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Ruling relationships in sustainable development and education for sustainable development

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ABSTRACT

It is from historical perspectives on more than 40 years of environment related education theories, practices, and policies that we revisit what might otherwise become a tired conversation about environmental education and sustainable development. Our contemporary critical analysis of Stefan Bengtsson’s research about policy making leads us to different interpretations of some key observations and assertions about sustainable development (SD) and education for sustainable development (ESD). To counter the persistent weight of the underpinning resourcist and economic view of the relationship between people and the environment, we examine other perspectives about economy, about people and society, and about the environment. These divergences insist upon diversity in education and in environmental education.

KEYWORDS

educational and social paradigms; environmental education; national and international policy; sustainable development

A not-so-tired conversation

Writing this response piece to Stefan Bengtsson’s (2016) “Hegemony and the politics of policy making for education for sustainable development” proved more difficult than anticipated. We wished to escape that uncomfortable feeling of returning to the same old discussions that have persisted in environmental education (EE) for more than 20 years about Sustainable Development (SD) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), including our own (Berryman, 1999, 2006–2007, 2008, 2011; Berryman & Sauvé, 2013; Sauvé, 1996, 1999, 2000, 2003, 2006, 2007, 2011, 2013a; Sauvé & Berryman, 2001, 2009; Sauvé, Berryman & Brunelle, 2007). In this latest context, Bengtsson rightly introduces his research account with the acknowledgment that both SD and ESD have an “antagonising effect on the field of environmental educational theory and research” (p. 77).

Indeed, the time, spaces, circumstances, and contexts of such antagonisms in any field of inquiry, like EE and ESD, and its critique, do change. The terms of debate are not static or stable. There are ample theoretical and empirical insights to update this conversation, as exemplified in this Special Issue dedicated precisely to that purpose. And perhaps, more than ever, there is a compelling need to reengage critically with an evolving range of contemporary assumptions and knowledge interests in this field because SD is now deeply installed in various discourses as a faith (Rist, 2007), and since ESD constantly pursues its colonization or proselytization mission all over the world’s cultures as illustrated by the recently completed United Nations’ Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD).

Stefan Bengtsson (2016) seeks to demonstrate that SD and ESD policies are not hegemonic prescriptions since they leave room for contestation, dissensus and various interpretations as they are adapted in diverse contexts and since they do not necessarily oppose the subjects’ agency through individual action. In this view, instead of criticizing the so-called hegemonic character of SD, Bengtsson invites
analysts and critics to explore and value the diversity of SD appropriation schemes in order to promote the adoption of this supposedly uniting and universal framework. At this point, we acknowledge Bengtsson’s courageous contribution to what otherwise might have been a tired, perhaps exhausted, conversation in EE about ESD that he duly acknowledges and references.

Bengtsson’s (2016) arguments are founded on a certain reasoning that can, and should be disputed. We note that Bengtsson’s analysis and critique appears to preclude other approaches to understanding and representing the world outside the SD framework. Indeed, Bengtsson’s analysis reductively positions EE as a strategy for “environmental protection” (p. 79) only, while expansively conceiving ESD policy as a holistic and malleable project, and a free zone for agency, provided that the ultimate universal goal of SD remains; in other words, you may think and act in your own way, as long as you go ahead with SD. Finally, Bengtsson’s analysis and critique avoids treatment of the core or basic meaning of education itself, and the relation between individual and collective or social agency.

So, rather than (re)tire from the 20 years long debate, we explicate our critique through offering diverging interpretations of ESD. We then propose other perspectives about economy, about people and society, and about environment. Finally, we highlight the historical importance of fostering diversity in education and environmental education in order to explore or inspire education focusing on relationships with the lifeworld. Our critique is based not only on our past contributions to this debate but on more recent empirical work mainly in the fields of food and water security and sovereignty education (Sauvé, Naoufal, & Auzou, 2013; Sauvé & Orellana, 2014a) as well as theoretical presumptions emerging from our immersion in current socio-ecological issues and controversies (for example, Sauvé, 2013b, 2014, 2015; Sauvé & Girault, 2014). Of course, our critical project is also nourished by the theoretical and empirical research efforts of other researchers challenging the appropriateness and the effects of strong economic appeals to foster social and environmental changes.

**Diverging interpretations**

Five assertions about SD and ESD made by Stefan Bengtsson (2016) are challenged.

1: *SD and ESD are not hegemonic prescriptions since there is “the possibility of resistance to a predominant economistic or neo-liberal discourse”* (p. 82).

