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Article

# 'Is It That We Do Not Want Them to Have Washing Machines?': Ethical Global Issues Pedagogy in Swedish Classrooms

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**Abstract:** According to sustainable development target 4.7, by 2030, all signatory nations must ensure learners are provided with education for sustainable development and global citizenship. While many national curricula provide a policy imperative to provide a global dimension in curriculum and teaching, mainstreaming an approach to teaching about sustainable development through pressing global issues requires strong attention to what happens between students and teachers in the classroom. In this article, we aim to help teachers think through an ongoing reflexive approach to teaching by bridging important theoretical and empirical scholarship with the day-to-day pedagogies of global educators. This collaborative praxis offers an actionable approach to engaging with values, conflicts and ethical consequences towards bringing global issues into teaching and learning in a critical and fruitful way. Our results show that teachers and students can both experience discomfort and experience a sense of significance and worthiness of engaging in a more critical approach. In addition, if we critically reflect and support students in doing so, as these teachers have done, we open up possibilities for approaches to global issues pedagogy that come much closer to addressing the pressing issues of our deeply unequal world.

**Keywords:** education for sustainable development; global citizenship education; postcolonial perspectives; collaborative praxis research

## 1. Introduction

According to sustainable development target 4.7, by 2030, all signatory nations must ensure that learners are provided with education for sustainable development and global citizenship. According to the Global Education Monitoring Report, “more than any other target, 4.7 touches on the social, humanistic and moral purposes of education. It explicitly links education to other SDGs and captures the transformative aspirations of the new global development agenda” [1].

While many national curricula, including that of Sweden [2], provide a policy imperative to provide a global dimension in curriculum and teaching, mainstreaming an approach to teaching about sustainable development through pressing global issues requires strong attention to what happens between students and teachers in the classroom. UNESCO [3,4] highlights the importance of including global equity and justice issues in classrooms, aligning with the imperative of today's growing economic and social inequalities and increasingly severe and unequally experienced impacts of climate change. UNESCO [5] describes the importance of a ‘decentering’ process, whereby learners expand beyond their local realities to consider ‘a vision of other realities and possibilities’ (p. 20).

Developments towards student-oriented and ethical pedagogical approaches to global issues in teaching practice offer promising opportunities; however, we argue, in line with research in the areas of critical global citizenship education and environmental and sustainability education, e.g., [6,7], applying a global ethical dimension in education is both complex and contentious. This is particularly true when it comes to looking at who defines global problems. ‘Global’ problems, such as poverty or deforestation, are often perceived by people in the ‘Global North’ as belonging to countries ‘over there’. In the European context, this can create an ‘us’, who study and solve the problems, and a ‘them’, who cause the problems and require help. Therefore, we argue, truly ethical approaches to global issues—and pedagogical processes and practices that would contribute to them—are possible only if we recognize the relations of power that have shaped history and engage with critical modes of inquiry. In this article, we aim to help teachers think through an on-going reflexive approach to teaching by bridging important theoretical and empirical scholarship with the day-to-day pedagogies of global educators. This collaborative praxis offers an actionable approach to engaging with values, conflicts and ethical consequences towards bringing global issues into teaching and learning in a critical and fruitful way. We combine critical frameworks in two research fields—environmental and sustainability education (ESE) and global citizenship education (GCE). We draw on postcolonial perspectives to reflect on the body of scholarship focusing on educating about/for global equity and justice issues. In particular, we apply postcolonial scholars’ theoretical insights on distribution/inequalities, power and epistemology to reorient and generate reflexive and explicit discussions about global equity and justice within education.

Having provided a short overview of these fields of scholarship, we describe a framework [8] that captures key aspects of teaching a global ethical dimension, and then apply the framework to engage with a small-scale study of how a group of teachers in Swedish upper-secondary schools incorporate global issues in their teaching practice. The different aspects in the framework address root causes of global issues and how different perspectives and worldviews originate. It can therefore be used to help to reflect on and reveal often unexamined global power relations towards making visible taken for granted norms and key factors and perspectives involved in global issues. Based on the findings of this study and drawing on some examples of practice grounded in ‘real classrooms’, we then offer some directions for how to support teachers in making choices about content and pedagogy grounded in ethical questions when teaching about global issues.

