Schooling and ESE: revisiting Stevenson’s gap from a pragmatist perspective

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ABSTRACT
Environmental and sustainability education (ESE) consists of topical existential and ethical issues. At the same time, these issues are taught in a school setting that is shaped by assignments, grades, and school tasks. The relationships between structures of formal education in a school environment and the characteristics of ESE has been described in dichotomous terms as a contradiction, known in the ESE research field as “Stevenson’s gap”, after Robert B. Stevenson. The aim of this article is to overcome this dichotomous understanding of the relation between schooling and ESE by providing a pragmatist perspective. Drawing on John Dewey’s notion of habit, two learning habits are outlined by which students encounter environmental and sustainability issues in the classroom: the habit of schooling and the habit of inquiry. Empirical data from Swedish upper secondary schools is used to illustrate their meaning in classroom practice. Our pragmatist conceptualisation highlights how these habits are simultaneously present in the same classroom. A conclusion is that teaching and learning in ESE should not be reduced to either habit but that both can be valuable for a robust and vital ESE.

Introduction
Teaching and learning about environmental and sustainability issues (ES-issues) involves deep existential questions. In contrast to many other kinds of teaching and learning content, ES-issues concern the students’ own future, both as citizens in a non-sustainable society and as human beings living on a planet where the resources overshoot each year. In this sense, the issues can touch on the very nerve of what it means to grow up in a society where dreadful visions of the future seem to be closing in (Lysgaard, Bengtsson, and Hauberg-Lund Laugesen 2019; Vandenplas and Van Poeck 2021; Verlie 2019). At the same time, the issues are taught in a school setting. Thus, when ES-issues enter the classroom they will inevitably be embedded in a machinery of assessment, task solving and the production of schoolwork. In previous research the relation between the structures of schooling on the one hand, and characteristics of EE/ESD/ESE on the other, has been described as a gap. This is known as “Stevenson’s gap”, after Robert B. Stevenson’s analysis of this relation (Stevenson, 1987/2007, 2007a). When Stevenson in 1987 described this gap between schooling and EE he framed it as a contradiction (Stevenson, 1987/2007). Given this conceptualisation, teachers stand between either pursuing a visionary ESE that questions the epistemological and ontological grounds of education, or teaching
structured problems in separate disciplines within the structure of schooling (Stevenson 2007a; see also Blenkinsop, Telford, and Morse 2016).

While Stevenson’s conceptualisation has been very influential for ESE research, the framing of the relation between schooling and ESE as a contradiction is problematic in two ways. First, the conceptualisation depicts a narrow understanding of what teaching and learning in ESE is supposed to be, in that it frames teaching and learning as contradictory to the school’s organisation in subjects/disciplines and to the structured problems that are taught in schools. The problem with this conceptualisation is that ESE is excluded as something that can be meaningfully taught and learned through the traditional organisation and structures of schooling. Second, the conceptualisation provides little support for teachers about how to navigate the relation between schooling and ESE. Instead, teachers are seen as caught between two incommensurable systems. Stevenson (2007a) formulates this unsustainable position like this: “For the vast majority of teachers, the organisational structures and rules (the ‘grammar’) of schooling are too powerful a force to change or work against, especially after having watched colleagues who have tried burn out or leave the profession” (p. 273; see also Vare 2020, p. 75).

However, and despite the contradictory gap, teachers teach ES-issues every day within the structures of schooling and navigate between the structures of schooling and ESE. As can be seen in our studies of classroom practices, teachers are able to address the complex ethical dimension of ESE within the structures of syllabuses, tasks and accountability surrounding their teaching. When we observe teachers successfully navigating between schooling and ESE, it does not appear to be extraordinary but is rather professionally mundane and a genuine part of their everyday ESE teaching. Against this background, it is important to move beyond the structural and dichotomous understanding of the relation between schooling and ESE and instead theorise how this relation takes shape and can be dealt with in teaching practice.

The aim of this article is to propose a theoretical understanding that makes it possible to overcome the dichotomy between schooling and ESE. To do this, we draw on pragmatist philosophy, and specifically on John Dewey’s concept of habits (1938a). From this theoretical perspective, the relation between schooling and ESE can be understood as two different learning habits that teachers set the scene for in their classrooms: the habit of schooling and the habit of inquiry. Thus, instead of seeing teachers as being caught between schooling and ESE as two contradictory systems, our pragmatist conceptualisation points to how teachers and students can actively shift between the two learning habits in their ESE practices. We argue that both habits are important for a robust and vital ESE and illustrate our pragmatic understanding with empirical examples from a recent classroom study.