As Bengtsson acknowledges in his account of the “paradox” (p. 77) created by ESD, many contributors to the two-decade long debate challenge or display manifest resistance toward SD prescriptions because there already is a strong perception and associated critical responses to the binding power of ESD over ways of thinking and acting in education, and in environmental education. When power is disputed, be it about a policy, or curriculum, or pedagogy, it is a manifestation of its own existence. It mirrors its prescriptive nature that some, or many, critique and resist. Although the possibility of discussion, dissent, and resistance do exist, it is certainly not the goal of policy documents to invite interpretations that risk contestation or contradiction. Policy documents strive for application, adhesion, and reformulation in national strategies, laws, and curricula. They foster and illustrate ruling relations defined by Dorothy Smith (2005, p. 227) as “translocal forms of social organizations and social relations mediated by texts.”

The SD model is strongly driven in many diverse contexts. International, national, and local institutions are mobilized and created to convert policies into action, for example, UN DESD, Learning for a Sustainable Future (LSF) in Canada, Établissements Verts Brundtland (EVB) in Quebec. How these policy formulations and prescriptions then “trickle down” and enact ESD is a different interpretive question that demands empirical insight and qualification, be it in Vietnam as case studied by Bengtsson, or elsewhere as we have studied (Sauvé et al., 2007; see also for example, Zwang & Girault, 2012).

Once again, even though there is room for resistance and some adaptation at different levels of policy formulation and its implementation, the policy aims for adoption of the reified SD model at different levels or layers of implementation. The underlying worldviews of SD and ESD are advanced at various scales through a discourse that typically presumes that long-term social development rests on
better and fairer economic exploitation of resources from the environment while taking care to not exceed ecological system support capacities that would compromise economic development (as in the Brundtland Report, WCED, 1987).

At the heart of SD (and ESD) lies a cosmology built on economic terms. In this vision of the world, based on three pillars, economy becomes an autonomous entity, somehow existing outside of society, and imposing its rules over the relations between society (producers and consumers) and the environment (a set of resources). SD is a resourcist construction and promotes anthropocentrism as an ultimate value system. According to Neil Evernden (1985 p. 23), “resourcism is a kind of modern religion which casts all of creation into categories of utility. By treating everything as homogeneous matter in search of a use, it devalues all.” Evernden presciently warned against a perverse effect, it being resourcism’s “most dangerous aspect is its apparent good intention. By describing something as a resource we seem to have reason to protect. But all we really have is a license to exploit it.”

So, even though there is some room for debate about values and resources, and their sustainability, the cards are already anthropocentrically loaded and the field’s discourses, policies, and practices are clearly bounded, or constrained. Berger and Luckmann (1966) help clarify this confusion or contradiction by highlighting how “ruling relations” help foster processes of objectification through institutionalization, legitimation, and reification where “the world of institutions appears to merge with the world of nature. It becomes a necessity and fate and is lived through as such, happily or unhappily as the case may be” (pp. 90–91). Following SD, the world is positioned as a reservoir of resources for humanity that we need to exploit in a fairer and more sustainable (and sustained) manner. Institutions, including the educational ones in a range of contexts, must act accordingly. Unfortunately, in Bengtsson’s study, we find no trace of analysis of the inherent trends or deep cosmology of SD controlling, or framing, the spectrum of acceptable “resistances”—as Berger and Luckmann shrewdly evoke “legitimation as a process” entailing “conceptual machineries of universe-maintenance” and “social organizations for universe-maintenance” (p. 92–115).

2: SD and ESD “hegemony is limited by the existence of alternate meanings put forward by other policy actors within or among national contexts” (p. 82).

Once again, this is a side effect, or unintended consequence of policy power and not a desired outcome. And the existing debate in the Vietnamese case as documented by Bengtsson can be interpreted not so much as creating alternate meanings but as a clear indication of an underpinning economic, resourcist worldview that is hegemonic and dominant. What Bengtsson identifies as “antagonism between socialists and economists demands” (p. 88) can be seen as mere variations about resourcism and economic worldviews. Socialism is historically hardwired in economic thinking. Karl Marx proposed another arrangement in the ownership of the means of production and in production relations. The debate is thus about economy and how it serves, or not, society in a just manner. With a “socialist-oriented market economy,” (Cling, Razafindrakoto, & Roubaud, 2013; Gabriele, 2006) the inclusion of the social in the field of economy is clearly expressed. The point here is not that these socioeconomic issues are of no importance. They are vital. However, they cannot define or contain the diversity of our social and environmental experiences and realities, more so in education. Once again, the margin of proposed “alternate meanings” is quite small since SD is bounded in resourcist, economic, and anthropocentric terms, a concern highlighted by others contributing to this SI.

