

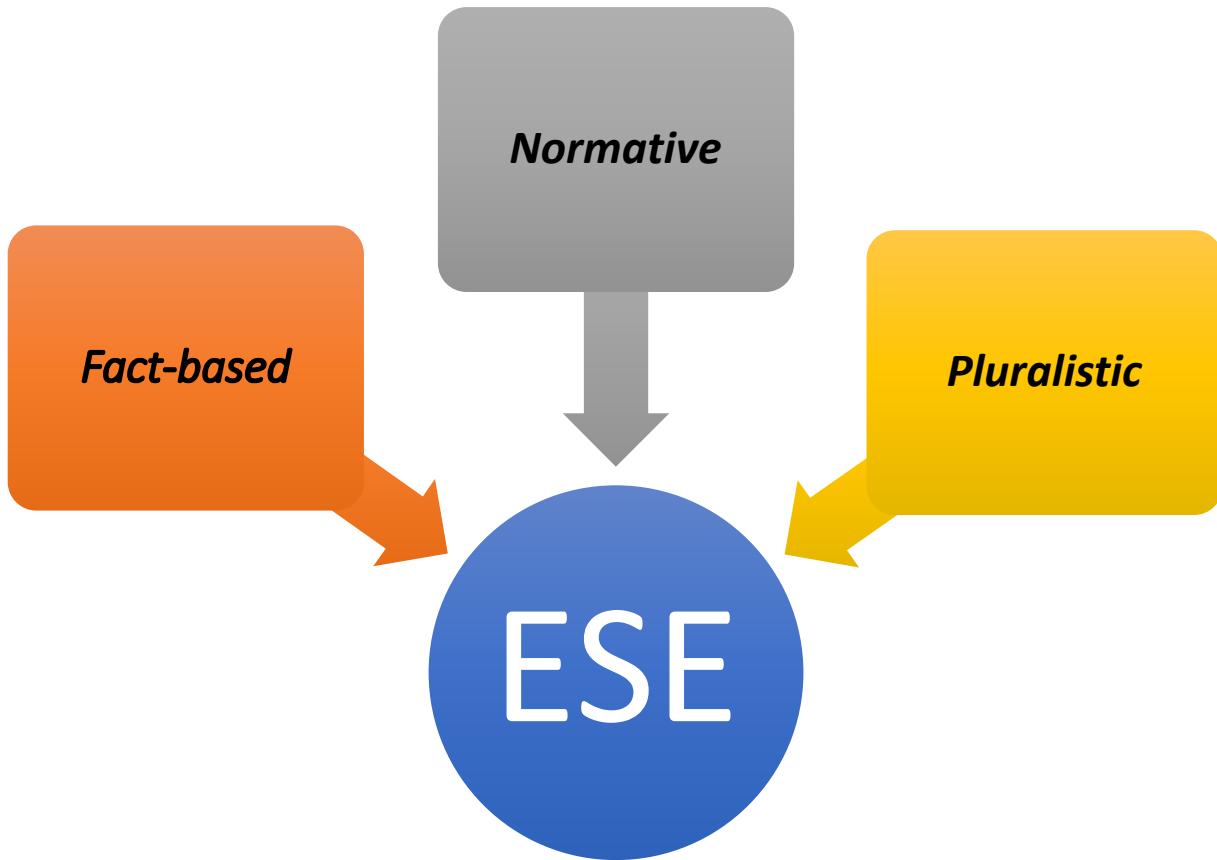
5. Different teaching traditions in environmental and sustainability education *Johan Öhman and Leif Östman*

What constitutes the best form of sustainable development teaching?



Three teaching traditions in environmental and sustainability education

- First identified in the national evaluation of EE/ESD in Swedish schools (Öhman & Östman, 2001)
- Using the concept of *selective traditions* (Williams, 1973)
- These selective traditions represent different solutions as to what constitutes **the best form of teaching** within ESE
- *The purpose:* to establish a **reference point** that can be applied when discussing sustainable development teaching. They can be seen as **alternatives** to reflect on, oppose or support when planning lessons or formulating ideas – a **didactic tool**



Different approaches to:



Sustainability
problems



Didactics



Facts and values



Education and
democracy

Approach to sustainability problems

- What is the nature of sustainability problems?
- What are their main causes?
- What constitute their solutions?
- What is the relative importance of ecologic, social and economic aspects of sustainability?

Didactic approach

- **Why?**: To *preserve* or *transform* society
- **What?**: *Essential* content or *students'* interests and *societal* changes
- **How?**: Students as *passive* receivers or *active* constructors

Approach to facts and values

- Are facts and values *separate* domains or *integrated*?
- How are values *founded*? *Universal* or *particular*?
- Are schools responsible for the *socialisation of certain values*?
- What values and to what extent?
- How strong and what *normativity* is acceptable in education?

