Teaching, researching and developing business education for sustainability


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.
Theoretical perspectives

- A person's 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.
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.
The didactic triangle and overview of the studies

Diagram:
- WORLD
- SOCIETY
- SCHOOL
- TEACHER
- STUDENT
- SUBJECT MATTER

Study I
Study II
Study III
Study IV
Category 1: Adapting to ethical values

- A business person is expected to maximise profit while following 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 businesses can adopt sustainability guidelines and stipulate demands on sub-contractors (adding)
- when business leaders are portrayed as dedicated environmentalists, who is or could be more informed than the customers (creating)
Different roles expressed through (teachers’ expected) learning outcomes

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

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

Know and follow laws and regulations in the juridical system

Formulate and follow up on self-imposed principles

= evolution of environmental governance
Results:

- 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 neonicotinoid pesticides (efsa.europa.eu).
Suggestions ...

- Reflect on the role of business that is facilitated in educational practice (the categories: adapting to, adding vs creating ethical values could be useful as well as the empirical examples)
- Facilitate space in education for students to ‘create ethical values’.
Spaces for ‘creating ethical values’:

- value-exercises (for instance 4-corners, forum-theatre)
- discussing cases of complex and uncertain (‘wicked’) sustainability issues, + different ‘responsibility-models’ (stakeholder model etc)
- talking about branding and asking students what they want their business to ‘stand for’
- when learning how to do business (more) sustainably and experiencing a ‘dislocatory moment’ …
A dislocatory moment

Is it sustainable to make trade with Bangladesh...

But that is what businesses do?!

teacher

Student
A dislocatory moment ...

... offer scope for subjectivity and opens up for change towards sustainability

... can be studied by analysing students learning *in situ* ...

... by combining Practical Epistemology Analysis (*stand fast, encounter, gap, relation*....)

... with a logics approach to discourse analysis

= The **emergence** of and **closure** of a dislocatory moment through the students investment in one or more ‘new’ logics, implying a **change** of the role of a business person.
Step 1: the emergence of a dislocatory moment

S3: (eagerly) ... if they leave them (chargers) for recycling they could get a discount for the old ones, leave your old and get 5% discount on the new ones.
S1 and 2: (with an appreciating tone) Yes, that’s smart

... 
S2: (with confidence) Purchase products ... from Sweden ...
T: (slowly) Well ... you know the transports part of everything is very complicated. Tomatoes that are grown in greenhouses or not and then they are distributed more or less far and it is not at all sure that those that come from a warm country without greenhouses ...
S2: (hesitantly) no, yes ... well very complicated. I do not know how one applies this on anything at all, it is very difficult. Maybe. No, I don’t know. A recycling bucket. (laughs)... 
S3: (ironically) Recycle here
Step 2: the closure of a dislocatory moment

S3: [with irritation] so Swedish ... short distribution... but say something [...]  
S3: But come on now. We could kind of email ‘Be charged’ and ask them if they for good arguments ...[they start searching on they suppliers website] environment ... CSR [...]  
S3: Environment! They (the suppliers) do not want anything to do with environment?? They are impossible.  [deep breath] ... We can give the money, our profit to Animal Rights...  

...  
S3: What about China?  
S2: Connected to child labour then?  
S3: So that the child workers get a raise (ironically) ...  
S2: it’s hard [...]  

T: (approaches the group) So, what have you come up with?  
S2: (with confidence) ... well, ‘Ur och Penn’, they recycle old watches and then we came up with the idea that we could recycle old ...
Step 3: the change of logic (through a dislocatory moment)

Guiding principles of the visions:

1. Comply with legislation informed by experts on sustainability
2. Reduce transports/buy local (‘think global and act local’)
3. Donate to charity
4. Manage the supply chain sustainably
5. Close the production cycle (circular economy)
Methods for analysing educational practice

- Analysis of textbooks (Companion meaning analysis)
- Analysis of teachers’ actions (privileging + a logics approach to discourse analysis)
- Analysis of learning in practice (Practical Epistemological Analysis)
- Analysis of teachers’ role for students’ learning (Epistemological Moves Analysis + Practical Moves Analysis)
- Analysis of ‘change’ (for sustainability) and scope for ‘subjectivity’ in classroom practice (PEA + discourse analysis)

/Name Name, Institution or similar
References (a selection):


Andersson, Pernilla. Talking about sustainability and teaching business economics – the ‘positioning’ of a business person in classroom practice. (Study III) (in review)


