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# The political dimension in ESE: the construction of a political moment model for analyzing bodily anchored political emotions in teaching and learning of the political dimension

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## ABSTRACT

This article departs from the understanding of environmental sustainable education (ESE) as a political project that consists of dissonant and conflicting voices. The aim of the article is to understand how affection, i.e. bodily sensations, transform into political emotions in teaching and learning settings. The article offers a philosophical and empirically based model called the 'political moment model' for analyzing bodily anchored political emotions in teaching and learning of the political dimension. The model was developed in response to an empirical case study where the data were somewhat confusing. In order to understand the empirical data, we used parts of Mouffe's theory of the political and various scholars' work on political emotions and placed these aspects in a pragmatist standpoint of experience, emotions and meaning making. The model helped to investigate students' experiences of the political dimension in situations where they experienced affection, i.e. bodily sensation, and emotions in connection with reflections and discussions about how to handle public issues of sustainable development. The article ends with a theoretical discussion of the findings in order to understand the political dimension in teaching and learning activities and to discern possible directions for future research on political moments in ESE.

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## 1. Introduction

The aim of the article is to present a theoretical model that deals with an aspect of the political dimension we call a political moment. Håkansson, Östman, and Van Poeck (2017) have identified different situations in which the political dimension can occur in teaching and learning activities in ESD settings. Classifying these situations resulted in a typology (the political tendency) that distinguishes 'democratic participation', 'political reflection', 'political deliberation' (sub-divided into 'normative deliberation', 'consensus-oriented deliberation' and 'conflict-oriented deliberation') and 'political moment'. Democratic participation focuses exclusively on the form and process of participation in democracy. It is a particular way of addressing the overall, shared question of how to organise social life, namely through a focus on how to distribute voices and power within the classroom and the school as an institution. Political reflections manifest the teachers' aim of making students rationally reflect on controversial

sustainability issues as social and shared issues. Political deliberation focuses on argumentation: to defend, for example, an opinion in light of a real or potential decision regarding how to organise a sustainable society. Political deliberation can be executed in three distinct ways in an educational context: normative deliberation, consensus-oriented deliberation and conflict-oriented deliberation. The fourth and last category is political moment. A political moment consists of being strongly bodily affected in a situation in which sustainable development is discussed as a public issue, and the subsequent process of inquiring and making meaning of this affectedness. In this way, we explore political emotions in teaching and learning of the political dimension, i.e. the ways in which the affection is shaped by and played out in relation to a political dimension.

This article takes departure from scholars that highlight arguments about environmental sustainable education (ESE) being a political practice (Van Poeck and Vandenberghe 2012; Bengtsson and Östman 2013; Knutsson 2013; Sund and Öhman 2014; Van Poeck, Goeminne, and Vandenberghe 2016). The argument is that conflict-oriented ESE is a productive way to emphasize the political dimension of environmental and sustainable issues in teaching. In line with this, Öhman and Öhman (2013) reported that discussions and deliberations in pluralistic ESE teaching often become consensus-oriented, and making the conflictual character (in a political sense) of environmental and sustainability issues invisible.

Although there are many good theoretical reasons as to why a conflict-oriented ESE could be productive in relation to students' learning, few studies have investigated such teaching and learning activities empirically, especially in terms of educational content that may include emotionally charged political issues. We therefore decided to do this.

However, as described later in the article, we ended up with contradictory and confusing qualitative data consisting of two different and seemingly incompatible pictures: outward consensus and (unspoken) disagreement. This served as a springboard to a re-examination of political and educational theories underpinning the design of the empirical investigation. In the process of re-examination, we combined Mouffe's theory of the political,<sup>1</sup> scholars' writings about political emotions and a pragmatist standpoint on experience, emotions and meaning making. The theoretical and empirical work led to the development of a model suitable for analyses of moments where students' deal with affection, i.e. bodily sensations, and how bodily sensations can transform into political emotions in students' meaning making of a political dimension. We call the model 'political moment model' (PMM). Before presenting the PMM, we describe the journey from the contradictory and confusing qualitative data to the construction of the new analytical model. This illustrates how the model was developed by a constant interplay between theoretical, methodological and empirical work. The investigation is based on empirical examples from an upper secondary school in Sweden.

In the first section the study's design is presented. In the second we describe the two seemingly incompatible pictures – outward consensus and (unspoken) disagreement – that confronted us when analyzing the empirical data. The third section contains our reading of parts of Mouffe's theory of the political, in combination with various scholars' work on political emotions and how these aspects are related to a pragmatist standpoint on experience, emotions and meaning making. How this helped us to develop a model for analyzing political moments is also discussed. The model is then both described and applied to the empirical data in order to illustrate how the model can be used for analyzing students' meaning making of a bodily anchored emotionally charged political dimension.

This section ends by a discussion of the relation between the experience of a political moment and the meaning making of the political dimension that may take place. In the fourth and final section, we discuss the findings in order to understand the cognitive and emotional aspects of the political dimension, and the teaching and learning that takes place. The prospects for future research are also considered.

## 2. The start of a research journey: confusing results from an empirical investigation

### 2.1. Description of the empirical investigation

Öhman and Öhman (2013) and others have shown that pluralistic ESE teaching often turns into consensus-oriented discussions in the classroom. These results sparked our interest to find out *how* learning emerges in a conflict-oriented discussion and *what* learning by participating in conflict creates. Based on this interest, and together with a teacher, we decided to design a lesson that would optimize the possibility of generating a conflict-oriented discussion amongst the students. This lesson can be characterized as pluralistic in that it includes diverse ways of approaching environmental and sustainability issues, for example, explanations of the causes of problems, who is responsible for them, who the central stakeholders are, what the solutions to the problems might be and how ecological, cultural, economic, political and social aspects are connected to environmental and sustainability issues. We designed the investigation to empirically study the role of conflict in learning processes when students participate in conflict-oriented ESE discussions.

