

Equipped for Responsibility in light of uncertainty and complexity? – Studies of business education for sustainability

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Pernilla Andersson, Lecturer in Social Sciences
education

Background:

- New teaching approaches involving the inclusion of 'sustainable development' in the business curriculum are being developed (Cullen 2015)
- Education for sustainable development challenging in relation to 'orthodox' business theories ('the business of a business is to do business'), how deal with values?? (Schwartz and Saiia 2012, Hühn 2014, Springett 2005).
- Uncertainty and complexity is particularly challenging for predominant responsibility regimes relying on science as a source of independent, objective and reliable knowledge (Pellizzoni 2007), for example the risk that neonicotinoid pesticides is for bees.

Purpose:

contribute knowledge about the roles of a business person that are articulated in business education when the concept of sustainable development is included in the curriculum, and how these roles can make students, as future business people equipped to address uncertain and complex sustainability issues.

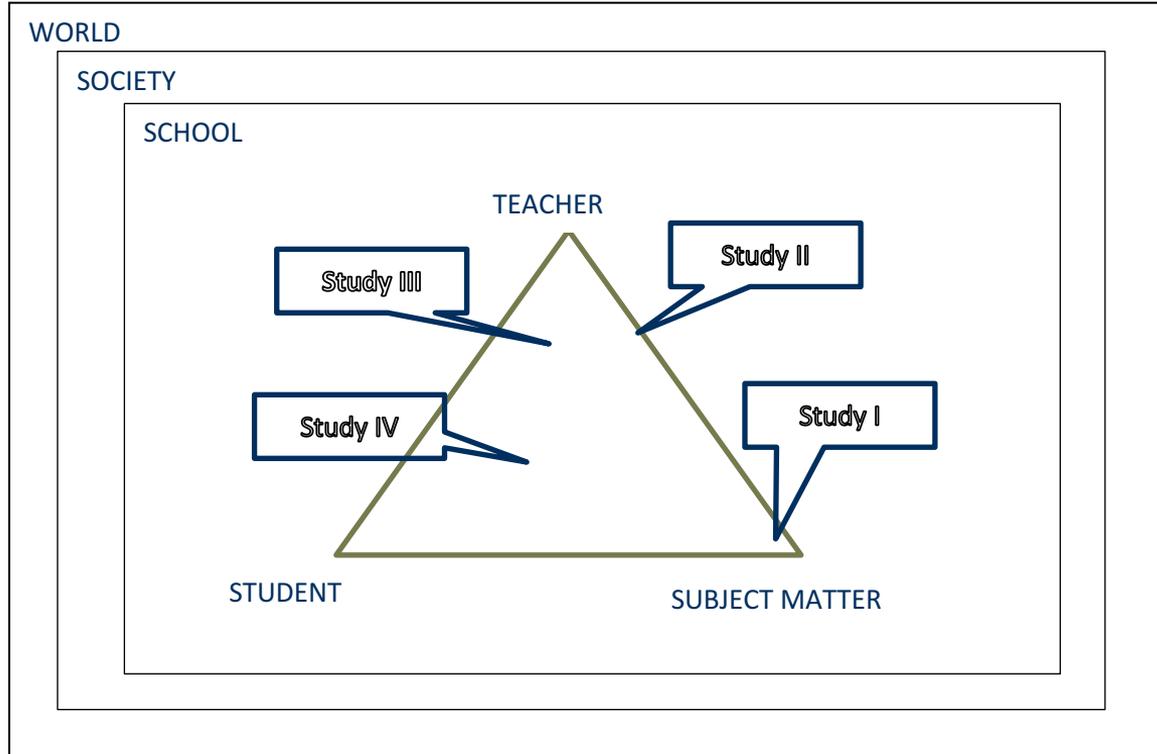
Theoretical perspectives

- A persons identity comprise a collection of different roles (dad, banker, animal rights activist).
- Just like gender roles and other social roles, the role of a 'business person' is changeable.
- Roles are reproduced or challenged in social practices. Change of social roles can accordingly be studied through studies of language use (discourse analysis).
- 'Reproduction' of roles (or norms) are hard to discover since they are often just perceived as a normal way of talking or writing ("the way we speak").
- A school (or university) is one of many social practices where roles are reproduced or challenged.