3: SD and ESD are not hegemonic because of the “emptiness of the consensus that these concepts stand in for suggests that it is the particular interests put forward by different groups in attempts to give meaning to these concepts” (p. 82).

The seemingly emptiness or ubiquity of the SD consensus (Sauvé, 2003) does not mean there are no ruling relations and hegemony. Once again, on close examination, the domination of an economic and resourcist outlook generally emerges. The apparent emptiness could be seen as a sort of black hole drawing everything in. To understand the attractiveness of a broad and totalizing model, we turn for insight to Italo Calvino’s (1985) character in “Mr Palomar,” as he reflects on and struggles with “the
model of models” he dreams of. After searching for an ideal model for the good of people, Palomar realizes “what the models seek to model is basically always a system of power.” Palomar concedes, “but if the efficacy of the system is measured by its invulnerability and capacity to last, the model becomes a kind of fortress whose thick walls conceal what is outside” (Calvino, 1985, p. 110–111).

Palomar helps us see that our imagination in “education” (or ESD) is already colonized by the resourcist and economic models underpinning the SD discourse, however empty or ubiquitous it can seem to be. The Vietnamese case does not contradict such an understanding. To the contrary, the debates about a “socialist discourse,” an “economist discourse,” a “nationalist discourse,” and “globalist discourse” are variations on a seemingly mandatory and centralized theme.

The dominant culture of SD interprets cultural diversity as a challenge or an obstacle, and invites all cultures to adapt and adopt a certain Western worldview. As an example of this globalized form of colonialism, much research—to the tiring point of seeming saturation—focuses on the conceptions or representations of SD and ESD, recognizing and exploring the plurality of understandings (for example, Clément & Caravita, 2011; Lange, 2008; Summers & Childs, 2007). However, it seems that the underpinning motive of this form of policy colonialism is generally to better understand barriers and resistance in order to overcome them. The goal is to drive in the concept, so as to better respond to, or mirror, recent educational ESD policies and practices/ implementations/trickle downs, that is, “conceptual machineries of universe-maintenance” in the words of Berger and Luckmann (1966).

Beyond its symbolic value, the SD international prescription is, indeed, heavily influential as the hardening of globalization keeps retriggering the critique of ESD (Berryman, 2011; Berryman & Sauvé, 2013, Jickling & Wals, 2008; Sauvé, 2011; Sauvé, Brunelle & Berryman, 2005). In the wake of the WCED (1987), facing the necessity to counter the depletion of resources and halt the acceleration of environmental problems so as to ensure a sustained development that satisfied actual and future populations’ needs, the UN urged all countries in the world, no matter the culture of peoples, to have a policy and SD strategies. These countries turned mainly to their environment and education departments with this colossal task of transforming the economy, despite the heaviness of their own specific missions and their lack of resources, and did not immediately or significantly confront their economic sectors and services (finance, industry and trade, labor, natural resources) to which SD was nevertheless mainly intended. However, because SD is now mandated through national policies, any environmental education or socioecological projects, be they “development” oriented or not, must now be framed in the SD language and logic in order to remain legitimate so as to access financial resources.

Whereas the vocabulary of “sustainability” in English, of “viabilité” in French, and of “sostenibilidad”, and even more of “sustentabilidad” in Spanish, intend to put socio-ecological concerns before those of “development,” the core and undisputed value of duration, or long lasting (of what?), still permeates the use of those languages. They try mimicking SD, thus avoiding complete rupture with ruling policies, while dissociating with them in some or many aspects (González-Gaudiano, 2015, p. 46). The space of language, and therefore of thought, remains constrained in a certain predetermined and propositional framework, reshaping the significance of agency. In line with the above, if the actions undertaken in the name of SD in the political-economic sphere have remained superficial and timid, as noted by Bengtsson, we have to recognize that these actors have not been the primary targets of SD policies, but have mainly turned to more vulnerable sectors, in terms of limited budget or huge mission, such as environment and education. Hegemony is thus exercised culturally through education (supported by the UNESCO ESD program), while not directly or firmly confronting the concerned or relevant authorities, thus further legitimizing the priority of economic development as remaining somehow sacred and, therefore, not to be disturbed.