Education and democracy

The *democratic paradox of education*: the double educational assignment to foster **free, autonomous subjects** and at the same time **transfer foundational values and norms** of a particular culture to future generations

Free subjects  Transfer values

Fact-based tradition



- Sustainability problems are viewed as *knowledge problems*
- Scientific facts and models are seen as having objective foundations and consist the core of ESE
- Values are private and not part of education
- **Aim:** citizens who have enough knowledge to judge between different political alternatives in sustainability issues
- The democratic process comes *after* education

Normative tradition



- Sustainability problems are primarily concerned to be of *moral character*
- The facts provided by science are used to derive the values and norms for correct sustainable behaviour
- Learning of sustainable attitudes and behaviour on the basis of scientific insight
- **Aim:** citizens who accept and approve of the changes necessary to create a sustainable development
- The democratic process comes *before* education

Pluralistic tradition



- Sustainability problems are seen as *political* problems (involves *conflicts* between different knowledge perspectives, values and interests)
- Critical examination of and deliberation on different alternatives in focus of education
- **Aim:** citizens who actively take part in the democratic debate and practices that concern a sustainable future
- The democratic process is situated *in* education

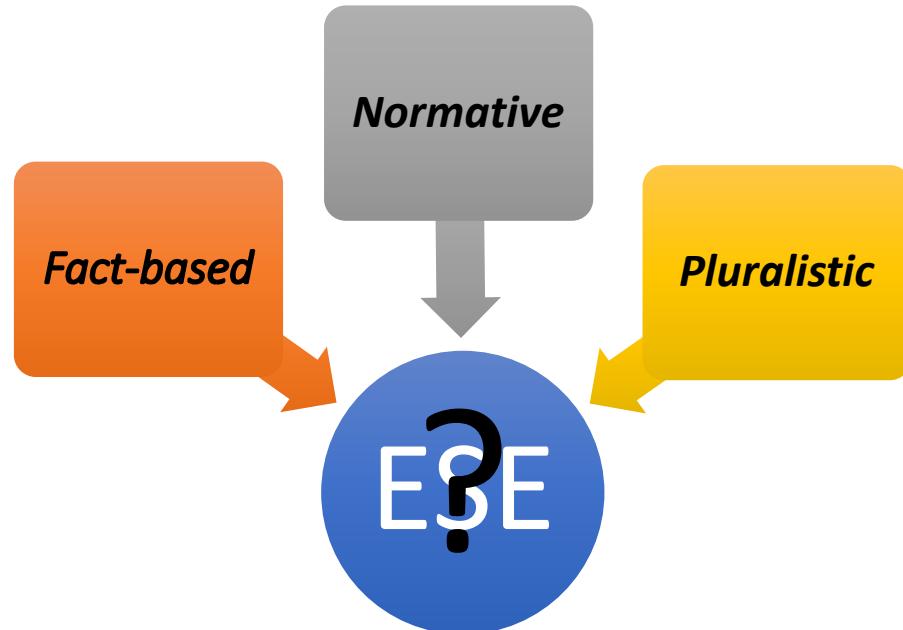
Tradition of ESE	Fact-based	Normative	Pluralistic
<i>Perspective on sustainability problems</i>	Sustainability problems are knowledge-based and are resolved by means of research and information	Sustainability problems are moral which can be resolved by exerting an influence on people's attitudes and behaviour	Sustainability problems are political which should be dealt with democratically
<i>The cause of sustainability problems</i>	An unforeseen result of production and resource exploitation in society	A conflict between society and the laws of nature	Conflicts between humans' wide range of achievement goals
<i>Main method of teaching</i>	Factual information from teacher to student	Transferring sustainable values in student active exercises	Critical discussions based on a number of alternatives
<i>The purpose of ESE</i>	Students receive knowledge of environmental problems by learning scientific facts	Students adopt environmentally friendly attitudes and behaviour	Students develop their ability to critically evaluate and take a stand in environmental and sustainability issues
<i>The aim of ESE</i>	Citizens who have enough information to judge between different political alternatives in sustainable and environmental issues	Committed citizens who accept and approve of the necessary changes in order to develop a sustainable society	Citizens who are competent to engage in the democratic debate and practices that concern a sustainable future
<i>Fact-value focus and relation</i>	Facts	Facts → Values	↑ Facts ↔ Values ↓
<i>The democratic process in relation to education</i>	After	Before	In
<i>Strengths and weaknesses</i>	Based on reliable knowledge Omits the value dimension of sustainability issues	Effective for individual change Violates the democratic and emancipatory purpose of education	Supports democratic competence Time consuming and lack of concrete sustainable actions