The lesson started by splitting the class into two groups. Each group was given instructions about what to discuss. When the group discussion was over the groups were asked to gather and discuss the ideas that had been generated together in class. The teacher did not take part in the group discussions but did coordinate the class discussion. This kind of lesson design was familiar to the class. The first group was asked to discuss whether a person should break the law to achieve a sustainable society. The second group was asked to discuss the possibilities of reaching a sustainable society, particularly regarding what to do with citizens who were unwilling to participate in the goal of achieving such a society. We video recorded the discussion in the two groups as well as the subsequent class discussion. The two separate group discussions lasted for 35 min and the class discussion for 30 min. Immediately after the lesson the students were given a questionnaire and asked to: (1) describe how they experienced the lesson and what they learned from it and (2) describe the emotions the discussion raised. The students wrote by hand for between 5 and 20 min and everyone filled about a half page. Participation in the video recordings and the questionnaire was voluntary. All the students – 8 females and 5 males – participated.

### 2.2. Result 1: consensus-oriented discussion

We were able to conclude in our analyses of the video recorded lesson that the students' discussions were more consensus-oriented than conflict-oriented. No disagreements could be found in the video material, which means that we did not see any emotional investment in opinions or in the students' argumentations. Rather, we found profound cognitive consensus-oriented political reflections in both the small group discussions and the class discussion. The following two excerpts exemplify this. In Group 1, the group discussing whether a person can break the law to achieve a sustainable society, the theme for the discussion was the need to reduce the freedom of the individual. In the following excerpt, three of the six participants are actively involved in the discussion.

Carl: I believe it is the freedom of the individual that is the obstacle for this development.

Sandra: that is actually true

Carl: you can say what you want about freedom, but why should we be able to buy cars that pollute too much? Why should we be able to buy, sort of, maybe cheaper alternatives of products that harm the environment, when there are maybe more expensive but environmentally friendly products?

Sandra: I think it's because it has always been like that

Susanne: I think we must redefine freedom

Carl: Yes

Susanne: ... put other values....

Carl: ... Yes ...

Susanne: ... And not, sort of, have hundreds of different options for freedom. Freedom must be like a green forest that we can walk in. Then it gets very hazy and unreliable.

Carl: Freedom is like a mantra – personal freedom ...

Sandra: ... you shall just have it ...

Carl: ... and nobody knows what it is

Group 2 discussed a different kind of problem, namely the possibilities of achieving a sustainable society if some citizens were unwilling to participate in its achievement. Similar problems and solutions were raised in this discussion as in Group 1. The following example is from a situation in which the teacher comes over and asks the group to summarize their discussion before joining the other group for a class discussion.

Mark: [inaudible] People stop whining and not go on nagging about everything

Sven: That was your suggestion

Sophie: (points at Mark) I agree with that

Christine: freedom in every aspect is as bothersome as hell

Mark: it was an alternative that we brought up. I didn't say we agreed on it. It was an alternative that I brought up, it was a position that I pushed

Amelia: I agree with you [inaudible]

Mark: democratic reduction for the good of the public

Christine: and you know what that is?

Mark: yes (long pronunciation)

Amelia: we agree that maybe there was a bit too much freedom, thus in some cases ....

Sven: ... Yes a bit too much freedom ...

Amelia: too much to choose from and too few rights in some cases. Can't we agree that we thought that?

Teacher: too few rights and a bit too much freedom?

Nina: too poorly defined rights [inaudible]

Amelia: yes, there were

In short, the students' conclusion in Group 2 can be summarized with the aid of one student's statement: 'there is too much freedom and too few obligations in society'. Thus, the analysis shows an overall consensus about the main obstacle for achieving a sustainable society, namely that people have too much freedom to act. This was expressed in both groups and was also raised in the class discussion.

Despite the fact that we tried to create the best circumstances as possible in order to generate a conflict-oriented discussion amongst the students, the findings were the same as those reported by Öhman and Öhman (2013), namely that many students' arguments are aimed at mutual agreement in classroom discussions. Nevertheless, although the design of the lesson was probably not as good as we first imagined, it became clear in the analyses of the responses to the questionnaire that some of the students expressed an experience of a political moment.

### **2.3. Result 2: pupils' conflict-oriented responses to the questionnaire**

The analysis of the students' responses to the post-lesson questionnaire showed a need to problematize the consensus-oriented picture produced by the video analysis. This was because some of the responses illustrated a conflict-oriented experience, such as in the following statements:

Personally I felt provoked by some opinions and assertions at the same time as I thought some were very clever. (student A)

At the same time my classmates' contributions sometimes make me worry about different world views and accordingly how different my own world view could run our world. (student D)

These responses demonstrate that the class discussion gave rise to emotionally strong experiences of a conflictual situation: the words 'provoked' and 'worry' indicate this. Thus, from the analysis of the video recordings and the questionnaire, two seemingly incompatible pictures emerge: outward consensus yet unspoken disagreement. We wanted to make sense of these pictures, and especially the fact that several students did not articulate their emotionally strong aversion to the opinions and arguments put forward by some of their classmates. In particular, we wanted to have a political perspective on these emotions.

This confusion and incompatibility led us to read some scholarly writings about radical democrats<sup>2</sup> and especially those of the Belgian political philosopher Chantal Mouffe. This reading was done selectively in relation to the empirical material and our knowledge interest, and we switched back and forth between reading and analyzing the material. This process is captured in the process of constructing a model, as presented below.