Method – two steps of analysis

- Synthesising results involving the role of a business person as: privileged in (6) textbooks (Study I), articulated in (8) teachers expected learning outcomes (Study II), coming into play through (5) teachers' actions (Study III) and taken up by students in (20) business economics lessons (Study IV). (A logics approach to discourse analysis used in the studies.)
- Analysis of the synthesised results using Pellizzoni's typology of responsibility

The didactic triangle and overview of the studies



Results

- From **13** roles of business to **three broad categories** of business roles: *Adapt* to ethical values, *add* ethical values or *create* ethical values
- Ethical values understood as sets of principles governing virtuous behavior (could also be understood as unethical or not 'ethical enough')

Category 1: Adapting to ethical values

- a business person is expected to maximise profit while following to ethical values as expressed by law and regulations.
- maximising profit requires responding to consumers' demands (adapting to consumers' ethical values as expressed in consumption choices).
- must be prepared to push personal feelings or convictions about what would be sustainable aside.

Category 2: Adding ethical values

- a business person is expected to take steps beyond what is required according to the law and regulations by adding principles or guidelines based on recommendations from others/experts.
- 'going beyond' what the law requires is both necessary because of, and facilitated by customers' demand of 'sustainable' products.
- (the perceived) customers' demand of sustainable products create scope for a business persons personal feelings in relation to sustainability that coincide with the customers.

Category 3: Creating ethical values

- Implies using the business as a tool to make change for a more sustainable world. This involves having knowledge about the conditions of socio-ecological systems and listening, being sensitive and receptive to others needs when making business decisions.
- Being sensitive and receptive to the needs of others when making business decisions requires (apart from reason) the involvement of personal feelings.

Examples from textbooks

- when it is described how more environmentally friendly production processes has been developed *as a result of* stricter regulations (adapting)
- when it is described how environmentally hazardous waste is dumped in countries with less stringent environmental laws. (adapting)
- when describing how consumers demands for 'eco-friendly' products has led to business adopting sustainability guidelines and thereby an emergence of an environmental technical industry (adding)
- when business leaders are portrayed as dedicated environmentalists who is or could be more informed than the customers. (creating)

Different roles expressed as learning outcomes (examples)

- 'know what is required according to the law' (adapting)
- 'have knowledge about sustainability, opportunities and risk, in relation to PR and marketing' (adapting)
- 'be able to describe how a sustainability report is constituted and discuss how a business has implemented the guidelines' (adding)
- 'recognising one's own moral platform and understand the decisions one makes and their consequences' (creating)
- 'be able to imagine and create business ideas where one cares for and contributes to the improvement of others' livelihoods'. (creating)

Roles privileged by teachers in classroom practice (examples)

- When describing actors as being driven by self-interest alone, leaving no space for a business but to adapt to the harsh circumstances. (adapting)
- When describing how many businesses has discovered that 'sustainability sells' or suggests that organic farmers are more successful than conventional farmers. (adding)
- When encouraging a student to act in accordance with their feelings for sustainability (creating)
- When suggesting that business owners has power to make changes for sustainability. (creating)

Different roles as taken up by students (examples)

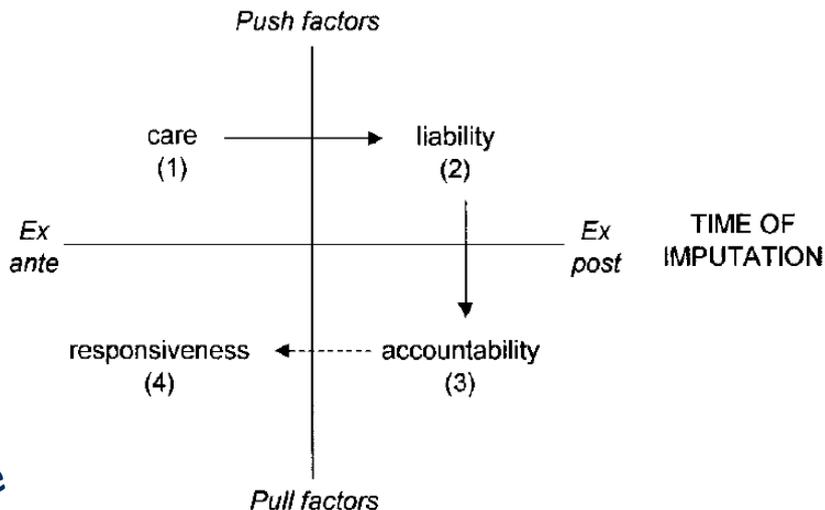
- When asking about what laws and regulations to follow.
(adapting)
- When talking about giving to charity *in order to* please customers. (adding)
- (can be recognised) when 'expressing themselves in terms of moral subjects', for instance when trying to find a solution to a problem with no obvious solution.