## **2. Bridging (Critical) GCE and ESE—Common Challenges and Opportunities for Teaching Ethical Global Issues**

It is important to see the UNSDGs as a mobilizing mechanism to promote engaged scholarship and practice in teaching global issues explicitly in classrooms around the world. It is also important to recognize some key concerns. For example, despite its good intentions, UNESCO’s work in supporting the UN Decade of ESD has been criticised for its universalising approaches in educational sustainability policies [9,10] and complicity with a neo-liberal agenda focused on marketization, individualism and competition [11–13]. In response to these concerns, scholars in the research field of environmental and sustainability education (ESE) have argued that we need approaches that synthesize educational fields and integrate socio-ecological perspectives to provide ways forward to “live well” socially and ecologically. Below are some examples that speak to interdisciplinarity and the bridging of (critical) educational fields.

Matthews [14] criticizes traditional EE rooted in the scientific paradigm for little engagement with political, historical and cultural issues and suggests “hybrid pedagogies for sustainability education” (p. 260) that link inequality and injustice to historical and locally specific environmental contexts. She argues that it is necessary to examine the global and postcolonial context of pedagogies concerned with environmental and sustainability education: “Failure to address cultural and historical aspects of pedagogy can lead to the assumption that educational solutions to contemporary environmental problems can be found in the addition of more science-based environmental education, education

for sustainability, or climate change management courses and programs” (p. 274). Also arguing for a nuanced approach, Gruenewald [15] points to the general absence of ecological thinking in critical social analysis concerned with human relationships. Gruenewald challenges educators to reflect on the relationship between their educational practices and the kind of places we inhabit and leave behind for future generations. By unifying two intersecting educational fields, Gruenewald [15] outlines “a critical pedagogy of place” that connects critical pedagogy’s *sociological* focus and place-based education’s *ecological* emphasis: “while critical pedagogy offers an agenda of cultural decolonization, place-based education leads the way toward ecological “reinhabitation” (p. 310).

Further, several researchers in the ESE field discuss the role of Indigenous, post-perspectives, and decolonizing perspectives on place and environmental education research (e.g., land education, place-based education). Tuck, McKenzie and McCoy [6] highlight the necessity of centring historical and current contexts of colonization in education on and in relation to land (land education). Le Grange [16] suggests that we need to rethink the science students are taught at school and promotes the integration of Western and Indigenous Knowledge Systems. Blenkinsop, Affifi, Piersol, and Sitka-Sage [17] also believe in integrating decolonizing perspectives in environmental education; however, they warn against importing post-colonial theory uncritically into environmental contexts. They suggest “an anti-colonial praxis for ecopedagogy” and employ the phrase “Shut-Up and Listen” as a reminder of listening to “the natural world” or “the voices of the silenced” (p. 349).

In counterbalance to the “manic” use of “post” to signal something new and innovative, Jickling and Sterling [18] question the need for the multitude of adjectival educations that struggle to make an impact on mainstream education. They suggest a more user-friendly way of talking about “post-sustainability” by simply asking an everyday question: “What should we do next?” (p. 5). Therefore, across ESE scholarship, there is a raising of concerns regarding the extent to which mainstream approaches to education for sustainable development can step over rather than engage directly with ethical issues around power and voice. We think it is important to consider how these wider scholarly discussions relate to examples of classroom practice.

Scholars in the field of critical GCE have similarly investigated problems arising from current approaches to teaching and learning about global interconnection and interdependence. They highlight the ways superficial approaches can serve to step over complex ethical issues and contribute to the unconscious reproduction of colonial systems of power, e.g., [19–24]. As UNSDG 4.7 becomes a focus for mobilising teaching towards taking up ethical global issues, we must draw connections between deep theoretical resources that help to make intelligible the continuation of unequal systems of power and deep experience of teachers who are taking up these issues in their daily practice.