### 3. The journey from confusing results to the construction of a theoretical model

As indicated, the confusing results directed our attention to read Mouffe's theory of the political. Mouffe states that democratic practice is not about creating consensus, but about dealing with conflict and disturbance in the context of a public space. Further, Mouffe explicitly argues that democratic practice is emotionally charged. This helped us to relocate the political dimension into processes of experience, meaning making and emotions.

The reading and use is presented below and is followed by a presentation of the PMM. The model is a result of our use of some parts of Mouffe's theory of the political, other scholars' writings about political emotions and situating these aspects in a pragmatist standpoint on experience, emotions and meaning making. In the third section we re-visit our empirical data in order to illustrate the use of the model in analyzing students' meaning making of a bodily anchored emotionally charged political dimension.

#### 3.1. Reading Mouffe's theory of the political

Using Mouffe (2013a), we ask why we should get involved in debates and deliberations concerning ways of organizing and re-organizing institutions and ways of formulating and re-formulating laws relating to our way of living together if there were no conflicts between different groups expressing different opinions. Mouffe (2013a) argue that there is no universal or rational best argument in political disputes, only different ethico-political interpretations. According to Mouffe (2013a), if there was no antagonism we would not get involved in emotionally invested arguments. We use the term political in line with Mouffe's (2009) analytical split between the political and politics:

... the dimension of antagonism that is inherent in human relations .... 'Politics', on the other side, indicates the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions which seek to establish a certain order and organise human coexistence in conditions that are always potentially conflictual because they are affected by the dimension of 'the political'. (101)<sup>3</sup>

Here we find that the political dimension, i.e. antagonism, is not only a constitutive condition for social relations, but also an ever present possibility to evolve in a disagreement or conflict. So, in politics we contest different orders to organize human coexistence and the political dimension constitutes the field of politics. Further, Mouffe's non-foundational approach to the political points to the idea that there is no final ground, no social objectivity, no essence, nothing beyond or unfolding a logic exterior to itself, or, in Mouffe's (2002) own words: '... no limited social actor can attribute to herself the representation of the totality and claim in that way to have the "mastery of the foundation"' (42). Marchart

(2007) expresses a similar position when he says: 'What is at stake is not the impossibility of *any* ground, but the impossibility of a *final* ground' (155). From this it follows that in a situation with an irreducible plurality of values, interests, or the like, it is impossible to adopt them all in one decision. That these conflicting alternatives are irreducible is the reason why Mouffe claims the possibility of antagonism. According to Mouffe (1993) there is:

no common ground between those conflicting articulations, there is no way of subsuming them under a deeper objectivity which would reveal its true and deeper essence. This is the basis for the assertion of the constitutive and irreducible character of antagonism. (40, 41)

Mouffe describes this situation as one of undecidability, which means that multiple options create a split between equally possible choices and that no previous experience, routine or habit can help to determine the decision. Thus, undecidability is an inevitable condition of decidability. In other words, Derrida writes that a fully informed decision is not 'accessible to man' (Derrida 1992, 55), otherwise the decision would only be a programmable application or an unfolding of a calculable process. Thus, in a decision, these multiple options inevitably create, include and exclude values, interests etc. Mouffe (1996) explains that:

There are many different forms of flourishing for human beings and they are exclusive of each other. It is not that we do not have, materially, the space or the time. It is that if you choose one thing, you necessarily exclude the other. Decisions have to be made, and to decide on one alternative is to exclude the other. (138)

Mouffe (2013a) further argues that 'the domain of politics is not and cannot be the domain of the unconditional because it requires making decisions in an undecidable terrain' (17) to achieve 'a temporary respite in an ongoing confrontation' (Mouffe 2009, 102, see also Mouffe 1992, 14). Based on Mouffe, we can state that the political dimension occurs in situations where we are 'making a choice between conflicting alternatives' (Mouffe 2010, 14). It is thus the potential of antagonism and the fact that someone's values or interests have to be excluded in a decision-making process that Mouffe's theory of the political pays attention to. According to Mouffe, this situation risks turning a friendly *we/they* relation into a relation between enemies. Mouffe (1995) explains that a conflictual situation includes a:

double movement: on the one hand, the consolidation of a 'we' – the friend side – by establishing a certain type of relationship among its different components; on the other hand, the designation of the 'them' – the 'enemy' whose exclusion from the range of difference that are considered as legitimate inside the circle of the 'we' will determine what are the limits imposed by pluralism. (39, 40)

Equally important for our model is Mouffe's (2005) understanding of the crucial role of passion in people's relations to the political dimension. Taking her departure in the writings of Carl Schmitt (1976), Mouffe (2013b) states that:

What the rationalist approach is unable to grasp is that what moves people to vote is much more than simply the defence of their interests. There is an important affective dimension in voting and what is at stake there is a question of identification (2) ... The prime task of democratic politics is neither to eliminate passions nor to relegate them to the private sphere in order to establish a rational consensus in the public sphere, it is, rather to 'tame' these passions by mobilizing them for democratic ends and by creating collective forms of identification around democratic objectives. (186)

According to Mouffe, envisaging politics as a rational process of negotiation among individuals not only eradicates the political, 'it is also to neglect the predominant role of passions as moving forces of human conduct' (Mouffe 1993, 140). However, Mouffe does not tell us much about the role these passions or affections play in the decision-making of individuals or collectives. What we can glean from Mouffe's theory of the political is that antagonism implies affect and emotions, in that there are things at stake. To further develop what this can mean in terms of meaning making of the political dimension in classroom practice, we first turn to scholars of 'the emotional turn in politics' and then to scholars who take a pragmatic approach to experience and meaning-making.