**Previous conceptualisations – contradictions and gaps**

A key text in the discussion about the relation between schooling and environmental education (EE), and later ESD and ESE, is Stevenson’s (1987/2007) book chapter from 1987. Twenty years after its first publication, the journal *Environmental Education Research* dedicated a special issue, 13(2), to Stevenson’s argument, in which the book chapter was also reprinted as an article. He argues the main characteristics of EE are incommensurable with the structures of schooling. Stevenson outlines four aspects in which the gap becomes evident.

First, while EE aims at transforming the values underpinning Western society, the dominant aim of schools has instead been the reproduction of society’s values. Second, whereas EE requires an interdisciplinary approach that enables students to encounter real world problems, the dominant organisation of schools has instead been about theoretical problems organised in separate disciplines (Stevenson, 1987/2007, p. 146). Third, while EE requires that students encounter “ill-structured” problems where the solution is not obvious, teachers tend to focus on structured problems that are compatible with assessment procedure expectations. Fourth, and last, EE challenges teachers’ epistemological assumptions, in that it depends on a holistic and
subjective understanding of knowledge. Considering Stevenson’s argument more than 30 years later, several aspects need to be highlighted. Educational systems around the world clearly emphasise the role of environmental and sustainability perspectives (UNECE 2016). Also, Sustainable Development Goal 4.7 aims to ensure that students develop skills to promote sustainable development (United Nations 2022), and policy initiatives, such as those of UNESCO (2014) explicitly aim to transform society. Thus, the policy and aim of schools today cannot simply be reduced to the reproduction of values. However, while there has been a discursive transition from EE to ESD in policy since 1987, Stevenson (2007a) argues that, if anything, the gap has widened and become accentuated in a school system that is driven by accountability.

Drawing on Stevenson’s article, Barratt Hacking, Scott, and Barratt (2007) named the gap between schooling and EE/ESD “Stevenson’s gap” – a term that has also been picked up by others1 (Breiting and Wickenberg 2010; Mogensen and Schnack 2010). Moreover, Stevenson’s argument and conceptualisation has been used broadly within the ESE research field to investigate educational practices (e.g. Smith 2007; Barratt Hacking, Scott, and Barratt 2007; Lotz-Sisitka and Schudel 2007; Blenkinsop, Telford, and Morse 2016; Vare 2020). In this sense, it has had a substantial impact on ESE research.

With reference to Stevenson, scholars like Paul Vare (2020) have empirically investigated the inherent contradictions that exist in the intersection between schools and EE and how teachers deal with these contradictions in practice. By analysing interviews with teachers in the UK, Vare identified a contradiction between the teachers’ aim to educate students without a bias for pro-sustainability on the one hand, and their aim to make sustainability underpin all teaching content and subjects across the curriculum on the other (p. 68). From these empirical findings Vare argues that the contradictions of implementing EE in schools need to be identified and assessed so that by making them explicit they can become a starting point for learning processes.

In the article that coined the term “Stevenson’s gap”, Barratt Hacking, Scott, and Barratt (2007) report on a study of a long-term EE project. By analysing the project in relation to the contradictions formulated by Stevenson in 1987, the authors show that it is possible to develop an environmental education within the present educational system that in many ways comes close to the visionary characteristics that Stevenson ascribes to EE. For example, the EE project took students’ knowledge and experience seriously, deployed a holistic approach to knowledge, and involved both parents and the local community in formulating the curriculum.

Another example of a study that explicitly addresses Stevenson’s gap is Blenkinsop et al.’s (2016) study of outdoor education. The researchers followed an outdoor school project that clearly stretched beyond the boundaries of traditional schooling. They identified that the outdoor teachers had certain pedagogical skills that the traditional school system and traditional “indoor” education could learn from. Although the project had solid support at policy level and was a successful example of a holistic EE, the researchers also identified that it lacked a deeper reflexivity that is crucial if Stevenson’s gap is to be overcome.