Central to this critically informed scholarship in both ESE and GCE is the complex nature of pressing global equity and justice issues and the important role of the teacher who presents, frames and engages with these topics in the classroom. In a study focusing on how ethical global issues are practised and contextualised by teachers in various subjects, Madsen [25] argues that exploring tensions, ruptures and openings apparent in the processes taking place in a school context is crucial for the development of existing teaching practices. Such issues cover a wide range of topics, each with competing problem definitions and complex ethical challenges. As Andreotti [19] argues, a critical approach puts questions of power up for study and recognizes that we are all both part of the problem and part of the solution, albeit differently depending on our contexts and positions. Teaching these issues involves responding to several challenging questions about the purpose of such education and the values and corresponding pedagogies on which such an approach could be grounded [10]. Taking up a similar thread by drawing on political theorist Hannah Arendt’s line of argumentation, Sund and Lysgaard [26] point to the fact that we should be vigilant about education turning into a political tool and instead acknowledge that education is a moral practice. These authors argue for the need to refocus the discussion on the normative question of purpose in education, rather than on technical ones about effective education.

Building from this work, we argue, along with Widdows [24], that a pedagogy of global ethics would not involve proposing ‘a’ global ethic, but would explicitly consider how teachers and learners can engage with the plurality of contexts and ethical considerations that define today’s pressing global issues. Such a pedagogy has ‘a fundamental commitment to including global concerns in *all* ethical reasoning and decision-making. / . . . / what matters is not just the consideration of global issues, but how these issues are approached and the methodology, ethical framework and assumptions adopted’ [24] (p. 5). Due to climate change, migration, easy communications and cultural influences on lifestyles, the deep interdependence between what is considered global and local cannot be denied [27]. Thus, contemporary phenomena of globalisation add new layers of complexity to the educational context. It is increasingly prevalent that global equity and justice issues are not just ‘out there’, but are also on our own doorsteps. Furthermore, while this urgency appears new, the policy imperative that all signatory nations must take up the UNSDGs, including 4.7, prompts educationalists to deeply consider how the issues of the present and the possibilities for changing the future are shaped by historical and on-going systems of exploitation and oppression.

From postcolonial theory, we understand that many of the conditions created by colonialism, such as economic inequality, unequal power relations, ethnocentrism and marginalisation, have been intensified and made more nuanced by conditions of neoliberalism that perpetuate and add further complexity to power imbalances within and between the ‘Global South’ and the ‘Global North’ [7]. Seen from this perspective, the history and relationships of colonialism and colonial power influence a global economy based on growth and development that has created and continues to increase poverty while also intensifying environmental issues [28]. Several researchers have studied the role of postcolonial theory and its application in global educational research [19,21,27,29]. They have found that educational initiatives that promote global issues and perspectives, although productive in certain contexts, tend to foreclose the complex historical and political nature of global issues and the possibility of more critical approaches. Andreotti [19] promotes making use of ‘critical literacy’ as an educational practice that critically examines the origins and implications of assumptions, particularly those underlying how problems and solutions are framed. She argues this could prevent the more ‘soft’ approaches to global citizenship from reinforcing rather than challenging the colonial systems of power. Andreotti [30] offers the pedagogical tool HEADS UP to assist with the task of identifying and addressing historical patterns of thinking and relationships that can be reproduced by educational initiatives. The acronym comprises the terms: hegemony, ethnocentrism, ahistoricism, depoliticisation, salvationism, uncomplicated solutions and paternalism. In line with Andreotti and other researchers, we regard the use of postcolonial perspectives as a critical mode of inquiry that can illuminate the ethical principle of responsibility for others and offer alternative perspectives on international development by challenging ethnocentrism and addressing issues of complicity.

Classroom-based research in global learning suggests that more research is needed to consider how these theoretical tools can be used to reflect on and engage with classroom practice. While there is not a large sample of studies explicitly considering critical GCE and ESE in practice, a few studies speak to the importance of foregrounding ethical pedagogy. For example, Nines and Reilly [31] conducted research on the impact of critical GCE approaches on the understandings of students aged 8–9 and 12–13 in Northern Ireland. They found that where teachers fully committed to and were able to teach global citizenship from multiple perspectives, students were able to more fully understand living conditions in parts of the world far away and also to be more empathetic with the issues facing immigrants in their local society. However, they also found teachers were prevented by a “lack of critical perspectives on local cultural identities and global North/South relationships, with few if any connections made between the two” (p. 114); and, “local identities and attitudes to the conflict in Northern Ireland remained untouched, learning which reinforces global stereotypes may not only fail to contribute to peace building in Northern Ireland, but also pave the way for further global divisions or conflict in the future (p. 115).