Empirical material	The adapting role	The adding role	The creating role
Textbooks (companion meanings) – Study I	Follow the law and consumers demands.	Respond to consumers demands for sustainable products, adopt sustainability guidelines and make demands on subcontractors.	Use a business as a tool for change.
Interviews (teachers’ expected learning outcomes) Study II	Maximise profit while following the law. Personal feelings ought to be pushed aside. (i)	Take steps beyond what is required according to the law and regulations. Personal feelings ought to be encompassed.	Promote sustainability (could/ought to be a driving force). Personal feelings need to be involved.
Classroom observations, with focus on teaching (companion meanings privileged by teachers) – Study III	Use financial performance indicators to assess whether to prioritise work for sustainability (personal feelings must be put aside because consumers are not ‘acting ethically’ to a sufficient extent)	Work for sustainability by meeting the demands of conscious consumers, (scope for personal feelings when coinciding with consumers demands)	Be sensitive and responsive to the needs and interests of others when making business decisions (involvement of personal feelings is necessary).
Classroom observations, with focus on the students – Study IV	Follow the law.	Purchase products locally, make demands on suppliers, control the supply chain, give to charity, ‘close’ the production cycle. (ii)	(iii)
In sum: A responsible business person is expected to:	Adapt to ethical values as expressed in law and regulations Refrain from involving personal feelings when making business decisions	Add ethical values as expressed by others ‘Has scope’ for personal feelings when making business decisions	Create ethical values Involve personal feelings when making business decisions.

The roles of business in the typology of responsibility (Pellizzoni, 2007)

RESPONSIBILITY: A TYPOLOGY

GROUNDS FOR JUSTIFICATION



→ = evolution of environmental governance

Provide for the needs of one's workers as 'the good master'

Listen to the needs and interests of others before deciding what to do

The creating role

The adapting role
Know and follow laws and regulations in the juridical system

Formulate and follow up on self-imposed principles

The adding role



Result:

- As sustainability issues often are uncertain and complex, a business person cannot rely on laws and regulations or predefined principles *alone*. →
- The roles could make students unequipped (adapting), ill-equipped (adding), or better equipped (creating) to address uncertain and complex sustainability issues, such as risks to wild bees and honeybees caused by (according to efsa.europa.eu) neonicotinoid pesticides.

Suggestions ...

- Facilitate space in education for students to 'create ethical values', for instance by using the categorisation (adapting, adding, creating) as analytical categories to analyse and assess initiatives to include 'sustainability' in the business curriculum.
- Space for 'creating ethical values': (a) value-exercises (4-corners, forum-theatre), (b) discussions using 'responsibility-models' (stakeholder model etc.), (c) cases/dilemmas focusing 'wicked problems', (d) branding.
- See also: Edwards, M., Benn, S. & Starik, M. (2017). Business cases for sustainability-integrated management education. I J. Arevalo. & S. Mitchell (Eds.) *Handbook of Sustainability in Management Education*

References:

Andersson, Pernilla, Johan Öhman, and Leif Östman. 2011. "A business to change the world." *Utbildning & Demokrati* 20 (1):57-74. (Study I)

Andersson, Pernilla, and Johan Öhman. 2016. "Logics of business education for sustainability." *Environmental Education Research*:1-17. (Study II)

Andersson, Pernilla. 2017. "Business as *un*-usual through dislocatory moments." *Environmental Education Research*. (Study IV)

Andersson, Pernilla. Talking about sustainability and teaching business economics – the 'positioning' of a business person in classroom practice. (Study III) (in review) *Journal of Social Sciences Education*.

Hühn, MatthiasPhilip. 2014. "You Reap What You Sow: How MBA Programs Undermine Ethics." *Journal of Business Ethics* no. 121 (4):527-541.

Pellizzoni, Luigi. 2004. "Responsibility and Environmental Governance." *Environmental Politics* 13 (3):541-565.

See also:

(Analytical framework for the analysis of 'Business education for sustainability')

/Name Name, Institution or similar