Valuing the traditions

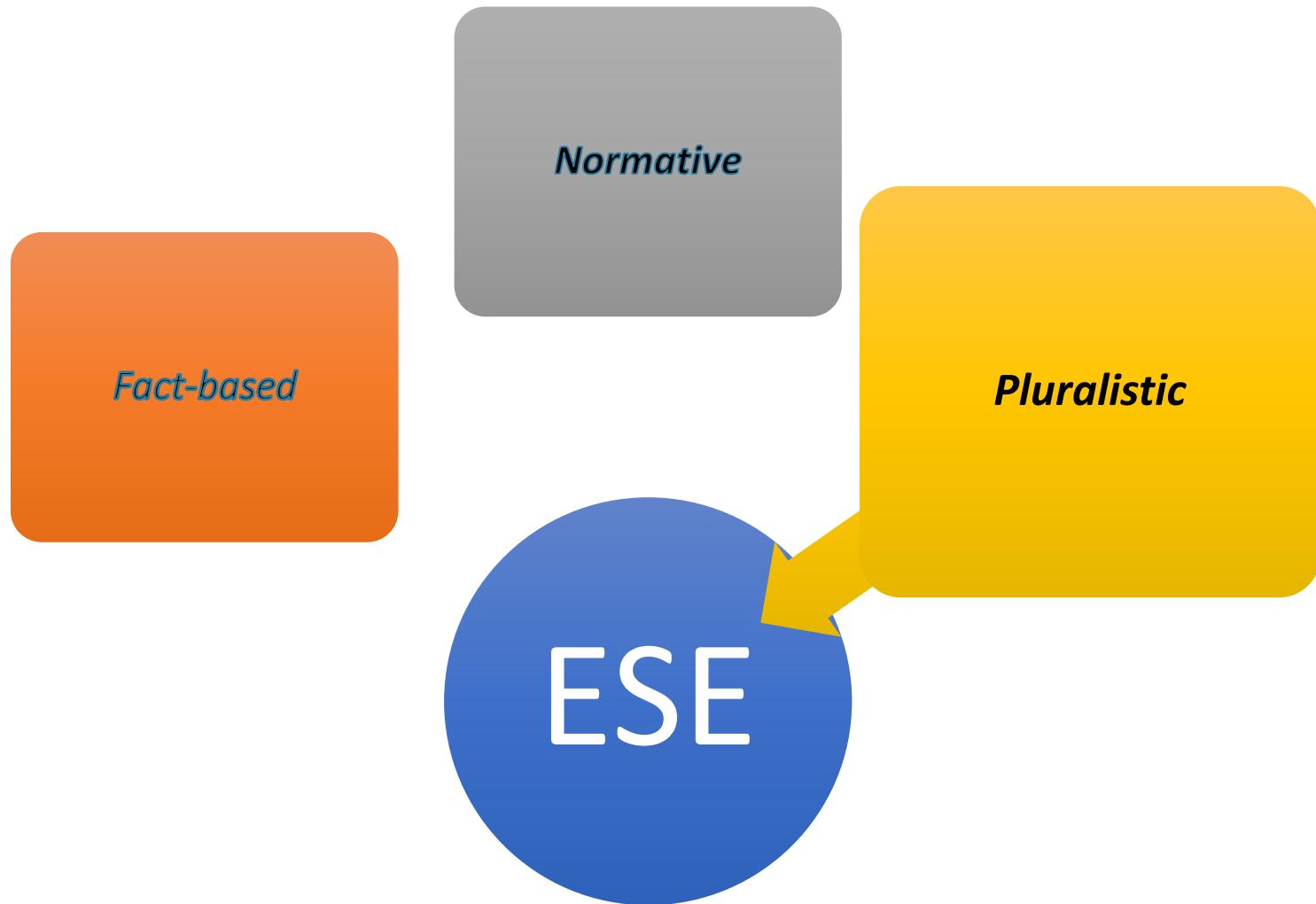
Two interconnected premises:

“The first is that environmental and sustainability issues are **value issues** that are connected to facts, interests, preferences, beliefs and attitudes. The second is that environmental and sustainability issues should be dealt with **democratically**, in that moves towards sustainable development imply considerable changes to our society that will affect every citizen’s everyday life” (p 76)



ESE-tradition	Fact-Value relation	Democratic process	Strengths	Shortcomings
Fact-based	Facts	After	Based on reliable knowledge	Omitting the value dimension
Normative	Fact → Values	Before	Effective for individual change	Violating the emancipatory and democratic potential
Pluralistic	↑ Facts ↔ Values ↓	In	Supports democratic competence	Relativism

(Öhman, 2008)



Pluralistic challenges

- *Societal challenges:*
 - a changing media landscape
 - crisis of democracy, polarisation
 - ‘post truth’ climate
- *Educational challenges:*
 - test and knowledge focus, goal-oriented NPM
 - strong political governance of schools
 - bureaucratic demands, limits to teachers’ freedom
 - de-professionalization of teachers and principals
- *Questions:*
 - What are the **limits** to pluralism? (which values and facts can be questioned?)
 - How to balance moral and political **emotions** and **rational** thinking?
 - What **empirical** knowledge is needed to progress pluralism in practice?
 - What is needed from a **theoretical** perspective?