Taylor's [32] narrative study of pre-service teachers engaging with a critical approach to GCE in a small university in Quebec also found a barrier on the part of teachers taking up mainstream and charitable approaches to global learning. In what she identifies as the "spare-a-penny, count-your-blessing" approach, pre-service teachers get stuck when they are unable to unpack "the crisis in learning initiated when children are exposed to knowledge of global inequity is closed down when pedagogy offers *consolation* rather than critical and ethical tools to respond to this crisis." (p. 181). Similarly, Truong-White and McLean's [33] study of a program that connects middle-school and high-school classrooms worldwide through digital story-telling, with a particular analysis of stories created in two schools, one in India and one in the US, found the programme did engage students with non-mainstream perspectives and encourage self-reflection. However, they noted a lack of emphasis on systemic causes and impacts of global problems and their findings called for more attention to critical pedagogical practices.

Marsden [25] interviewed primary and secondary teachers in Denmark and Ireland about their ESD teaching with the aim of listening from 'inside' the profession. Her research sought to explore the tensions, ruptures and openings in the ongoing classroom processes. She found that ESD is not an independent subject with a clearly defined content, and consequently teachers were challenged to explore various ways of knowing, invite cross-disciplinary approaches and to work self-reflectively with their own values and preferences in relation to sustainability issues. As a consequence, the teachers spoke about trying to integrate ESD issues within an obligatory course, often doing so on their own as a "lone agent of change". Marsden found that teachers find it problematic that ESD is seen as a "could" but should be a "must", and she warns while that fitting ESD into existing subject areas may help, this risks the loss of open learning processes and transdisciplinary approaches to handling complex issues. Marsden's study demonstrates the importance of critical aspects inherent to ESD. She found teachers do not question the relevance of such work but do seek support in order to integrate it into different subject areas.

These examples of empirical research suggest that it is important to consider classroom practices and the extent to which teachers engage with issues of complicity and complexity when taking up rather than stepping over the influence of colonial systems of power on today's issues. We argue that the HEADSUP tool serves to assist us analytically in looking closely at teacher pedagogy which, according to existing research, is at the heart of enacting critical GCE and of ensuring that when environmental issues are examined, that they are done so in a way that engages directly with such complexities.

### 3. Materials and Methods

This small-scale empirical study involves upper secondary teachers in Sweden and engages the theoretical tools outlined above with the reality of teachers facilitating global learning in their classrooms. We sought to consider the nuances or to deeply consider what is involved in teaching global equity and justice in a country in a Global North context. Given the small sample, we did not aim to make generalisable claims, but rather to connect theory and practice in order to offer a more nuanced frame to further empirical and theoretical scholarship on this topic. Five teachers from two public schools in the central region of Sweden volunteered to participate, having heeded an invitation from the researcher to the school principal. They included two female Science teachers, two Social Science teachers (one male and one female), and a female English teacher. All five teach in higher education preparatory programmes and interact with global issues within their subject areas. They were aged between 35 and 62, had different teaching backgrounds and had been in the profession for between 9 and 33 years. Data sources include audio-recorded teacher interviews (a 30 min interview with each teacher), video-recordings of teachers and students in the classroom (total hours filmed: 9) and audio-recorded teacher interviews in the form of video feedback where teachers reviewed segments of the class and reflected on the students' responses (a 60–90 min follow-up interview with each teacher) [34,35]. All data was collected in the autumn of 2016 during a three-month period.

The *initial interviews* with the teachers were semi-structured [36] and organised around teachers sharing how they incorporate global issues in their teaching practice, what they recognise as global issues in their courses/subjects, how they argue for why global issues are important, and how they design curriculum to implement complex global issues. The interviews offer a picture of some of the factors at play that create conditions and influence teaching practices. Researchers selected key events from the *classroom data* that appeared to play an important part in the ongoing classroom processes and where teachers challenged themselves and their students to critically address global issues and move away from simplistic solutions and assumptions. For the *follow-up interviews*, the researchers played the key events back to the teachers whose reflections contributed to the empirical data. Such a key event could be one in which a teacher addresses global issues, puts them into social, cultural and historical contexts, relates them to discussions about ‘us’ and ‘them’ and invites students to look at these phenomena from different perspectives. This part of the study enabled a deep engagement with teachers’ perspectives through their own descriptions of their classroom actions and the factors that influence teaching practices, and thus elicits teachers’ reflections on classroom processes.