Even though these conceptualisations of the relation between schooling and ESE can play an important role in making the contradictions visible, they depend on a structural understanding of schooling and ESE. In that sense, they offer little support for how teachers can practically approach and navigate between the structures of schooling and the visionary ideals of ESE. Furthermore, this dichotomous understanding tends to reproduce a perspective where teachers have little room for agency when stuck between two contradictory structures. However, we also want to highlight that even if “Stevenson’s gap” is generally understood as a contradiction between structures, Stevenson (2007a) himself argues that there is a need to overcome both absolutist and dichotomous understandings of EE:

Rather than treat environmental education programmes and practices in absolutist or dichotomous terms of a critical inquiry–based approach or an information transmission approach, I’d argue that to open up possibilities for new practices we should look for and promote instances of pedagogical activities, assignments and assessments that engage students in the kinds of higher order or critical thinking required for analysing environmental issues. (Stevenson 2007a, p. 280)
Thus, Stevenson points attention to pedagogical activities that engage students in critical and higher order thinking and open up teachers and students to new practices that are not stuck in the dichotomous understanding. A key issue here is whether there is a need to open up for new practices to overcome the dichotomy, or whether teachers are already teaching in a way that surpasses the dichotomous understanding of the relation schooling and EE/ESE.

Given the structural focus of previous conceptualisations and Stevenson’s argument to overcome the dichotomy, it is important to articulate an understanding of teaching practice that overcomes the dichotomy between schooling and ESE. To do this, we turn to the pragmatist philosophy of John Dewey.

Theory

With the aim of overcoming the dichotomous understanding of schooling and ESE, Dewey’s pragmatist philosophy is a handy theory. Without going to deeply into Dewey’s pragmatism, there are two main reasons why pragmatism provides us with suitable concepts to complexify Stevenson’s gap. First, Dewey’s pragmatism turns to practice and human experience to describe the relation between human activity and the world. This means that pragmatism does not start or end in metaphysical concepts when explaining this relation (Dewey 1938a; see also Ryan 2011, pp. 39–41). Instead, from a pragmatist perspective, the meaning of a certain activity or phenomenon is found in the function and consequences of the activity in a specific practice (no more, no less). For the pragmatist, the fundamental question is not ‘what is reality?’ but rather ‘how is reality experienced?’ (Dewey 1905). As Dewey and Bentley (1949) formulate it: “We reject the ‘no man’s land’ [sic] of words imagined to lie between the organism and its environmental objects in the fashion of most current logics, and require, instead, definite locations for all naming behaviors as organic-environmental transactions under observation” (p. 121). Thus, meaning is found in practice and in the “the definite locations” of human experience, and not in the “no man’s land” beyond it which is metaphysical.

The second reason for drawing on pragmatism to nuance Stevenson’s gap relates to the first. As pragmatists understand practice as a totality that does not need to be mediated by metaphysical concepts, it follows that the traditional dichotomies, such as subject-object and mind-matter, dissolve as they become redundant for explaining practice (Dewey and Bentley 1949, p. 120-121; see also Garrison, Öhman, and Östman 2022). Thus, as pragmatism is a theory that dissolves dichotomies by turning to human experience, it functions as a suitable theoretical starting point for our aim to overcome the dichotomous understanding of Stevenson’s gap.

To conceptualise the relation between schooling and ESE from a pragmatist perspective, we specifically turn to Dewey’s (1922/1983) notion of habits. For Dewey, habits are fundamental to social life and reside in practice and activities. In daily use, habits refer to our non-reflective actions in the world and are synonymous with our routines. The Deweyan notion is more complex than this everyday use of the term. From Dewey’s perspective, habits should be understood as our very dispositions to the world. As dispositions, habits are socially learned and shared directions for action. In *Logics: The theory of Inquiry*, Dewey points out that “[a]ny habit is a way or manner of action, not a particular act or deed” (Dewey, 1938b, p. 13). This notion of habit is also developed in *Experience & Education*, where he describes how the principle of habit “covers the formation of attitudes, attitudes that are emotional and intellectual; it covers our basic sensitivities and ways of meeting and responding to all the conditions which we meet in living” (Dewey, 1938a, p. 27). This means that habit is not just a surface to our existence in the world but is also a concept that denotes our very disposition to our environment. The character and meaning of a habit are determined by its function in a specific practice and its connection to other habits (Lekan, 2003). In this way, a practice can be seen as consisting of a number of interconnected habits.
With this thicker definition of habits, Dewey makes a distinction between mechanical habits that are the repetitive, non-reflective actions in the world and dynamic habits that are flexible and reflective (see Hansen & James; Östman et al., 2019a; Ryan, 2011). As Hansen and James (2016) put it, the dynamic habits “constitute a generative starting point of action, but not an ending point” (p. 94). Mechanical habits emerge from repetition while dynamic habits develop through reflection over actions; in other words, dynamic habits emerge through education (Hansen & James, 2016). Moreover, learning a habit with a dynamic quality involves paying attention to certain objects rather than others. For this, the teacher has the key role of both selecting what is worth paying attention to and supporting students to develop this specific attentiveness (Östman et al., 2019a, p. 137, see also Östman et al., 2019b).