### 3.2. *The PMM: analyzing processes of meaning making of a poignant experience of the political dimension in environmental and sustainable issues*

Several scholars acknowledge that political life is not just about cognition and reason, but is also fraught with emotions (Clarke et al. 2006; Ferry and Kingston 2008; Leach 2010; Solomon 2008). This ‘turn’ indicates shortcomings in cognitivist research that excludes the emotional dimension of conflict. In studies of the political, emotion is the indicator that tells us when something important is ‘at stake’ in a political issue or event (Leach 2010). Several scholars argue for the need to pay attention to the importance of affects, feelings, passions and emotions in political life (Koziak 2000; McClain 2009; Petray 2012). In addition, Gould (2001, 2010, 2011) suggests that reason and emotion make up a non-rational dimension of politics. Further, Goodwin et al. (2001) argue that ‘emotions are part of the “stuff” connecting human beings to each other and the world around them’ (10). In this sense, conflicts are sites of embodied political emotion where the adrenalin rushes and chills and gut feelings may arise as physical responses. Goodwin et al. (2001) discuss these as ‘immediate and intuitive emotional responses’ (13), whereas Gould (2010) uses the term ‘affect’ to point to physical responses as an effect of being affected (cf. Shouse 2005).

The term emotion is sometimes used interchangeably with affect, passion and feeling. In this study we discuss the terms affection and emotions and drawing on Gould’s (2010) using of particularly Massumi’s work (1987, 2002), Gould (2010) points to affect as an important aspect of the political, and describes affect as:

unfixed, unstructured, and something that we do not quite have language for, something that we cannot fully grasp or express but is nevertheless in play, generated through interaction with the world, and affecting our embodied beings and subsequent actions ... Affect is the bodily sensation that exceeds what is actualized through language or gesture. As a body’s registered sensation of a moment of existing relationally, interactively, in the world, affect is an effect of being affected, and an effect that is itself a preparation to act in response, but in no preset or determined way. ... (26, 27)

Another way of describing affect is in terms of immediate experience. Overgaard (2008) says that immediate experience ‘is our experience as it is “given”, that is, as it is *before* we start tampering with it, interpreting or editing it, actively working on it in some sense’ (291). The idea of immediate experience is clearly also a part of the pragmatic tradition. James (2003) calls it pure experience, Peirce (1992) refers to ‘firstness’ (see Bernstein 2010) and Dewey ([1925] 1981) discusses immediate qualitative experience. Albeit in slightly different ways, all these pragmatists emphasize the importance of experiences that are non-intentional and non-calculable, i.e. occurrences that you are struck by or catch your attention (see Johnson 2007). Gould’s description of affect as unfixed, unstructured bodily sensations that emerge in interaction with the world can, in phenomenological language, be called immediate experience. It is through this type of immediate experience that we can understand Mouffe’s claim that the political is constitutive of social relations and why we cannot ignore passions when understanding the political dimension. Thus, affects, feelings and emotions are important parts of a lived experience of the political dimension in people’s lives.

Here it is important to recognize both the difference and the continuity between affect and emotion. Affect is the trigger that makes you feel an emotion in a non-predetermined way. Emotions are thus a result of a process in which we work actively (interpreting, editing etc.) on the immediate experience or, in Dewey’s terminology, start an inquiry ([1938] 1986) where the affect – the bodily sensation – is the object of our inquiry. Boler (1997) explains: ‘[i]t’s not that I knew I felt bitter, and then happened to decide to express it. Rather, I expressed my anger and was told “You’re just bitter”’ (225, 226). Thus where immediate experience involves a bodily change, emotion is the expression of this bodily change, i.e. an effect of making inquiries into that change (James [1890] 1950, 499): ‘we feel fear, for example, *because* our heart is racing and our skin is sweating’ (Ahmed 2014, 5).<sup>4</sup> This differentiation between affect and emotion suggests that understanding is based on not only accepting one’s own so-called ‘gut’ reaction, but also incorporating an inquiry process to make meaning of this bodily change. Gould (2010) argues that if we not take notice of the affect, ‘we not only lose sight of the bodily, visceral qualities of feelings,

we also obscure a number of insights that an affective ontology provides for understanding political action and inaction' (25). However, as Gould (2010) explains:

In practice, it can be difficult to distinguish between affect and emotions. Affective states, for example, often generate immediate emotional displays, creating a sense that affect and emotional expression are on and the same and the affective states can quickly be fixed into named emotions. (28)

This article is inspired by the term moral reaction introduced by Öhman and Östman (2008). Here, immediate experience plays an important role in distinguishing situations, such as when people immediately react in order to rescue a person who is drowning. Moral reactions are spontaneous reactions that 'just happen', without any inquiry, and always express a moral responsibility for someone or something. A moral reaction can be seen as a non-inquired action to an immediate experience or a response to being affective, in that it is unintentional, 'goes deep' (Rhees, [1970] 1996, 98) and is physical, like a 'gut reaction' (Öhman and Östman 2008, 62, 63, see also Sund and Öhman 2014). What a moral reaction and a political moment have in common is that they are both strong affective experiences that are not planned in advance. Inspired by the term moral reaction, we have developed the term 'poignant experience of the political'. Here, we use Dewey's notion of the word poignant as an immediate, pre-cognitive experience. Dewey ([1925] 1981) says that:

Empirically, the existence of objects of direct grasp, possession, use and enjoyment cannot be denied. Empirically, things are poignant, tragic, beautiful, humorous, settled, disturbed, comfortable, annoying, barren, harsh, consoling, splendid, fearful; are such immediately and in their own right and behalf. If we take advantage of the word esthetic in a wider sense than that of application to the beautiful and ugly, esthetic quality, immediate, final or self-enclosed, indubitably characterizes natural situations as they empirically occur. These traits stand in themselves on precisely the same level as colors, sounds, qualities of contact, taste and smell. (82)

From this it follows that we perceive a poignant experience of the political as a pervasive, affectual, immediate and non-intentional bodily experience that is unfixed and not structured. An inquiry into the poignant experience will result in an emotion. To paraphrase Ahmed (2014), we can say that we feel antagonism because our heart is racing and our adrenalin starts to pump. Notably, this is not always observable for the other participants in the discussion.

Thus, a poignant experiences involves a bodily change that mean something to us, but the change is not yet made meaningful. To make the meaning meaningful we need to start an inquiry into the poignant experience, which results in some meaning being made of the affect, in our case the political. In order to make a clear distinction, we call the outcome of an inquiry process of poignant experience of the political as *meaning making of the political* (see model 1). In empirical terms, poignant experiences of the political do not become visible for researchers or other observers until a person uses gestures or language. The problem here is that when we use gestures or language we have already started to interpret and edit the poignant experience (Dewey [1934] 1987, Dewey [1938] 1986). Consequently, in 'expressing what we are feeling, a transformation occurs, a reduction of an unstructured and unrepresentable affective state with all of its potential into an emotion or emotions whose qualities are conventionally known and fixed' (Gould 2010, 27).

How is it possible to determine whether someone has a poignant experience of the political? Stenlund (2000) shows that one of the philosophical methods that Wittgenstein uses is to describe recognizable situations as reminders of the basic features of our language games. His method is descriptive and a posteriori to human practice (see Fann 1969 and Monk 1991), and the analysis is conducted with 'the assumption of being among "average people" with an everyday, average understanding of our language' (Stenlund 2000, 36, author's translation). In this approach, it is recognized that we humans use words and gestures as indirect reminders of feelings, situations and other experiences. Dewey ([1925] 1981) pinpoints this function in the human way of using words and gestures by saying that '[i]mmediate things may be *pointed* to by words, but not described or defined' (75). Thus, as humans we can articulate an affect or a feeling by using words and gestures; not because the word or gesture has a definite meaning that corresponds directly to that specific affect or feeling, but because it reminds us of an affect or feeling that we have had in another situation in the past. However, if the only way of determining whether or not someone has had a poignant experience of the political is through indirect

recognition, what kind of 'things' do we indirectly recognize as a poignant experience of the political? According to Mouffe (2005), in many conflicts the opponent is seen as a moral enemy rather than a political adversary. Mouffe (2005) explains:

What is happening is that nowadays the political is played out in the moral register. In other words, it still consists in a we/they discrimination, but the we/they, instead of being defined with political categories, is now established in moral terms. In place of a struggle between 'right and left' we are faced with a struggle between 'right and wrong'. (5)

From this it follows that we have to work out features or criteria with which to analytically and indirectly discriminate a situation as political and to separate a poignant experience as political from a poignant experience as moral in the analysis of students' communications by using gestures and/or language. Importantly, these criteria are constructed for analytical purposes. We have define the following four criteria:

- (1) The first criterion is the occurrence of a conflict. This means that an issue brings people together because it divides them (Latour 2005). In other words, there is enough in common to make contact and for values to get in each other's way, but not enough to avoid an indeterminate conflict situation. We call this a *conflictual criterion* in order to emphasize that the conflicting alternatives are *experienced as* irreducible – it is not possible to adopt all the alternatives in the decision, i.e. there is 'no common ground between those conflicting articulations' (Mouffe 1995, 41).<sup>5</sup>
- (2) The second criterion is that an issue is political if it is in the public domain. Here, rules, laws, issues of fairness of any kind, the distribution of social goods such as welfare and education, equality and issues about rights and responsibilities, public accountability or good governance are all regarded as political. In other words, a shared problem brings the participants to the table. A public emerges when those affected by a shared problem become aware of their interdependency and the need to engage in a joint activity of examining and monitoring the consequences. In this way, communications can be deemed political insofar as they concern collective choice or are likely to concern collective consequences at whatever point these arise, such as in how to organize social relations when making laws (see above). We call this a *public criterion*.
- (3) The third criterion is the *exclusion criterion*, which is connected to the conflict criterion. A central part of this criterion is the inclusion and exclusion process, in which certain standpoints are included and others excluded in the process of making a decision. Thus the decision also becomes an experience of an act of inclusion and exclusion and making 'a choice between conflicting alternatives' (Mouffe 2010, 14). This inclusion/exclusion process is linked to the creation of 'we' and 'they'. According to Mouffe (2013b), it is crucial to acknowledge the identity formation and the creation of a 'we' and a 'they' in processes of inclusion and exclusion. She argues that:
- (4) once we understand that every identity is relational and that the affirmation of a difference is a precondition for the existence of any identity – i.e. the perception of something 'other' which constitutes its 'exterior' – we can understand why politics, which always deals with collective identities, is about the constitution of a 'we' which requires as its very condition of possibility the demarcation of a 'they'. (59)
- (5) This criterion can, with the aid of Warren (1996), be described in more concrete terms as involving a disruption of 'some amount of previously assumed solidarity and communality' (252).
- (4) The fourth criterion is that the participant(s) communicate emotions, thereby showing that the conflict is something that goes deep and that something that is highly valued is at stake. Mouffe (2000) claims that: 'If there is anything that endangers democracy nowadays, it is precisely the rationalist approach, because it is blind to the nature of the political and denies the central role that passions play in the field of politics' (146). Ruitenberg's (2010) interpretation of Mouffe's emphasis on passions in politics is that 'passions are mobilized when the fundamental values and commitments that shape the practices, discourses and institutions of a society are at stake' (48). Therefore, political disagreements and conflicts are often deeply rooted. Furthermore, there is an important distinction between emotions themselves and emotions