The events and the teachers’ responses to them were analysed with an analytical tool (Table 1) [8]. It adapts Andreotti’s [30,37] HEADS UP into *four key aspects* of a critical engagement with global issues: *contextual-historical, affective, political and epistemological*. The tool builds from critical literature in the field and critiques of global learning and education for sustainable development that call for closer attention to how historical patterns are often replayed in education contexts and the necessity to make colonial systems of power evident. The tool makes it possible to consider how teachers’ reflections, concerns and teaching practices engage with such circumstances as past legacies and current inequalities, dimensions of power, and universal solutions to complex issues. The analytical questions emerging from these aspects can be used to reflect on classroom practice and the extent to which global power relations and are made transparent.

**Table 1.** Analytical tool: aspects of global issues in teaching.

| Aspects of Global Issues in Teaching | Analytical Questions  |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| The contextual-historical aspect     | How are different historical roles and positions discussed in relation to present problems?   |
|                                      | How are issues and problems put into (local, historical etc.) context?  |
| The affective aspect                 | How are people in need portrayed?   |
|                                      | How are relations between ‘us’ and ‘them’ addressed?  |
|                                      | How are sentiments like generosity, solidarity and sympathy addressed?  |
| The political aspect                 | How are power relations addressed?  |
|                                      | How are people invited to see themselves as potential agents in societal development?   |
| The epistemological aspect           | How are people encouraged to position themselves in relation to different views?  |
|                                      | How is knowledge problematised? (What does knowing something mean in terms of a priori, a posteriori, individual and collective knowledge?) |
|                                      | How are different knowledge systems (scientific/local/indigenous) addressed?  |

#### 4. Results and Empirical Examples

Findings from the initial interviews indicate that a range of factors influence how and why these teachers teach global issues. These include:

- *the course syllabus* (the course goals and the topics and content covered in the course and if global issues are specified),
- *how teachers perceive education and teaching more generally* (their educational philosophy and views of learning),
- *teachers’ anchor points*, what they particularly cared about [34,35] *in teaching global issues* (which can help teachers in their everyday practice but also be tacit barriers to change),
- *teachers’ and students’ own experiences of global issues* (experiences of living/travelling in a country of the Global South, ethnicity/ethnic background),

- *what teachers and students bring to school* (in terms of individual assumptions/personal worldviews and the collective and situated constructions of such assumptions).

### *Empirical Examples*

Analyses using the tool suggest that the teachers plan, teach and explore global issues in a range of contexts and that different teachers emphasize slightly different aspects. However, remarkably, the different aspects brought forward by teachers were closely related and often mutually reinforcing and interwoven in their practices. Notably, teachers engaged students in global issues from multiple perspectives and emphasised different angles particularly well in courses with an interdisciplinary character. Below we present three empirical examples from classroom practice that researchers identified as significant and share the teachers' comments.

In the *first* example, Travis, a social sciences teacher, emphasized the *contextual-historical* and *political* aspects, relating his teaching of global issues to the current migrant crises and the number of people coming from Africa south of the Sahara who are displaced because of economic and political factors in their home countries. After asking his students to compare the number of refugees in relation to inhabitants in different countries, he explained: "when you do a quick google [search] like this you get figures from all over the place, they do not always agree, some may be exaggerated and some underestimated and they may refer to different time periods . . . but you must remember that there are more displaced people now than after WWII"

The teacher also emphasized the *affective* aspect, personalising and empathetically treating the journeys of displaced people when he stressed that students in his class could have faced these experiences given several have origins in African countries. In a conversation with a student whose family had emigrated from Eritrea to Sweden, Travis engaged in complex ethical issues:

Travis: I mentioned Eritrea, in West Africa and several countries there as well, people make terribly hard journeys from their home countries up to the Sahara desert with the help of people. even to die . . . transporting them in terrible conditions into Libya where there is very harsh treatment as well and then they are taken across the Mediterranean to Italy and many of these people have died in the Mediterranean crossing in unsafe boats  
 Lilly: Today is the third year since . . . a boat drowned . . . and 400 people died . . . in Lampedusa.  
 Travis: Yes . . . , Lampedusa was the one that grabbed the world's attention perhaps most . . . a very sad thing for these economic migrants, and now please remember that these people are displaced and there may be people here who have family or personal experience from this this and can speak better than I . . .