The notion of habits enables us to outline how the relation between schooling and ESE can be understood in terms of two learning habits: the habit of schooling and the habit of inquiry. As habits, they should be understood as two different predispositions to act. The habit of schooling is seen when students approach the teaching and learning content as a school task and when solving problems by finding new information. With the habit of inquiry, students approach the content as a wider environmental and sustainability problem and not just as a school task. In approaching these problems, the students enter a process of inquiry where the ethical dimension of the problem are brought to the surface. Below we illustrate how the relation between schooling and ESE is played out in educational practice. As the empirical examples highlight, both the habit of schooling and the habit of inquiry can be present in the classroom when students learn about ES-issues.

**Empirical illustrations**

**The empirical material**

The empirical material used in this article was collected in the research project “Teaching global equity and justice through a critical lens”, funded by Swedish Research Council. The material consists of interviews with teachers and students and audio/video recordings from two upper secondary schools. In total, we interviewed five teachers and 14 students from four different classes. The material contains 23 h of video/audio files from classroom discussions and 9 h of interviews. When collecting the data, we followed the ethical guidelines provided by the Swedish Research Council. The participants were informed about the study both verbally and in writing, and they gave their consent to participate. An ethical consideration with regard to this article is the tension between protecting the identity of the participants and providing enough context for the empirical illustrations to be clear and informative. When these two principles collided, we opted for the former. Thus, in order to protect the identity of the participants we have omitted contextual aspects that could have provided more in-depth knowledge about the situations.

**The empirical illustrations**

To outline our theoretical argument we followed two methodological steps. In the first step we mapped Stevenson’s argument and identified how it characterises the relation between schooling and ESE. In this step we also read texts that in different ways have used, developed and discussed Stevenson’s argument (Barratt Hacking et al., 2007; Blenkinsop et al., 2016; Vare, 2020). Thus, the section on previous conceptualisations of Stevenson’s argument should not only be understood as a description of previous research, but also as a methodological step that is necessary for formulating the novelty of our pragmatist conceptualisation.

In the second step, we engaged Dewey’s notion of habit as a theoretical tool to conceptualise the relation between schooling and ESE. The notion of habit enabled us to develop a
perspective where the relation between schooling and ESE was not seen as a gap between contradictory systems, but as a relation consisting of two different learning habits. In our research in upper secondary schools in Sweden, the four illustrations are not rare. We identified habit of schooling and the habit of inquiry regularly across all our video/audio recordings in the classrooms. In this sense, they are embedded in an everyday approach to teaching and learning in our collected data. In the four situations outlined below, we observed clear-cut illustrations of the two learning habits.

In short, we use the empirical illustrations to show how the relation between schooling and ESE can be understood in terms of learning habits. When this relation is understood in terms of learning habits, it becomes clear that teachers are already shaping the relation between schooling and ESE in their daily teaching practices rather than confronting a contradiction.

Stevenson’s gap as two learning habits

In this section we present four empirical illustrations from two different Swedish upper secondary schools. The first two illustrations come from a lesson at School A and show concrete examples of the habit of schooling and habit of inquiry when students encounter the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a teaching content. The third and fourth empirical illustrations come from a lesson at School B and show the two learning habits when students encounter the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) as a teaching content.

