

*Special edition of the learning network
‘Sustainable Development in my Course’:*

“Sustainable Development Teaching: Ethical and Political Challenges”



*An event organised by the International Thematic Network
‘Sustainability Education – Teaching and Learning about
Wicked Socio-Ecological Issues’*

Wednesday 13 November 2019

Venue

Het Pand, Onderbergen 1, 9000 Gent

Programme

13:00 – 14:15 Plenary:

- Welcome
- Introduction: Aims and focus of the book (Katrien Van Poeck)
- Principles for sustainability teaching (Leif Östman)
- Different traditions in environmental and sustainability education (Johan Öhman)
- Sustainable development teaching in view of qualification, socialisation and person formation (Katrien Van Poeck)

14:15-14:45 Coffee break

14:45-15:45 Workshops in 3 parallel sessions:

- **1A Sustainability and wicked sustainability problems** (Thomas Block & Erik Paredis): In this workshop, the content of sustainable development teaching is the central focus. ‘Sustainability’ and ‘transition’ are popular and often used concepts. However, this omnipresence also leads to a diversity of interpretations and misunderstandings about their meaning. This workshop examines four common misunderstandings about sustainable development and sustainability transitions: (1) ‘Sustainability is about ecological concerns’; (2) ‘We need a waterproof and objective definition of sustainability’; (3) ‘Every change leads to a transition’; and (4) ‘We can easily plan and manage sustainability transitions’. Starting from concrete examples and a typology of sustainability problems, we will also address how factual uncertainty (scientific controversy) and disagreement on values and norms (ethical and political controversy) bring about specific challenges for knowledge production about sustainability problems and possible solutions. Seeking inspiration in proposals for new approaches to science such as ‘post-normal science’, we explore the ethical and political challenges involved in sustainable development teaching and engage with the question what it could mean to design ‘post-normal education’ for dealing with wicked sustainability problems where facts are uncertain, values in dispute, stakes high and decisions urgent.

- **1B Classroom discussions on sustainability issues** (Karin Rudsberg & Johan Öhman): This workshop focuses on students' learning through argumentation in classroom discussions. We present a framework to understand arguments in classroom discussions as consisting of different elements and how this framework can be used by teachers to assess whether and how students make progress with respect to the quality of their argumentation. Drawing on empirical examples we clarify questions that are important for teachers to think about in relation to students' learning, their use of knowledge and the importance of peer interactions. Research shows that argumentation can be a fruitful method in the teaching of complex, value-related issues. In argumentation, the students not only learn and use content knowledge, but also learn how to formulate valid arguments in order to participate in deliberative discussions. We will discuss how teachers have an important role to play with regard to the quality and diversity of the deliberation.
- **1C Teacher moves: Political moves** (Katrien Van Poeck & Leif Östman): This workshop focuses on how teachers can influence students' learning regarding the political dimension of sustainable development. By employing specific teacher moves teachers can affect how the political is experienced in environmental and sustainability education (ESE). Drawing on empirical examples, we will illustrate how 'political moves' can be used in order to give shape to an ESE practice as a 'conflict-oriented political deliberation' in which students raise and defend conflicting standpoints regarding how to organise society in the face of sustainability problems. Performing them opens up opportunities for students to personally experience the judgements, prioritisations and decision-making about different and competing alternatives that are involved in the question how to organise society sustainably – and to learn from that experience. We will also show that teachers can perform moves that steer the activity away from conflict-oriented deliberation, for example by staging a 'normative deliberation' through reinstating moves, norm-installing moves and rationalising moves. This opens up a discussion on how teacher's choices which moves to employ very differently affect how the political is experienced in educational practice.

16:00-17:00 Workshops in 3 parallel sessions:

- **2A Teacher moves: Ethical moves** (Katrien Van Poeck, Leif Östman & Johan Öhman): This workshop focuses on how teachers can influence students' ethical and moral learning and, in particular, on how they can promote students' growth as moral subjects in environmental and sustainability education (ESE) practice. We will describe, illustrate and discuss a variety of 'ethical moves', i.e. actions performed by a teacher that open up a space for articulating moral reactions and deliberating on ethical opinions. By performing such moves, we will show, teachers can turn students' moral experiences into fruitful drivers for pluralistic ESE by enabling students to express and share moral experiences and standpoints, to articulate ethical differences and controversies and to reflect and deliberate on moral reactions and dilemmas.
- **2B Handling political emotions in the classroom** (Ásgeir Tryggvason): This workshop deals with how to handle 'political emotions' in our teaching practice. When discussing sustainability issues in the classroom, heated emotions and conflicts between students can arise. But discussions about sustainability issues can also lack both engagement and emotional involvement from the students, even when the teacher brings up what s/he thinks is a burning sustainability issue. A crucial question is then how to approach emotions in ESE in a non-instrumental way and where the political dimension of emotions can be put to the fore. We will present and discuss two strategies to teach with and through political emotions in environmental and sustainability education. The first strategy is simplification which simplifies

the complexity and the conflictual aspect of sustainability issues. When a classroom discussion is characterised by an emotional indifference or a lack of engagement, simplification is a strategy to approach this indifference. The second strategy is circulation, which is a way to maintain the intensity of emotions, or to (re)orientate them toward other objects and issues. When emotions run high in a discussion, circulation is a strategy to approach these emotions as productive elements of a vibrant environmental and sustainability education.

- **2C Values clarification exercises and Forum Play** (Pernilla Andersson): This workshop presents two methods for engaging with the ethical and political dimension of environmental and sustainability education in our teaching practice. 'Four corners' is a values-clarification exercise where students are invited to take a stand regarding a complex or controversial issue by moving physically in the classroom. The exercise offers students opportunities to listen to different perspectives, verbally communicate their own perspectives and think critically. Accordingly, the exercise can be used as a way to clarify different and conflicting perspectives on sustainability issues. In this way, it offers a way to politicise approaches to address sustainability issues. 'Forum play' is a variation of the Forum Theatre created by Augusto Boal as part of what he called "Theatre of the Oppressed". Forum play is a kind of role-play with the purpose to process injustices and conflicts between groups and individuals. The audience is invited to take active part and reflect about different individuals' alternative courses for action and the aim is to explore how oppressed individuals can have an influence in particular situations. A teaching approach inspired by Forum play can facilitate a space where students can experiment and explore different strategies or decisions in a strive to turn something found un-sustainable into something more sustainable.

17:00-18:00 Reception