When asked to comment on the event, Travis stressed "the main thing is to get things into perspective . . . we are coming back to this western-centric point-of-view of the refugee crisis . . . all the *problems* and all the *costs* it brings and all the *difficulties* . . . and to actually try to bring a more global perspective." In addition to addressing the affective aspect and put forward a generous portrayal, he explicitly draws out different ways of knowing about the issue and attempts, thus emphasising the *epistemological* aspect. While studies of refugees are a part of the curriculum, his explicit treatment of these aspects may be influenced by the fact that this teacher was born and raised in the Global South and moved to Sweden in his early twenties and also the fact there are refugee students in the class. He therefore brings his experiences abroad and in Sweden to offer a nuanced perspective on this issue.

In the *second* example, the students in Science teacher Carla's classroom examined the global water crisis. They applied scientific knowledge and discussed how the supplies of freshwater resources are inequitably available and unevenly distributed, which can lead to conflict and concerns over water security. With reference to a documentary, a group of four female students discussed the fact that a multinational company had built a factory in a village in India and depleted the locals' supply of fresh water which they rely on to live and to farm, thus emphasizing *political* and *affective* aspects by considering power relations and highlighting different local perspectives. In the exchange below, students discuss whether water should be free and consider different ways of increasing access of fresh water. They refer to information from the documentary regarding the impact of the Coca-Cola factory.



According to the film, since it was built, the water table has dropped and this has caused a drought and made farming efficiently even more difficult. The documentary's information evoked complex reactions. One of the students expressed feelings of guilt, another student confirmed that it was good to feel guilty, and the others emphasized people's diverse wants and needs. The students also drew parallels between the destroyed way of life for the locals in the documentary and the situation in Sápmi, the cultural region traditionally inhabited by the Sami people, highlighting the importance of maintaining traditional ways of living (and knowing). They emphasized both *contextual-historical* and *epistemological* aspects. (*Comments by the authors in italics*).

Harriet: I think like it was in India ... where they got water from the groundwater ... but then Coca-Cola came ... so that is the thing ... that is not like if it should be free or not ... more a question of distribution ...

Kaley, Sandra & Lilly: Yeah ...

Harriet: ... and cartels and stuff ... / ... / (*reading the next question*) 'Different ways for increasing access of fresh water' ... Well, actually, when you think of Coca-Cola they have water. They can take their own water, they can pay for it! Also when you take water from someone, from a country, the people that actually drink it are the people who already have water. They can drink from their tap.

Lilly & Kaley: Mmm.

Sandra: I feel bad every time I drink a Coca-Cola ...

*Laughter*

Lilly: You are good, you feel guilty!

*Laughter / ... /*

Harriet: However, that is another thing from the documentary ... when they bought that water, they closed it for anyone else, they had to pay for it and they had been coming there for years ... it is like *their* water ...

Sandra: The best way would be just to not have another country ... being able to take like profit of your ... water ...

Harriet: it is like, think, if you live up at Kebnekaise (*the highest mountain in Sweden, lies in Sápmi*) ... have you ... been there?

Sandra: No!

Kaley: They have like water from rapids and they have always lived there been self-sufficient and then if you came, Coca-Cola that is, and builds a wall around your water where you have come for years, where you were born, I do not know ... like, and it is locked and you cannot access you water ... ? So you have to buy it ... that would be pretty weird ... And you have lived there for a long time ... They would be pretty mad about it ... basically another country shouldn't ...

Sandra: ... another country or company ... maybe the water should be like ... you cannot like ... say that the water should belong to the government because the government would *sell* it ...

Kaley: Yeah ...

Sandra: ... to like other countries ...

Harriet: it is just weird that ... just because someone *else* is ... starting to live in a certain way that means that *you* have to adapt and they have the power to take everything in the world ...

Kaley: I just feel that no company should be able to ... take away someone else's access to water ...