Habit of schooling: sustainable development goals

This empirical example illustrates how the students used their habit of schooling to solve a problematic situation. In School A, the students studied the SDGs during a social science lesson and were split into groups of 2–4 students, with each group being given one of the SDGs to consider. Their task was to find information online and give a short presentation at the end of the lesson about what the goal meant and how it could be achieved. The syllabus for social science in Swedish upper secondary schools includes sustainable development as a teaching and learning topic, which means that the task that the students are given is not uncommon or special.

One of the groups consisted of two boys, Daniel and Peter, who worked with SDG 10, “Reduce Inequality”. Their approach and handling of the questions can be seen as an example of the habit of schooling. These boys encountered a problem which was to give a presentation about inequality at the end of the lesson. To do this, they needed to find information about the goal, its obstacles and its consequences. Their problematic situation revolved around the forthcoming presentation rather than with the causes of and solutions to inequality as such. This meant that they stumbled on several sub-problems in this problematic situation, all of which could all be solved with their habit of schooling.

In the following excerpt Daniel and Peter had found a website about how some countries were experiencing an increase in economic inequality despite economic growth, and this was increasing both within and between countries. One of the problems they encountered was the kind of inequality referred to by the website.

Peter: Yes, gaps concerning gender equality? Is that what they are saying? Or what kind of gaps are they referring to?

Daniel: Yes, I think so.

Peter: Gaps between...no gaps between rich and poor is what I think they mean.

Daniel: Yes, then we take that.
The problem that the boys encountered here was not related to the problem of equality itself, but the problem of solving a task and identifying the content of their presentation. In this sense, the problem was not related to inequality as a societal phenomenon but to their presentation. The situation could be framed as the boys encountering a “school task problem” rather than a problem that existed outside their classroom.

In this excerpt, the boys handled the problem swiftly by concluding that the website referred to inequalities between rich and poor (rather than between men and women). This example illustrates that the issue of inequality did not play a crucial role, neither in relation to the problems they encountered nor to how the habit of schooling helped the boys out of the problematic situation. Their approach to the content, as a school task, does not open up to the existential and ethical dimension that content around social inequalities can bring forth. So, even if they were encountering the issue of inequality, no existential or ethical dimensions were brought to the surface in their discussion.

Daniel and Peter evidently learned new information about SDG 10 and inequality through statistics although it seemed as though the actual content (the question of inequality) could be substituted with any other content and that they would still be successful in their task. Almost without interruption, the boys stayed focused on their task during the entire lesson. Their activity during the lesson can be described as doing schoolwork. Even though this work required attention and diligence, it did not require a process of inquiry, since these boys already had the habit of schooling, which was sufficient for them to be successful at doing schoolwork.

**Habit of inquiry: sustainable development goals**

During the same lesson, three students were assigned SDG 2, “End hunger”. These students, here named Kristina, Liza and Gustav, searched the Internet for information on the topic and prepared their presentation.

They stumbled on a simple quiz game produced by the UN’s World Food Programme (WFP) called “Free Rice”. The students answered multiple choice questions about the meaning of certain English words, e.g. “the word ‘disease’ means…” If they clicked on the correct answer, in this case “sickness”, WFP donated 10 grains of rice to hungry or starving people. While playing this game the teacher joined them and asked how it was going. The students explained the game to him.

**Teacher** [Philip]: Is there a problem with handing out free food in the form of aid? […]

**Kristina**: Problem?

**Teacher**: Yes, is there a downside to it?

**Liza**: That you hand out free food?

**Teacher**: Yes, this may sound like a really odd question, but if we see it like… we are talking about economic systems.

**Liza**: Well, economically it clearly doesn't benefit anyone. But because the problem, or the major problem is that people are dying of hunger, then that's kind of priority number one. In that case you can't really think in economic terms.

**Teacher**: Exactly. What I meant was that local food producers might do this for a living. So, if free food is handed out to the population, what will happen to the local food producers and suppliers?

**Kristina**: Well, it will turn out even worse for them.

**Teacher**: Yes, they might not be able to continue. Then when the next problem, the next hunger crisis, drought and so on comes, there will be fewer active food producers, in which case the need will be even greater. So here we have the paradox of aid. I mean, aid is a good thing, but everything creates ripples on the water.
Liza: Yes, it is perhaps about emergency solutions as well as more long-term perspectives. Long-term is better if local farmers can get their production going. But in that situation, if someone is really malnourished, on the brink of dying, then it’s like…

[The teacher and students agree that this is a complex issue and that it relates to the SDG they are studying. The teacher then explains a little more about how handing out food is a complex issue for aid].