The role of education is crucial here as a process, or not, of examining our lives in light of diverse ways of understanding and acting in the world (Morin, 1999, p. 8). Morin’s “blinding paradigms” is apt: a paradigm selects and determines conceptualization and logical operations. It designates the

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4: The paradox of SD and ESD policies being seen at the same time as powerful and only symbolic: “Policy is, therefore, seen as having influence and being limited in its capacities to govern agency and action. If so, the power of policy partially remains a symbolic gesture” (p. 78).
fundamental categories of intelligibility and controls their use. Individuals know, think, and act according to interiorized culturally inscribed paradigms. Now, paradigmatic SD policy, language, and models like ESD become the ultimate predetermined globalizing goal of education, as rejected very early in the debate within EE by Jickling (1992, and this SI), how, indeed, do we contribute critically to broader, to deeper and simply to other educational goals about the environment and society?

In Bengtsson’s study, we find no examination of the reasons explaining the paradox he points at, nor of the deep and long-term influence of a societal paradigm promoted and prescribed by political authorities, as symbolic it might appear at first.

5: There is a contradiction in critics of SD and ESD since “the paradox exists in the dual claim of structural dominance and the possibility of critical reflection.” (p. 78).

Bengtsson probably misunderstands our contributions to EE and ESD. In the articles of ours he cites (Berryman & Sauvé, 2013; Sauvé, 1999; Sauvé, Berryman, & Brunelle, 2000; Sauvé et al., 2005), we never advanced the view that the dominance of sustainable development meant the extinction of critical reflections. We defend the necessity to not foreclose critical thinking in the SD vision of the world and it’s so-called consensus. About the “limits of power in policy,” we reiterate those limits should not be confused between decisive influence, striving for power, powerful positions, and absolute power, as Bengtsson appears to do.

Having questioned and clarified five problematic assertions in Bengtsson’s study, we now highlight some perspectives about economy, about people and society, and about the environment, still remaining in the shadow of SD and ESD. We insist on diversity in education and in environmental education, as has been the historical case. These perspectives, sometimes newer, are needed to revitalize what, at first glance, might be a tiring rehearsal of an otherwise exhausted conversation.

Other perspectives on economy

In order to address our globalized socio-ecological problems while taking into account the current dominant neoliberal contexts in which education occurs (Laval & Weber, 2002Ziegler, 2013), we believe the SD proposal had, and still has, some relevance. It may alert and even persuade actors operating in the politico-economic sphere that the economy will benefit from taking into account environmental and social aspects of their development projects. Thus, constraints, issues, and risks may turn into opportunities for them, mainly a sustained development. So the language of SD might well be adapted to certain types of social actors, for certain objectives and contexts, so as to promote new green ways of producing and consuming, without compromising the basis of market economy (UNEP, 2011). Also, it can be observed that the essentially pragmatic SD discourse (with indicators, without criteria) has improved through the countless discussions and debates about the relevance of such a proposal, and the necessity to work toward a “strong sustainability” (Huckle, 1996). In any case, however, we have to keep in mind, theoretical and empirical research drawing attention to the environmentally negative effects of focusing primarily on economic advantages (Chilton, Crompton, Kasser, Maio, & Nolan, 2012; Crompton & Kasser, 2009; Sheldon, Nichols, & Kasser, 2011).

But still, we consider that SD, with its faith in “development” (Rist, 2007) and its universal valorization and privileging of sustainability, is much too narrow as a worldview to be promoted as a holistic societal project and even less as a geo-culturally sensitive global education program, as highlighted by Edgar González-Gaudiano, in addition to Kelly Teamey and Udi Mandel in this SI. A sound political and social project would be based on a rigorous critical consideration of the different ways of conceiving economy so as to make contextually relevant choices, without being trapped in any hegemonic exogenous influence, especially as it becomes reified, as is the case. The purpose here is not to examine in this text the whole spectrum of alternative proposals on economy in relation to the demands of ecology (as in Gendron, 2014), but to underline the necessity for a basic environmental and ecocitizenship education to invite all of us to analyze the current economic issues in light of different possible ways of conceiving and acting the economic dimension of our society and our lives.
Among these possible alternative avenues, we draw attention to four proposals relevant to our own research, in which the pillars are clearly different from the “three pillars” of SD. Two of these proposals are related to some older traditions: the first one, ecodevelopment, emerged from international cooperation experiences, and the other, Vivir bien, from Southern indigenous cultures. The two other alternatives to mainstream notions of economy are “ecological transition” and the “degrowth movement.” They are based on a strong critique of current Western economies and suggest deep social transformations. As such, following Teamey and Mandel’s account of their “enlivened learning” globally ethnographic project in this Special Issue, it would be reductive to assimilate these pillars to the mainstream “strong sustainability” movement: their roots, finalities, references, and languages should not be trapped in SD cooptation, so as not to blindly erase cosmopolitical diversity (Stengers, 1996).