Sandra: Yes

Kaley: ... because water is such an important thing ... that we need to survive

*/ ... /*

Harriet: Stuff like that can make you really annoyed ...

Kaley: Yeah, they take advantage of other countries ...

Harriet: How hard can it be ... ? Do not they see that people are standing there ... like not having water ... ?

Kaley: Cannot people just be nice and share ... like good human beings ... ?

Harriet: Yeah, I think of that every time Travis (*their social science teacher*) says something ... Wait, do you really need that when you have so much ...

In her reflections about this key event, Carla stressed that she chose this particular documentary because it raises the question of whether water should be a human right or a tradable commodity. She noted that the students distinguished and related to both political factors (water cannot be accessed due to poverty, injustices) and physical factors (groundwater levels are too low) of global water crises. She also reflected on the fact that they moved between different subject areas and contributed knowledge of conflicts and societal aspects that were valuable for a deeper understanding of the issue. She felt important learning occurred as students saw consequences of problems, suggested possible solutions, and while expressing strong and varied reactions, did not feel disempowered by

a ‘doom and gloom’ future because they ultimately understood the importance of the critical approach. She also noticed how the students put problems into local and historical context and emphasized that an objective of the course is that students critically examine and develop their own value systems and show an understanding of how values vary depending on cultures and time periods.

In the *third* example, in a Social Science course on international relations, a Social Science teacher, Heather, and a Science teacher, Ashley, taught collaboratively in order to strengthen and deepen linkage of similar topics, concepts, or capabilities from the two subject areas. The students were instructed to use certain statistical variables and the Gapminder World graph (available at [www.gapminder.org/world](http://www.gapminder.org/world)) to compare the situations of different countries and then reflect on the benefits and tensions of global development. The students had watched a popular TED talk, *The Magic Washing Machine* by Hans Rosling, the founder of Gapminder. In the talk Rosling uses data and statistics to dispel common myths about the developing world. He explains how economic growth will continue to change life on earth, and as one example, raises the implications in terms of time and energy of the ‘developing world’ moving from hand washing to machine washing. The teachers instructed students to explain Rosling’s message and how he justifies his claims. In this excerpt of a complex discussion within the lesson, the students relate the message of the talk and the world’s growing energy consumption to behaviour change in Sweden and to the case of development in India.

John: ‘What is Rosling’s message?’ (*reading the instructions*). That the seemingly impossible is possible!

Linette: Is it . . . ?

John: Yeah, well if everyone was aware of the facts, then extreme poverty could be eradicated. Statistically you could end poverty tomorrow as long as everyone was in on it and willing to dole out/distribute all assets . . . but that assumes that people want to do it also . . .

Linette: However, I do not get it when she (*the teacher*) talks about washing machines . . . is it that *we do not want* them to have washing machines . . . ?

John: Yeah, well look, people think like in India that there are so many people . . . and if all those people want a washing machine that would heavily increase energy consumption and it will be an environmental disaster . . . well that is you cannot argue that way. Because then you place yourself above others . . . it is the view of human beings . . . if you think of that as okay . . .

Linette: . . . that we think it is okay, but they do not . . . ?

John: Well . . . yeah . . . exactly . . . and in that case you hold on to a . . . well you might as well continue with slave trade . . . this is basically the same principle . . . to value at what level . . .

Linette: . . . so in that case we should choose not to . . . and that we would not handle/cope with . . .

John: . . . well in that case we would need to bike more . . . but on the other hand it is also the case that . . . the development in India . . . India invests more in the UK than the UK invests in India . . . which is kind of cool . . . they have now become an economic superpower . . .

In the above example, the student discussion focused on how relationships of colonial power continue to influence global development but also how power structures change with time and development (depicting India as an emerging superpower) and thus emphasising both *contextual-historical* and *political* aspects. Relating to one’s own view of others (‘them’, ‘those people’) the students also associated the spatial distances between people with relational and *affective* aspects, i.e., how much sympathy we feel for another group and what we are prepared to change in our way of living, and suggests one possible behaviour change at the local level: “biking more”. In her comments on this interaction, the teacher, Heather, points to the *epistemological* aspect when she recognised the students’ abilities for abstract thought and to problematise and relate to others’ perspectives/narratives: “We have talked a lot about differences in living conditions . . . and I guess that is the main purpose of education and schooling . . . not so much to give the students the right answers, but to teach them the ability to ask the right questions”. This freedom to raise deep ethical questions is confirmed by the students questioning the teacher’s review of Rosling’s argument about the move from hand washing to washing machines being both a sign of development and a significant negative impact on the environment worldwide. In asking “is it that *we do not want* them to have washing machines?”,

the student demonstrates ethical pedagogy at work in deeply questioning and touching on key tensions inherent to power and relationality in today's global issues.

