency in educational settings, as presented here, is to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the particular dangers and possibilities that have been highlighted in the education for sustainable development debate. Since education for sustainable development now seems to have become a worldwide educational approach, supported by UNESCO and leading educational politicians, we find such clarification particularly important.

We have tried to show how situations of moral reactions, norms for correct behaviour, and ethical reflections in education for sustainable development practice can be opportunities to oppress diversity and free opinion in a way that confirms the misgivings of education for sustainable development critics. But these same situations can also be used as resources for enhancing students' awareness, tolerance, and ability to interact with people with diverse attitudes and standpoints. There is a fine dividing line between such outcomes, and a lot depends on teachers' awareness, empathy, and action competence as to whether education for sustainable development turns

out to be indoctrination or a pluralistic activity. Thus, the concept of education for sustainable development does not necessarily have to be seen as a danger in itself, but is perhaps rather a question of how ethical and moral issues are treated in educational practice.

While the relationship between humans and nature is often seen as a foundation for sustainable development, we have here used examples that involve this relationship. However, one of the main points of education for sustainable development is the interconnection between this relationship and social and economic issues and, in our opinion, further clarifications of these ethical dimensions of education for sustainable development practice are of great significance. It is our hope that the typology suggested here can be a tool that is useful to future research on this subject.

Notes

1 Controversial questions in sustainable development include: Who should we be taking into account in our strivings for a sustainable future, and to what extent? Are we only responsible for sustainable development in our own part of the world or throughout the whole world? Does everybody have equal rights to the same welfare? Will future generations have the right to the same welfare as we have? How many generations ought we to be concerned about? Should future generations have the right to experience wilderness and biological diversity? Does sustainable development concern other species? Do animals and plants have the right to a secure future?

2 When returning to Cambridge in 1929 after an almost ten-year absence from the academic world, Wittgenstein gave a popular lecture on the subject of ethics, documented as *A Lecture on Ethics* (1992). In this lecture he is still occupied by the "true or false" reasoning about ethical judgements, and the idea that language is primarily a description, which was significant for his earlier period. Yet this lecture prospects his later thinking by the way he uses examples to illuminate the specific circumstances in which ethical judgements are meaningful (see Rhees, 1970/1996). In this way, this lecture can be perceived as part of Wittgenstein's "middle period," where he starts to question his earlier suppositions, but his later methods have not yet assumed their final form.

3 See also Rhees (1970/1996) for a discussion about Wittgenstein's view on ethics.

4 Inspiration for this term comes from Wittgenstein's *A Lecture on Ethics,* in which he talks about ethics as "a document of a tendency in the human mind" (Wittgenstein, 1993, p. 44).

5 In earlier studies, this Wittgenstein-inspired approach has been used in clarifying the problems of the combination of criticism and pluralism in

environmental education and education for sustainable development by using examples to remind how criticism appears in practice, rather than seeing criticism as an entirely theoretical issue (see Öhman, 2006). A similar approach has also been used to study individual continuity and change in environmental moral meaning-making (Öhman & Östman, 2007). In this paper we develop this approach further by focusing on ethical and moral meaning-making in relation to the dangers of indoctrination in education for sustainable development practice.

[6] This example is taken from the research project "Environmental Education in a Democratic and Consumer Perspective," funded by the Swedish National Agency for Education.

[7] The example is taken from the research project "What Do Students Learn During Laboratory Work and Field Studies?", funded by the Faculty of Technology and Science and the Teacher Education Council at Uppsala University. This example is also used in Wickman (2005).

[8] It is of course logically possible to see a moral reaction as being culturally dependent, but this is generally only from a third-person perspective. For the person reacting, it is not possible to say whether his or her reaction is genuine or "simply the product of his [sic] upbringing" (Johnston, 1989, p. 132). However, our point is not what it is that makes us react and why, but rather to remind ourselves that in some situations, we show an immediate concern in a way that can be called moral, and this is a significant feature of human beings.

[9] In traditional ethics, particularly in Kant's moral philosophy, only those actions that are controlled by individual human beings are conceived as being of moral significance. However, this standpoint has been criticized by scholars like Phillips (1992) and Winch (1972), and it is with reference to this critique that we call these reactions *moral*.

[10] That norms connected to the ethical tendency have origins in human beings living together has prominently been highlighted by pragmatists like Dewey: "Others *do* take account of what we do, and they respond accordingly to our acts. Their responses actually *do* affect the meaning of what we do" (Dewey, 1922/1988, p. 217).

[11] These habits are therefore not to be seen as "mechanical rote responses," but rather as "dynamic response patterns" that help us to find out the right way to relate to our environment in different situations (Lekan, 2003, p. 5).

[12] This empirical example is taken from the developmental project, "Sustainable Development in School," undertaken on behalf of the Swedish National Agency for School Improvement.

Acknowledgements

Research for this article has been carried out within the projects "Learning and the Appropriation of Scientific Discourse in a Sociocultural Perspective" and "Encounters with Nature and Environmental Moral Learning," both supported by grants from the Swedish Research Council. We would like to thank the research group SMED (Studies of Meaning-making in Educational Discourses), David Kronlid, and Niclas Månsson for their helpful comments on various versions of this article. We would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their important remarks on earlier drafts of this paper.