While still resourcist, ecodevelopment specifies the type of development that should be promoted. This proposal, inspired by existing territorial and local practices and ways of living (Sachs, 2007, p. 247–277) is nourished by the theoretical fields of ecology and cultural anthropology. Since the first international UN Conference on Human Environment in 1972, Ignacy Sachs (1981, 2007, 2013) has structured the concept of ecodevelopment, which is anti-liberal and opposed to “growth,” as the ultimate objective of development. Explicitly recognizing the symbiotic relation between society and nature, ecodevelopment is based on three pillars: (1) autonomy of decisions and search for endogenous models that are appropriate to each historical, cultural and ecological context; the notion of ecoregion is fundamental here, as well as the values of participation and solidarity; (2) equitable response to the needs of all human and every human: material and immaterial needs, starting with the striving for or the achievement of a meaningful life; (3) ecological prudence as a search for development in harmony with nature (beyond risk management). Gutierrez and Gaudiano (2010, p. 79–84) recall how ecodevelopment lost ground with the emergence of the less demanding proposal of “sustainable development” (see also, Gaudiano, this Special Issue).

Acknowledging the important contribution of ecodevelopment, some authors (Berr, 2013, p. 17) recommend consideration be given to its principles as the basis of a new political economy for a “strong” sustainable development. Here, we can simply ask: why not recognize the rupture between these two different proposals, and invite us to “look elsewhere and do otherwise” than SD, as does Ignacy Sachs (2013, p. 6)?

With the rising wave of ecosocialism in Latin America, the concept of Vivir bien or Buen vivir has permeated the political sphere. It became a pillar of Bolivian and Ecuadorian national constitutions (República del Bolivia, 2009; República del Ecuador, 2008). Rooted in indigenous cosmovisions, it means to live in peace, in harmony among us, human beings, and with nature. Vivir bien differs from the “live better” economy based on capital accumulation and inequality. It is defined as an alternative to “development.” This political and more endogenous project goes beyond the traditional socialist Left and offers a way of being and living together, humans and non-humans, in the shared living systems. In place of the three spheres of sustainable development (economy, society, environment), the contemporary appropriation of Vivir bien considers three interrelated spheres of the world: social, spiritual, and material (Delgado, Rist, & Escobar, 2010; Huanacuni, 2010).

The idea of a life community is the main pillar of this proposal, with that of communitarian socialism and community democracy. Community includes humans and nature, humans being part of nature, and the legal rights of nature being recognized. The rights of nature are indeed stated in the Ecuadorian Constitution since 2008 and are the subject of a fundamental law in Bolivia: the Law of the Rights of Mother Earth considers Mother Earth as “…the dynamic living system formed by the indivisible community of all life systems and living beings whom are interrelated, interdependent, and complementary, which share a common destiny” (Asamblea Legislativa Plurinacional, 2012). In the North or Western cultural part of the world, this philosophy resonates with Aldo Leopold’s project for a biotic community and a land ethic (Leopold, 1949).

More recently, also from the Western world, the ecological transition movement, rooted in social theory and technology systems studies, also focuses on the ecological and social dimensions of the needed transformative changes (not “development” or growth) through local, small, autonomous, diverse, flexible, resilient, and connected community projects (Hopkins, 2008). Beyond pragmatic
accommodation and adaptation, “it starts operating according to new assumptions, rules and practices” and “entails profound alterations in structures, institutions and social relations and as a result, society” (Fischer-Kowalski et al., 2012).

Sustainability implies that we are trying to design a steady-state system with less inputs and less outputs than we have at the moment, which can carry on indefinitely. Whereas actually what we need to be designing for is the ability to withstand shock. But a lot of the literature about resilience talks about it meaning that a system can take shock and then reform into its previous state. Whereas increasingly, the way people are starting to look at it, it’s about seeing that shock as an opportunity to change. (Hopkins, 2010, p. 22)

Finally degrowth is another perspective on economy that more seriously challenges traditional economical doctrines focusing on growth and development. Degrowth “has nothing to do with a simple greening of existing techniques nor the ‘democratization’ to make them accessible to all,” “or merely with the collective self-management of capitalist techniques” (D’Alisa, Demaria, & Kallis, 2014, p. 3). It strives to debunk what it identifies as the fallacies of the dominant discourses on economy. “Sharing, simplicity, conviviality, care and the ‘commons’ are primary significations of what this [transformed] society might look like.” (Idem). In educational contexts, examining degrowth can help understand and debate about economy and especially about some often unexamined assumptions in the dominant economic discourses (Bayon, Flipo, & Schneider, 2012).