in a political collective as part of a view of the social order. Ruitenbergh (2009) explains that the difference between moral and political emotions is primarily not one of kind or of intensity, but of object, and that this is necessarily bound up with a substantive vision of a just society. Ruitenbergh explains, 'one may feel angry with one's cheating brother's moral transgression and one may feel angry with the reduction in civil liberties as a result of anti-terror legislation' (277). Consequently an object of a political emotion is 'the ability to feel anger on behalf of injustices committed against those in less powerful social positions rather than on behalf of one's own pride' (Ruitenbergh 2009, 277). This is what we call an *emotion criterion*.

To briefly summarize the four criteria, we can say that if a person communicates a lived-through experience of an emotionally charged conflict about a public issue, where the decision-making processes inevitably involve inclusion and exclusion and the creation of a 'we' and a 'they', we can say that this communication expresses an experience of a political moment. If these criteria are fulfilled in the communication, we can say that the person is making meaning of a poignant experience of the political. Markedly, if a person chooses to not communicate this experience, then no-one will be able to recognize that the person has had such an experience.

Due to the empirical circumstance that we can only indirectly recognize a poignant experience of the political, we introduce the term *political moment* to cover the poignant experience, the inquiry of the poignant experience, the meaning making of the political and an actual or potential decision (see Figure 1). Notably, the four phases that constitute a political moment can only be described in analytical terms.

### 3.3. Revisiting the confusing results with the aid of the analytical model

In the following we use PMM to illustrate the use of the model in analyzing students' meaning making of a bodily anchored emotionally charged political dimension. In this case, we analyze two of the students' responses to the questionnaire in order to answer the following research question: Have these two students experienced a political moment?

The two students' responses to being asked to describe how they experienced the lesson and what they learned from it are provided below.

- Student D: At the same time my classmates' contributions sometimes make me worry about different world views and, consequently, how differently my own world view could run our world.
- Student E: Got a little upset when I realized that I am the only one who sees things this way.

As mentioned above, these responses demonstrate that the discussion in the classroom gave rise to emotionally strong experiences of a conflict situation and that the words 'worry' and 'upset' indicate this.

The first analytical step is to define whether these students' responses fulfil the criteria of being political. We interpret student D's statement as a description of an experience of the possible exclusion of his or her world view in favour of other totally different world views in decisions about how the world should be governed. Thus, here we find the public criterion and the conflict criterion. The exclusion criterion is also encountered when 'they' are identified as classmates. This experience of possible exclusion is also connected to the emotion criterion when student D uses 'worry' to express that this is something that concerns him/her. Student E's statement about being upset is to do with the fact that he/she is the only person who thinks in a particular way, which reflects being excluded as a minority. In this way, this statement touches on the same issue as student D's statement, namely an emotional reaction. We interpret that both student D and student E's reflections deal with the political dimension of sustainable development. We can also say that the student's use of the words worry and upset is an expression of political emotions. Using our analytical model, we could say that both student D and E have had a poignant experience of the political, which they make meaning of by an inquiry. This meaning making implies a transformation of a political affection into a political emotion.

In the exclusion criterion we highlighted that inclusion and exclusion is connected to an actual or potential decision. However, in the video recorded lesson no observable decision was made. Still, as we saw in student D and E's reflections about the experienced lesson, they seemed to understand that