## 5. Discussion

As scholarship in the areas of ESE and critical GCE has suggested, taking up ethical global issues in classrooms is a complex task. It is also a necessary focus for the take up of SDG 4.7, which emphasizes, among other social justice education approaches, both educating for global citizenship and sustainable development. As critiques of ESD have suggested, it is essential that the treatment of environmental issues be deeply connected to social, political and economic factors [6,12,14,15,38]. There are important critiques of the UNSDGs, including a tendency to be implicit rather than explicit about responsibilities [39,40] and the way education systems can be complicit with a modern colonial imaginary in the context of UNSDGs [41]. However, we argue that mainstreaming of UNSDG 4.7 in formal education in Global North contexts provides a space of momentum for significantly rethinking approaches to education about global issues and sustainable development. Such a pedagogy would take up rather than step over issues of complexity and power relations, and is an area that has been well theorised but requires further research regarding practice in classrooms.

Therefore, in this small-scale study, we engaged directly with classrooms where teachers and students discussed micro-level ethical and political challenges through teaching practices and student interactions. The examples of practice shared in this paper show not only how the teachers reflected and directed work in their classrooms, but also how their pedagogy challenged students to think of multiple perspectives on how a problem is framed and encouraged them to come up with alternative answers of these issues. This draws attention to and highlights key issues to be considered in teaching ethical global issues. Students and teachers engaged deeply in and considered historical patterns of oppression and coloniality when provided opportunities to engaging in a dialogue without the purpose of agreeing or determining an immediate and fixed solution. Rather, there was evidence of addressing and co-creating values that are more mindful to global power relations and marginalised voices and bringing together alternative worldviews (and ways to relate to nature, growth, etc.). Research has shown that considering values and ethics has been an ignored part in education and that teachers and educators appear uncomfortable with dealing with conflicts and ethics and bringing that into their teaching [38]. Critical scholarship in GCE and ESE suggests this must include reflecting on how the lives we live in the Global North affect the lives of others far away and how local/regional/national issues are also global issues.

Being given the opportunity by their teachers, students in this study express awareness that global issues are many-sided and concern both environment and social justice, and the teachers take this as a starting-point, alongside their own experiences, personal anchor points and educational philosophy. This small sample shows that such teaching enables students to begin to develop awareness about their own values and the values they live by, and to confront them with other values and reflect on the structures of which they are part. The findings of this study alert teachers and educators to the importance of considering ethics in a way where we take up political ideas and consider alternative perspectives. This is exemplified in discussions and reflections from the classroom snapshots where teachers and students critically engage with notions of complexity and complicity while also being rooted in the daily life of classrooms. These include questions such as to what extent economic growth advances human development or if technological advances are also ecologically and socially unsustainable and harmful, and whether water should be a human right or a tradable commodity. We chose to quote a student in the study in the title of this article, "Is it that *we do not want* them to have washing machines?". This question in reference to considering Hans Rosling's talk highlights the important ethical critical questions possible through ethical global issues pedagogy.

Working from the assumption that teaching should support students to uncover and question simplistic analyses and to engage this discomfort (with issues of migration, climate change, unequal power), we must consider how best to resource teachers including support with handling difficult

conversations [42]. In this small study, we have found evidence that uneasiness associated with experiencing feelings of guilt and complicity within wider systems can in fact be a dynamic and significant experience as demonstrated by some of the participants in this study, see also [43]. Thus, we recommend further research must consider not just how teachers take up and teach about colonial systems of power but also how those systems of power play out within their classrooms. As Taylor [32] reminds us, “A global citizenship education of ‘bringing the world into our classrooms’ forgets that our classrooms are always already in this world” (p. 177).

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