Teacher: So, are you ready [to give the presentation]?

Kristina: Yes, I’ll just write this down, the last… check this.

Gustav: I have donated 270 grains of rice!

Liza: Good! … or… but we don’t know if that is good.

Gustav: Apparently not, damn it!

In this excerpt, the teacher, here named Philip, disturbed the students’ habit of schooling. By posing the challenging question “is there a downside to it?” he provoked an ethical dilemma that required an inquiry process. In contrast to the boys in the previous excerpt, these students encountered a problem that was not only related to the forthcoming presentation but was also a societal problem outside the classroom. When approaching this kind of problem the students could not rely on their habit of schooling. The students entered a process of inquiry in which they started to define what handing out free food really meant. At the start of this inquiry, the student Liza saw that a problem with handing out food was that no-one benefitted economically from it. However, this does not seem to be the problem the teacher wanted them to focus on. The teacher instead wanted the inquiry to move on a bit further and therefore continued to ask what would happen to the local food producers if someone handed out free food. This kept the process of inquiry going. The process of inquiry also came to a temporary closure when Liza stated that it was perhaps about urgent solutions as well as long-term perspectives, which the teacher seemed to accept.

As part of our empirical data we also interviewed the teachers. During the interview with Philip, we asked him to read the excerpt from this situation and comment on his actions. He read the excerpt and explained his approach: “I usually try to provoke them. I try to challenge their conceptions” and “I see it as a sign of quality when they get a bit frustrated, that is a sign that they are on the way to seeing the complexity of the problem.” Philip’s action to challenge the students and their conceptions of aid was thus a deliberate act that was grounded in the explicit goal of getting the students to understand the complexity of the issue. In this way, Philip also opened up the ethical dimensions of the content to the students.

Habit of schooling: indigenous peoples’ rights

The third and fourth empirical illustration of how the relation between schooling and ESE can be seen as two learning habits is from School B. Here, the students studied a social science course with their teacher Jane. The lesson that we have chosen as an example concerns the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). At the start of the lesson the teacher introduced the Declaration and said that four countries voted against it because it impinged on their national sovereignty; although, they later changed their positions and adopted the Declaration. The teacher read a news article about the process aloud to the students and then split them into smaller groups of 3 or 4. In these small groups, the students’ task was to map out the conflicts relating to the Declaration and identify “Which articles are problematic or … spark conflicts? And discuss the pros and cons.” After the small group discussions, the teacher led a discussion in the classroom for all the students.
The following excerpt shows three students (Helen, Björn and Doris) discussing what the conflict is about and trying to identify which articles were criticised by the countries that voted against the Declaration. The excerpt illustrates how these three students approached the task with their habit of schooling.

Helen: I don’t know. So here is like Article 28. It refers to like compensation, or to like re-give them the land that they took. And obviously that is one of the conflicts, that you can’t just take land from someone that owns it now. You said that there was another Article?

[...]

Björn: Yeah. Article 26. The Declaration states that the indigenous people have the right to the land.

Doris: Territories and resources, which they can claim.

Helen: Oh. It’s like the same. What’s the difference between them?

Doris: Yeah.

Björn: Two different Articles. Same shit!

Helen: But Article 28 is like talking about compensation and 26 is talking about literally giving back what they took. Because compensation could be something else than the land. [...]

The students began by asking “What is the conflict?” and “Which articles are criticised?” and then identified that the main issue was about sovereignty and compensation. They linked the concepts of sovereignty and compensation to Articles 26 and 28 in the Declaration. Moreover, they tried to map the differences between Articles 26 and 28, which led Björn to conclude that they were the “same shit”, while Helen discerned some differences between them.4

The problematic situation that these students faced was to formulate a suitable answer to the questions. They did this by analysing the Articles in the Declaration as tasked. Thus, the problem that they faced could be solved by deploying their habit of schooling. With this habit they tried to identify aspects in the Declaration that might answer the questions posed by the teacher. As the problem was purely epistemic, in the sense that they could solve the problem by gathering more information, their habit of schooling was an effective and successful way of approaching it.