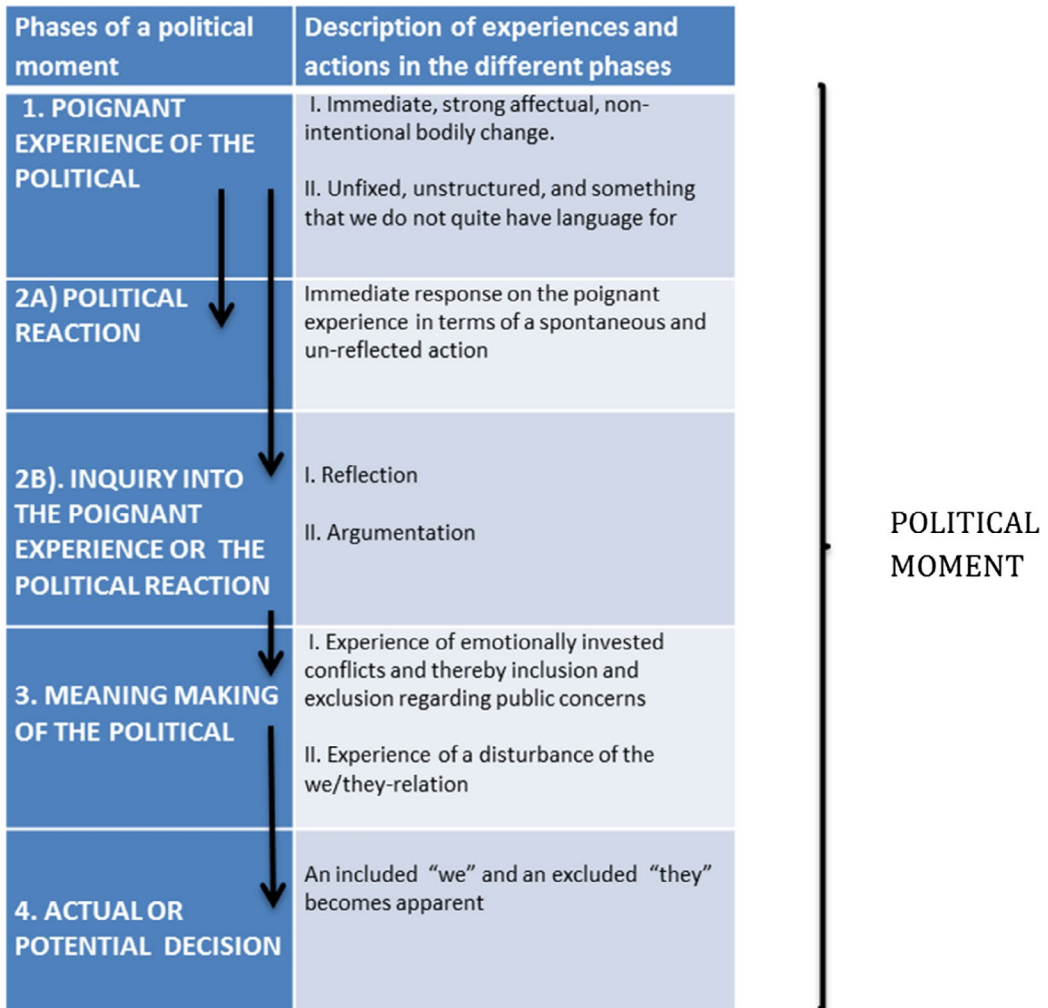


Figure 1. The Political Moment Model.<sup>6</sup>

Notes: We have not included in the figure the fact that from a poignant experience we can act immediately without reflection or inquiry. Such a 'political reaction' can be exemplified in a person in a strong affective mode, such as when taking an immediate stance in a controversial debate. See Öhman and Östman (2008) for a similar description and discussion regarding 'moral reaction'. A third way – not included in the model – of dealing with a poignant experience of the political dimension is a so-called non-action, i.e. we do nothing.

in order to reach a decision their world view would be excluded. In this example, this decision is prospective or potential. It is prospective in that it is not about a decision here and now, and is potential because it is an imagined possibility. Accordingly, the student's emotional reaction expressed as 'worry' and 'upset' becomes political according to the four criteria outlined above. From this it follows that these two students have made reflections that result in a specific disturbance of 'some amount of previously assumed solidarity and communality' (Warren 1996, 252). This means, for example, that a specific social relationship has changed when it comes to who in the school these two students share values with and when for them a new we/they relationship to their classmates occurs as a consequence. But this change in organizing the social is not made public, even though it will indirectly become visible in the way the two students relate to certain classmates in the future. We interpret that, in this particular situation, silence can be seen as a decision to not openly and directly disturb the social, even if the social from the perspective of these two students has already been disturbed. Such an approach to

political moments is understandable if it reflects a strategy that avoids risking existing social relations.<sup>6</sup> This new organisation of social relations means that some classmates will be or are manifested as ‘they’ in the conflict. As this perceived new organization of the social is not made public, the disturbance of the social cannot be directly experienced by their classmates. Additionally, this has consequences from an educational perspective, especially between those students who in the lesson actively expressed their thoughts and opinions and those who did not express their worries and concerns. In this way, the former group of students did not have the opportunity to encounter actual or potential inclusion and exclusion, but instead experienced consensus. Thus, their learning processes were different in relation to the so-called silent students who clearly disagreed with the consensus-oriented educational content. In this example, learning about the political dimension includes experiencing exclusion, an understanding of the conflictual and an identification of ‘we’ and ‘they’ in an actual or potential decision-making process. Therefore, ‘emotions are part of the “stuff” connecting human beings to each other and the world around them’ (Goodwin et al. 2001, 10). In addition, when a political moment in which making meaning of the poignant experience of the political is made public, conflict, antagonism and processes of inclusion and exclusion can evolve in the classroom and be experienced by everyone in the room. From a learning perspective, such a situation is of course quite different compared to that encountered in our empirical material.

In relation to the students’ reflections, we can say that both students have lived *through* a political moment. The inexplicable ‘gut’ reactions unintentionally set the stage for students to explore why and how they reacted to a poignant experience. This resulted in experiences of the political dimension as emotionally charged and consisting of a we/they relation that in a prospective and potential decision could end up as inclusion and exclusion.

#### 4. Summary and discussion

In this article, a philosophical and empirically based model has been developed in response to an empirical case study in which the data consist of outward consensus and unspoken disagreement. In order to better understand the empirical data we read parts of Mouffe’s theory of the political, studied research on political emotions and included pragmatist theory on emotions, experience and meaning making. We then re-analyzed our empirical data in order to understand the confusing picture of the investigation. The re-analyzing ended with the construction of PMM as a model for analyzing moments where students’ deal with unpredictable, unfixed, unstructured and non-intentional bodily sensations and transform those bodily sensations into political emotions in teaching and learning settings.

Previous research has shown that when students make decisions about socio-scientific issues, their arguments are often based more on values and ethical considerations than on scientific knowledge. The close intertwinement of subject matter, personal values and emotions mediate responses to the specific learning experience (Eilam and Trop 2010; Heimlich and Ardoin 2008; Lundegård 2008; Rickinson and Lundholm 2008; Rickinson, Lundholm, and Hopwood 2009; Shephard 2008). In this sense, cognitive and affective aspects are indispensable elements of ESE teaching and learning, which include conflicts of interest (Christenson, Chang Rundgren, and Höglund 2012; Heimlich and Ardoin 2008; Lundegård 2008). Also, outside the ESE field several education scholars have successfully utilized themes highlighted in this article (Biesta 2009, 2011; Hess and McAvoy 2014; Ljunggren 2003; Ruitenbergh 2009, 2010; Säfström 2010; Todd 2010, 2011; Washington and Humphries 2011).