These four proposals challenge education as a necessary condition and as a crucible for deep social transformation, free from the “paradigmatic” a priori of the “blinding” ESD framework and its limited finality. For example, Sachs (2007, p. 385–386) insists on the necessity of promoting a political pedagogy, including learning about the history of development, the diversity of ecological natural and cultural ecologies; education needs to promote creativity, inspire responsible voluntary involvement and value participation. Of course ESD also reassuringly defines itself as a process of critical thinking and collaborative learning, and values the different approaches of a progressive education. However, over strategies, SD & ESD are fundamentally grounded in a cosmology and a cosmopolitics of economic growth, irrespective of political/national histories. The a priori of an education grounded in a global economy-centered and managerial view of the world must be deconstructed in a critical environmental education process (Berryman, 1999; Robottom, 2005; Sauvé & Orellana, 2008).

Other perspectives on people and society

In SD and ESD, the social world can all too easily appear as an arena where people essentially struggle to access or share products of a sustained economy, taking care though not to surpass the proposed or regulated/ruled “sustainability” limits of these processes. The key social and ecological issues can be, or ‘are’ reduced to the modes of production and distribution of wealth. Other insightful and persuasive perspectives about people and society and how they relate to the world exist. We already pointed toward ecodevelopment, Vivir bien, ecological transition and degrowth as providing alternative perspectives of economy and about people and society. Thus, diverse alternatives are defended, created, and explored in various contexts and circumstances (Manier, 2012). They deserve attention and they risk being neglected if we focus solely on the social and political worlds as arenas for production and distribution under an economic rationale. The point here is not to identify an ideal but to indicate other prospects to foster inventiveness and creativity in environmental education and research. There are thus important and needed explorations to be pursued of social and political arrangements or organizations supporting healthy people, communities, and places.

Inspiring theoretical and empirical researches document how focusing on economy in environmental discourses can be counterproductive or produce the equivalent of iatrogenic effect (“adverse conditions that are inadvertently induced by the activity of a doctor—that is, the patient becomes sicker as a result of the treatment”, in Crompton & Kasser, 2009, p. 23). Many of these researches are built around Shalom Schwartz’s (1992) circular model of values in which self-enhancing values of power (authority, influential) and achievement (ambitious, wealth) are opposed to self-transcendent values of universalism (protecting the environment, equality) and benevolence (forgiving, helpful) (see Maio, Pakizeh,
Cheung, & Rees, 2009). According to researchers in this field, “intrinsic and extrinsic values are like two balloons connected to each other—as one expands, the other contracts.” (Blackmore et al., 2013, p. 24). This is certainly relevant in education. It invites EE researchers and practitioners to be vigilant with regard to our discourses and practices so as to avoid the iatrogenic effects of hasty framings of research, policy, and pedagogies in trendy economic terms. In fact, the activations of some values could in part explain these effects and the associated rebound effect.

Such critical and normatively aware “micro/subjective” reflexivities invite us to revisit with more confidence and renewed support, other frames, discourses, and practices on people and society in the history of environmental education and, more broadly, in education. Thus, for example, Hart (2003), Noddings (2003), O’Sullivan (1999), Orr (1990, 1994), Payne (1999, 2006), Postman (1995), Tomashow (1996), and others, are built on such alternative perspectives. At a more “macro”-level, the self-transcendent appeal can play out in various contexts. Denmark is a strong social democracy with solid institutions, supporting singularity or individuation, which in return supports the institutions because people know their singularity was institutionally supported (Rydahl, 2014). This may seem a contradiction to many but it still exists. And many of the socially democratic values shared “educationally” in Denmark (for example, Laessoe & Ohman, 2010) have nothing to do with purely economic rationales: trusting others, valuing and supporting free education, autonomy, solidarity, realistic dreams, “hygge” moments, family and work equilibrium, modesty, and others (Rydahl, 2014). Nonetheless, Denmark’s social democracy is currently encountering various pressures from neoliberalism and globalization.

**Other perspectives on the environment**

Strangely, it seems to be the environment that is the most reduced or shrinked component in SD and ESD discourses even though it is precisely environmental issues and constraints that gave rise to the idea of SD. This is important because Bengtsson’s study reduces and limits environmental education to environmental protection only, which is in line with the resourcist perspective that permeates SD. Basically, in SD, as already cautioned previously, the environment is limited to resources and to problems stemming from the exploitation of resources. All the other ways of envisioning the surrounding world are radically downplayed or made invisible/non present. This more recently culminated in the assessment of ecosystem services as a new fashionable resourcist twist or buzz in some circles. The prevailing view is that if we can figure out the monetary equivalent of services provided by nature, we will protect nature or carefully manage ecosystems. Put differently in terms of the “not so tired” critique of ESD, nature is objectified, reified, measured, quantified, instrumentalized, and commodified as a technology “designing” a technics of its human, social, and ecological experience (Payne, 2003/2006).