Notes on Contributors

Johan Öhman is Senior Lecturer at the School of Health and Medical Sciences at Örebro University, Sweden and is one of the founders of IRESD (Institute for Research in Education and Sustainable Development), <www.did.uu.se/iresd/index.html>. His area of research is in environmental ethics and democratic issues within the sphere of education for sustainable development, environmental education, and outdoor education. **Contact:** S-701 82, Örebro, Sweden; johan.ohman@oru.se

Leif Östman is Professor in Curriculum Studies at Uppsala University, Sweden and is the leader of IRESD (Institute for Research in Education and Sustainable Development, <www.did.uu.se/iresd /index.html>) and the research group SMED (Studies of Meaning-making in Educational Discourses). His main research interest concerns the content and processes of socialization in environmental education, education for sustainable development, and science education. **Contact:** leif.ostman@did.uu.se

References

Baltic 21E. (2002). *Agenda 21 for the Baltic Sea Region Sector Report – Education (Baltic 21E).* Baltic 21 Series No. 02/2002. Retrieved February 15, 2008, from www.baltic21.org/attachments/no22002_education_sector_report.pdf

Biesta, G. & Burbules, N. (2003). *Pragmatism and educational research*. Boulder: Rowman & Littlefield.

Dewey, J. (1988). Human nature and conduct. In J. A. Boydstone (Ed.), *The middle works, 1899-1924, Vol 14: 1922* (pp. 1-227). Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press. (Original work published 1922)

Fann, K. T. (1969). *Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Fien, J. (1995). Teaching for a sustainable world: The environmental and developmental education project for teacher education. *Environmental Education Research, 1*(1), 21-34.

Gough, S. (2002). Increasing the value of the environment: A "real options" metaphor for learning. *Environmental Education Research*, *8*(1), 61-72.

Huckle, J. (1999). Locating environmental education between modern capitalism and postmodern

socialism: A reply to Lucie Sauvé. *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education, 4*, 36-45.
Janik, A. & Toulmin, S. (1973). *Wittgenstein's Vienna*. New York: Touchstone.
Jickling, B. (2003). Environmental education and environmental advocacy: Revisited. *Journal of Environmental Education*, *34*(2), 20-27.
Jickling, B. & Spork, H. (1998). Education for the environment: A critique. *Environmental Education Research*, *4*(3), 309-328.
Johnston, P. (1989). *Wittgenstein and moral philosophy*. London and New York: Routledge.
Lekan, T. (2003). *Making morality: Pragmatist reconstruction in ethical theory*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press.
McKeown, R. & Hopkins, C. (2003). EE ≠ ESD: Defusing the worry. *Environmental Education Research*, *9*(1), 117-128.
Monk, R. (1991). *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The duty of genius*. London: Cape.
Öhman, J. (2006). Pluralism and criticism in environmental education and education for sustainable development: A practical understanding. *Environmental Education Research, 12*(2), 149-163.
Öhman, J. & Östman, L. (2007). Continuity and change in moral meaning-making: A transactional approach. *Journal of Moral Education, 36*(2), 151-168.
Phillips, D. Z. (1992). *Interventions in ethics*. Houndmills and London: Macmillan.
Rauch, F. (2002). The potential of education for sustainable development for reform in schools. *Environmental Education Research*, *8*(1), 43-51.
Reid, A. (2002). On the possibility of education for sustainable development. *Environmental Education Research, 8*(1), 5-7.
Rhees, R. (1996). *Discussions of Wittgenstein*. Bristol: Thoemmes Press. (Original work published 1970)
Stenlund, S. (1999). Wittgenstein och moralfilosofin [Wittgenstein and moral philosophy]. *Philosophia, Tidskrift for filosofi*, *27*(3-4), 179-196.
Sterling, S. (2001). *Sustainable education: Re-visioning learning and change*. Foxhole, Dartington, Totnes, Devon: Green Books.
UNCED. (1992). *Agenda 21*. London: Regency Press.
UNESCO. (2005). *United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014) International Implementation Scheme.* Retrieved February 15, 2008, from http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001486/148654E.pdf
Wals, A. E. J. & Jickling, B. (2000). Process-based environmental education seeking standards without standardizing. In B. Bruun Jensen, K. Schnack, & V. Simovska (Eds.), *Critical environmental and health education: Research issues and challenges* (pp. 127-149). Copenhagen: The Danish University of Education, Research Centre for Environmental and Health Education.
Wickman, P-O. (2005). *Aesthetic experience in science education: A study of situated learning.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
Winch, P. (1972). *Ethics and action*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
Wittgenstein, L. (1993). A lecture on ethics. In J. C. Klagge & A. Nordmann (Eds.), *Philosophical occasions 1912-1951* (pp. 37-44). Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett.
Wittgenstein, L. (1997). *On certainty*. Oxford: Blackwell. (Original work published 1969)
Wittgenstein, L. (1997). *Philosophical investigations.* Oxford: Blackwell. (Original work published 1953)