**Habit of inquiry: indigenous peoples’ rights**

When the students in the above excerpt ended their group discussion their teacher Jane then led a classroom discussion. The classroom discussion was an example of how the teacher transformed the question “What is the conflict?” from a school task into a societal problem with conflictual and ethical dimensions. In the excerpt below, when the teacher framed the problem as a societal problem she did so by actively steering the students away from their focus on specific Articles in the Declaration.

Teacher [Jane]: Alright people. OK. What is the conflict here people? What is the conflict?

Anna: The indigenous people are not getting what they deserve.

Teacher: Mm. Discrimination. And this is true. I mean if you look generally at this population in comparison to the general population, generally speaking, indigenous peoples have lower life expectancy, lower health… don’t get equal access to health care, education. Marginalised in many, many ways; which is true.

Helen: But I guess the problem is that…. I think they want to compensate the indigenous people, but it’s like who is to decide what compensation is right, how much, and to who. Like who is…

Teacher: Yes. Who is indigenous people? We were talking about it here in this classroom. What does it really mean?
Helen: Who is supposed to get compensation? And also if they want their land back, then they’re asking the US to take the land from someone and give it back to them. Basically, they are saying that what they did a long time ago was wrong. So, it’s like a little bit… I understand why they should have that land, but now since it was so long ago, it’s also a little bit… Like you can’t really punish me for what my grandfather did. But I’m not saying that they shouldn’t be compensated. Obviously they should.

Teacher: Mm. But the problem here is... We will get to that when we get to the individual Articles. Did I forget any point here that you addressed? Like can you punish landowners today for the sins of the past? Whose land is it? Can you take land and say “OK, you guys, you are not having that. You guys are having that.” Who is indigenous peoples? Who is this group that we’re talking about? What is their definition? I mean should we read the actual Declaration it doesn't say. It just goes straight “The indigenous peoples have the following rights bla bla bla”. But of course it is sad. It's meant to do something about historical injustices, right? Like we will not have a sustainable society if we don't address these imbalances, if we don't do something.

Helen: This idea of compensation reminds me a bit of like Britain giving Israel to the Jews. And that didn’t really work out well.

Here, the students and the teacher faced a problem that they were unable to solve by comparing and analysing specific Articles in the Declaration. The teacher not only steered the students away from discerning specific Articles by saying “We will get to that when we get to the individual Articles”, but also underlined that the Declaration was not helpful in this problematic situation: “Who is indigenous peoples? […] I mean should we read the actual Declaration it doesn’t say. It just goes straight “The indigenous peoples have the following rights bla bla bla”. But of course it is sad. It's meant to do something about historical injustices, right? Like we will not have a sustainable society if we don't address these imbalances, if we don't do something.

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In contrast to the students’ own group discussions, the teacher posed the question “What is the conflict?” in a radically different way than the students. She did not pose it as a question that could be answered with facts and information found in the Declaration. Instead, she posed it as a question that required ethical standpoints as answers. She opened up the ethical dimension of the content by raising more conflictual questions, such as: “Can you punish landowners today for the sins of the past? Whose land is it? Can you take land and say ’OK, you guys, you are not having that. You guys are having that.'”

The teacher and the students did not find a solution to the problem and it seemed clear to them that they would not find it in the Declaration itself or with their habit of schooling. Their inquiry process into this issue was not fully completed during the lesson. However, the students encountered the content of UNDRIP in a completely different way than when sitting on their own and discussing it.

Discussion – ESE needs both learning habits

The aim of this article is to overcome the dichotomous understanding of the relation between schooling and ESE. This is done by identifying two learning habits inherent to the relation: the habit of schooling and the habit of inquiry. A key question is: what are the benefits of formulating the relation as two learning habits?