We have already drawn attention to the possible iatrogenic effect of this avenue (Crompton & Kasser, 2009). The notion of relatedness or kinship with the environment, forwarded by psychiatrist Harold Searles as early as in 1960, does not fare well with purely economic prospects. And even in the field of economy, the idea of the rationale and calculating individual is challenged. Reciprocity and a deep sense of connectedness, of dynamic and vital exchanges with the surrounding world, appear as a more solid ground to envision preservation, conservation, remediation, and wise use.

Historically, it became more difficult to value such understanding of connectedness with the rise of important monotheist religions and their institutions, generally denying or downplaying the importance of the flesh and the world, the life-world, and rather valuing the Word, and the afterlife (Berryman, 2008, 2011). A deep sense of connectedness also remained difficult with the rise of positivism and its institutions, denying “interiority” or “subjectivity” to all but the humans and seeing the world through the lens of human subjects acting upon a world of objects. Such positivist emancipation from religious beliefs came with its own set of beliefs and drawbacks (Descola, 2005, 2014; Schumacher, 1977). Interestingly, the Catholic Church and other religions seem to be changing and becoming more attentive to the life-world as shown by the recent Encyclical Letter by Pope Francis (2015), including: “Bring healing to our lives, that we may protect the world and not prey on it, that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction. Touch the hearts of those who look only for gain at the expense of the poor and the earth.”
In these alternative economic, social/political, and environmental contexts (as can be carefully/strategically used to either reinterpret Bengtsson’s analysis/critique, or more fundamentally de/reconstruct his reading), and in the field of education and more so in environmental education, it is important not to foreclose other perspectives. Once again, it is important to consider we have only flagged a few of these alternatives.

Diversity in education and environmental education: What next for EE?

Education has always been solicited as a main strategy to promote macro-political programs (Petrella, 2000; Popkewitz, 2004), whether they be explicit or implicit. International—and thus national—instances prescribe and/or support different “educations for . . .” As an example, UNESCO’s problem-solving oriented program for environmental education (1975–1995), then for ESD (1995–2015) and now for Global Citizenship Education (GCE) highlights these transitions. This new GCE framework already makes untested claims on integrating and surpassing the objectives of previous programs:

Within UNESCO, elements of GCE have been promoted through education for peace & human rights, intercultural education and education for sustainable development as well as health education and the Organization’s work on youth engagement and a culture of peace (…) Building on the experience of these programmes and the growing global call for more and better global citizenship education, UNESCO is taking the technical leadership and overall coordination of initiatives related to global citizenship education, especially in the context of the Global Education First Initiative.

Of course, promoting transversal integration of core dimensions of contemporary education such as peace, human rights, health, and citizenship, has a crucial epistemological, ethical, and pedagogical relevance. However, it can be observed here that there is no explicit mention of environmental education as it seems to melt into the thin air of ESD. And the ideas of “technical leadership” and “overall coordination of initiatives” from the GCE remind us of the earlier problematic case of ESD during the past decades, where all socioecological initiatives (including schoolyard gardening or museums’ biodiversity exhibitions) were simply reframed, reinterpreted, and renamed as ESD. This raises a new risk of a-culturation of education within a global macro-culture. After the self congratulations by UN on DESD, researchers in EE must carefully appraise the issues and effects of such a worldwide program, before launching a new hegemonic policy (with an explicit “global” perspective) that will frame the very meaning of education and of being a human and a citizen, without real consideration of historical, cultural and ecological contexts.

Fernando Huanacuni (2010) points at the colonization of spirits, as an insidious epistemic, ethical, and cultural alienation, and invites us to escape exogenous educational programs. This Bolivian educator identifies the main characteristics of an indigenous/endogenous education, rooted in contextual and cultural realities, where authority is replaced by a community responsibility to enhance learning to live well together (vivir bien), humans and other living beings, in an organic, holistic manner (Sauvé & Orellana, 2014b). The idea of “development” generally does not exist in indigenous cosmologies. These visions of the world are rooted in an ecology of time where future, present, and past are closely related. The instrumental value of sustainability has no meaning here.

Education is about learning to relate to our individual and collective self, constructing identity, learning to live alterity with human and other life forms, and to relate to our Oikos, our shared house of life (Payne, 2009; Sauvé, 2009). It is about the meaning of our individual and collective being-in-the-world. It is about ecosophy, ethics, esthetics, politics, and economics (eco-nomein). The huge philosophical, theoretical, and practical heritage of environmental education (environment related education), focusing on our human relationship with and within Oïkos, can contribute to inspire such a holistic pedagogical project, as an important transversal part of it.

