

Teaching Sustainability in Schools in the Anthropocene

Emil Mörk, Karlstad University

The Swedish curriculum with its intention for sustainable development is formed around the presumption that sustainability is possible and something to preserve or obtain. However, this presumption is challenged in the new geological epoch, i.e. the so called Anthropocene or human dominated epoch, which is sometimes perceived as the end to the possibility of sustainable development. Consequently, school curriculums face contradictions about when and how they should educate about sustainability while how much of the dreadful truth should be included. For example, fear of climate change (atmosfear), as one of the biggest Anthropocene challenge, can lead to a paralyzed state for individuals and policy makers to take actions. This creates a paradox where true knowledge about adverse climate change impacts could lead to the inability of action. In turn, this raises some of the most fundamental questions in didactics, i.e., what is the purpose of education, and what power education holds?

Civic (Samhällskunskap) is both a normative/progressive and a descriptive subject taught in schools, and the paradox between both facts and actions and between sustainability and the Anthropocene will likely be more present here than in most other subjects. I argue that disentangling the challenges that the Anthropocene brings to the curriculum of the Swedish subject Civic regarding teaching sustainability, require new forms of knowledge and curriculums. This requires research on several interlinked arenas, for example the curriculums formulation, transformation, and realization arenas.

A planned first article will focus on what knowledge social-ecological scholars consider important knowledge for people to understand and act in the new epoch. This will be an attempt to start the process of mapping what to consider powerful knowledge as described by Young in and about the Anthropocene. In following studies, the result of the first article will relate to what knowledge is taught in Swedish civic subject.

Time: Monday 4.4, 10:30, room E610