Understanding the relation between schooling and ESE is understood as a gap between contradictory structures reproduces a narrow understanding of teaching and learning in ESE. In short, it reproduces the idea that due to their complex and multidisciplinary character of ES-issues have no place in the structures of schooling. As mentioned in the introduction, this not only leaves us with a narrow understanding of teaching and learning, but also limits the understanding of teachers’ agency and actions. The dichotomous conceptualisation presents teacher practice as a choice between either pursuing a visionary ESE or subjugating to the grammar of schooling (cf. Stevenson, 2007a, p. 273). This conceptualisation of ESE
requires teachers not only to establish a learning environment that is societal transformative, but also to develop a “conscious practice of questioning the epistemological and even ontological assumptions that underpin mainstream education” (Blenkinsop et al., 2016, p. 354). The pragmatist conceptualisation that we put forward enables us to overcome this dichotomous understanding by stressing how teaching and learning in ESE take place through both a habit of schooling and a habit of inquiry. As the empirical illustrations show, students approach ES-issues as traditional school tasks and as wider societal problems that require ethical reflection and inquiry. Given this, it is problematic if ESE research conceptualises the habit of inquiry as the only learning habit that is good enough for ESE. As we see it, the two learning habits have important roles to play in a robust and vital ESE. For example, even if the students Daniel and Peter in first excerpt did not encounter the ethical dimension of inequality, or discuss the complexity of achieving SDG 10, they at least learned something valuable. Thus, the habit of schooling should not be downplayed in ESE as it has a role to play when learning about environmental and sustainability issues. With this said we do not want to overlook the problems that the habit of schooling entails.

As previous conceptualisations have accurately pointed out, education has been affected by increased accountability and instrumentality (Gruenewald and Manteaw, 2007; Stevenson, 2007b). When measurable outcomes become the only kind of learning that counts, both for the individual student and for the educational system, there is a risk that the habit of schooling becomes the only reasonable way for students to approach ES-issues. This would limit the meaning and scope of ESE and diminish its existential and ethical dimensions. Moreover, a habit of schooling that is driven by an intensified culture of accountability would not only limit students’ experiences of ESE, but also limit the scope of teachers’ professional judgement and autonomy. If the habit of schooling is the dominant way of handling ES-issues in classrooms there is a risk that teachers’ work become reduced to delivering school tasks and assignments. That would move teaching farther away from being a reflective and autonomous practice that is grounded in teachers’ professional judgment (Hopmann, 2007; Westbury, 2000).

What our contribution shows is that both learning habits can be seen as valuable, in the sense that education is about studying the world and getting involved in it (see Öhman & Sund, 2021). It could be said that the habit of schooling is directed towards the intellectual aspect and students’ distant knowledge of ES-issues while the habit of inquiry is directed toward students’ own moral and emotional relations to them.

As we observed in our classroom studies, teachers are already shaping the relation between schooling and ESE through their teaching. The notion of habits enables us to theorise this practice without falling into a dichotomous understanding in which teachers are seen as being caught between either schooling or ESE. Our proposal for a pragmatist understanding is primarily directed to the ESE research field. However, the notion of habits is not only valuable for ESE research but could also be valuable for teachers’ reflexive practice. By way of conclusion, we therefore want to turn to practice and point to how the pragmatist understanding of habits can be used by teachers when planning and reflecting on their ESE practices. With the two learning habits in the foreground, teachers can raise reflective questions about their teaching, such as:

a. When is the habit of schooling appropriate and when is the habit inquiry appropriate in my lessons?
b. How can I stimulate, and privilege, the habit of inquiry in my teaching?
c. Can the students go through all my lessons by merely deploying the habit of schooling?
d. How does my teaching frame the ESE content in terms of “school task” and “challenging questions”?
e. What dimensions of the content do I want the students to encounter during my lessons?
Questions like these can support teachers when navigating within schooling and ESE, as well as in their active shaping of the relation between schooling and ESE (cf. Öhman & Sund, 2021, p. 4–6). In this way, the pragmatist conceptualisation provides a practical perspective on the relation between schooling and ESE that could be a support function for teachers' reflective practices in ESE.

Notes
1. The gap between schooling and EE/ESD has been given many labels. Even those who directly refer to Stevenson's conceptualisation (1987/2007; 2007a) use various terms, such as philosophy-practice gap (Barrett Hacking et al., 2007), rhetoric-reality gap (Hart and Hart 2014), discourse-practice gap (Vare 2020) and Stevenson's gap (Barrett Hacking et al. 2007; Breiting and Wickenberg 2010; Mogensen and Schnack 2010).
2. Östman, Van Poeck, and Öhman (2019a) use the terms ‘frozen’ and ‘plastic’ to depict the different qualities that habits can have.
3. All the names of the students and teachers in this article are pseudonyms.
4. Later in this discussion the students outlined more distinct differences between the two Articles in the Declaration.

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