Diversity is an important feature of EE, which is grounded in different interrelated aspects of our relationship with the environment: as nature, as problems, as resources, as ecological systems, as a territory to belong to, care and share, as a place to inhabit, as a community socioecological project, as the whole biosphere—our common world, and others. It weaves different complementary modes of
relation with this multifaceted environment: cognitive, affective, ethical, cultural, artistic, praxic, political, and spiritual approaches. Nearly 20 pedagogical currents of environmental education (general ways of conceiving and enacting education, combining countless different models, approaches and strategies), were developed and are still evolving (Sauvé, 2005). This diversity is closely related to a diversity of ethical postures, including biocentric, ecocentric, cosmocentric (Brenner, 2010). In this perspective, ESD, with its conception of environment as resources for the State to manage and share and reductively protect, its anthropocentric ethics and its most often pragmatic and instrumentalist curriculum (Girault, Zwang, & Jeziorski, 2013; Selby, 2015, p. 32–33), cannot be considered as a global framework enclosing the diverse possibility or relating to the environment. This explains why many educators caring for the socioecological dimension of our relation to the world, do not wish to be locked in ESD, and prefer to breathe elsewhere (Girault & Sauvé, 2008).

As explained earlier, Bengtsson (2016, p. 79) presents environmental education as centered on “environmental protection” only or primarily. The spectrum of EE purposes, goals, and achievements, as well as expectations, is much larger. One of these is to construct the very meaning of our relation with the living world. While ESD intrinsically indicates SD as the ultimate predetermined goal of education (whatever definition you give), EE invites us to explore and experiment with diverse modes of relating to our natural and socio-ecological world, and to create a personal and collective project of being and enacting in our collective oikos.

**What next for the politics of policy formation in ESD?**

Stephen Bengtsson (2016) rightly calls for the recognition of diversity within SD and ESD. Such an exploration is important as we seek to understand the unproblematic worldwide spread of the SD and ESD prescriptions, and to get the best possible picture of their influences around the globe and modes of penetration into the different lifeworlds of everyday life. Accordingly, in our response to Bengtsson’s invitation, we warn against the loss of diversity in socioecological thinking under a ruling SD discourse, we emphasize the various explorations of more holistic perspectives or types, taking into consideration the whole spectrum of economic, social, environmental, and educational currents—without reducing them as variations of “strong” or “weak” sustainability. The “black hole” of SD and ESD, we strongly believe after two decades of our own critical research in various circumstances and contexts, still generates erosion of critical thinking and praxis, which needs to escape the limits of any specific proposal.

Partly inspired from Gilbert Rist (2007), the following avenues open up for further consideration, deliberation, and debate some of the reflexive spaces now urgently needed:

- Maintain the critical vigil about the ongoing or evolving proposals and modes of implementation of SD and ESD;
- Ceaselessly stimulate economic and political imaginary of our societies (Leff, 2014);
- At local and regional levels, continue exploring alternative cosmologies and document emerging initiatives that relate to what Gustavo Esteva and Magdu Prakash (1998) named “beyond development”;
- Contribute to the “regeneration”, the reconstruction of the existing, here and now, rather than rushing ahead with “development” and escaping in the future (Aga Khan, 2005);
- At international levels, considering multiscale interdependencies, support and encourage improved international organizations policies; at best, contribute to the making of such policies.

Education, in the fullest sense of that term, must be part of such a critical and creative project. More specifically, different EE proposals, centered on the close relationship between personal, social, and ecological realities, can make important contributions: environmental justice education (in relation with ecological equity), ecocitizenship education or/and environmental health education.

Some of the early currents in the history of EE and more recent ones (Sauvé, 2005) call for fundamental transformations and they cannot be amalgamated and subsumed in ESD, where economy imposes its rules to the relation between society and environment. The SD model should mainly target
certain actors of the current politico-economic sphere, who may value this language and arguments, as a first path toward a deeper socio-ecological ethics all the while keeping in mind the potential iatrogenic effects of the values possibly highlighted in such language and arguments. However, the issue for educators is to pursue the exploration and experimentation of holistic and coherent education theories and practices articulating personal and social vision of the world and of our being and acting in this world. Such proposals are based on deep consciousness of the ontological, ethical and political character of education. (Re)invigorating “tired” discussions, conversations, and debates about SD and ESD can be part of such a clarification process.

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References