First, with PPM we can frame a situation as political and understand that we never actually start a meaning making process from nothingness. The starting point may be a bodily affective change due to the experience of things that we have discovered as valuable and to which we feel committed. This leads to learning processes from the political dimensions that not only include cognitive aspects, but also affective and emotional ones (Gould 2010; Mouffe 2013a, 2013b). Second, the situation demands an inquiry to reach a meaning making of an affective poignant experience of the political.

By re-analyzing the empirical data with PMM, we were able to identify the meanings that students made, based on their inquiry of a poignant experience, i.e. how bodily sensations transformed into

political emotions. This opens for possibilities to experience a conflict-oriented ESE practice as concrete and politically emotional charged, i.e. where the experience is of an undecidable conflicts in which alternatives stand in opposition to each other. Here the process of inclusion and exclusion cannot be escaped. This experience indicate what is at stake (values, interests) and who of the classmates that becomes a 'we' and who becomes a 'they'.

By looking at the multiple ways in which students experience and represent conflict, we take the analysis beyond the cognitive: living through a political moment consist of both affection, cognition and emotions. The pragmatic postulate is that humans have the capacity of being bodily affected and thereby to have, what James refers to as 'a pure experience' and Dewey to as 'immediate experience'. Methodologically speaking this means that when people try to communicate bodily sensations, they can only do so indirectly, by pointing with words. Depending on the context, expressions that communicate emotions, are often used to point to bodily felt qualities, i.e. immediate experiences (see further Anderson, Garrison, and Östman *in press*). Therefore, our interpretation when the students' above were using the words 'worries' and 'upset' is that they have had a bodily sensation, i.e. a poignant experience of the political dimension in terms of conflict, antagonism and process of inclusion and exclusion. This results in a specific way in which the political dimension in environmental and sustainability education can be experienced in practice, we call it a 'political moment' (for other ways, see Håkansson, Östman, and Van Poeck 2017).

Further, to expand Gould's (2010) interpretation of the function of emotions, we say that in a political moment 'human beings come to know and understand ourselves and our contexts, our interests and [passionate] commitments, our needs and our options in securing these needs' (23). In this way, the experience of what is valuable for the student, but also what is valuable is threatened.

This understanding of the political as consisting of cognitive, affective and emotive elements points to a bodily experience of the political, i.e. where the learner literally feels the political dimension at play. If this interpretation is correct, it consolidates that emotions as part of the political are relevant to teaching and learning activities in a political ESE practice.

Here we argue for the potentiality of PMM for educators, especially the concept of poignant experience in teachers' planning and designing of teaching and learning activities. From a pragmatist standpoint, offering students experiences of political moments, is not an epistemological question. We think that it is essential to recognize that it might not be possible to simply teach in a specific way to grant experiences of political moments, because poignant experiences are not intentional or calculable but rather something that strike students unexpectedly or catch their attention. From this follows, saying that environmental and sustainability issues are inherently conflictual holds little weight. Whether educational content becomes, or does not become, conflictual is related to individuals' commitments. As such, a political moment may occur from teaching, but is impossible to take for granted. This is also one of the main challenges for educators.

Due to this difficulty, we argue that further empirical research is important in order to understand how unpredictably of political commitment take part in conflict-oriented ESE practices. In order to answer the questions raised here, and by others, further empirical research is needed. We believe that PMM can make a fruitful contribution to the understanding of ESE and other political projects that include dissonant and conflicting voices.

## Notes

1. Several scholars within ESD research field are using Mouffe's theory of the political (Hasslöf 2015; Lundegård and Wickman 2012; Sund and Öhman 2014).
2. Mouffe (1996) explains her view of radical democracy as a 'radical democratic society will still be a liberal democratic society, in the sense that we are not going to put into question the basic institution of political liberalism. The purpose of the project is to radicalize it by extending the sphere of equality and liberty to many more social relations. In a sense, it could be called radical liberal democracy. It is not an alternative to liberal democracy' (145).

3. Mouffe (2005) takes her departure from Schmitt (1976) in her ontological understanding of antagonism. Our pragmatic perspective has the consequence that the political as an ontological condition for the social becomes naturalized in the model, i.e. ontology is situated in everyday practices, making it a practical lived ontology.
4. Gould (2010) clarifies the importance of making a distinction between affects and emotions by saying that:
 

in practice, it can be difficult to distinguish between affect and emotions. Affective states, for example, often generate immediate emotional displays, creating a sense that affect and emotional expression are one and the same. ... nevertheless, even with these empirical difficulties, making some conceptual distinctions is important, particularly because the category of affect has specific qualities of import in social life that are minimized and even obscured if we collapse all distinction into one broad, undifferentiated category – emotions – that is tightly coupled with cognition. (28)
5. Another way of explaining the situation would be to say that the alternatives are incommensurable.
6. This relates to Warren's (1996) claim that 'political relations are the most difficult of all social relations' (251–253). Warren (1996) points to a crucial aspect, namely that doing politics can concern either the issue that is discussed or the decision to or not to interrupt the social relations in the classroom. This can be one explanation as to why political moments are rare in ESE practice (see Öhman and Öhman 2013).

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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