

## South African and Swedish children on the human being, sustainability and the future

**Keywords:** children's existential questions; sustainability; moral authorship;

In an interview study carried out in 2019, 41 South African and Swedish children aged 10 to 12 years, were individually interviewed. Studying at eight different schools, five children from each class took part. Their schools were all located in communities where scarcity of water had been experienced – in Sweden the dry summer of 2018, and in South Africa drought due to the changing weather patterns.

In the interviews a Swedish method, developed over decades (see Hartman, 1986a; 1986b; Hartman & Torstensson-Ed, 2007), was used to ask children what their reflections were. Their responses were recorded both orally and in writing. The questioning format of the method is open, allowing for answers to be formulated freely, at the same time as the consistent following of the interview guide gives opportunities for comparison of answers. The interviews lasted from 17 minutes to 41.

In the interpretive framework *Ethics in Light of Childhood* (Wall, 2010) and the concept 'empowered inclusion' (Josefsson & Wall, 2020) have been used (see Sporre, 2021), as well as the concept of children's 'moral authorship' (Sporre et al., 2022) where the work of Mark B. Tappan (1991;2010) also forms a background.

In this presentation themes about the human being, sustainability and the future from the interviews are in focus. The earnest way the children respond to the interview themes raises questions as to how education can be transformed to take them on.

### References:

- Hartman, S. G. (1986a). *Barns tankar om livet [Children's thoughts about life]*. Natur och Kultur.
- Hartman, S. G. (1986b). *Children's philosophy of life* Stockholm Institute of Education.
- Hartman, S., & Torstensson-Ed, T. (2007). *Barns tankar om livet. [Children's thoughts about life]*. Natur och kultur.
- Josefsson, J., Wall, J. (2020). Empowered inclusion: theorizing global justice for children and youth. *Globalizations*, 17(6), 1043-1060.
- Sporre, K. (2021b). Young people – citizens in times of climate change? A childist approach to human responsibility. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 77(3, a6783), 1-8.  
<https://doi.org/doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i3.6783>
- Sporre, K., Lotz-Sisitka, H., & Osbeck, C. (2022, 2022/01/02). Taking the moral authorship of children and youth seriously in times of the Anthropocene. *Ethics and Education*, 17(1), 101-116.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17449642.2021.2024991>
- Tappan, M. B. (1991). Narrative, authorship, and the development of moral authority. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development* 54, 5-25.
- Tappan, M. B. (2010). Telling Moral Stories: From Agency to Authorship. *Human Development*, 53, 81-86.
- Wall, J. (2010). *Ethics in Light of Childhood*. Georgetown University Press.

*Karin Sporre is Senior Professor in Educational Work with a focus on values, gender and diversity at Umeå University, Umeå, Sweden. Her research interest is in the field of ethics in education where matters of sustainability today are crucial. With an interest in global perspectives, she has over the last twenty years developed research cooperation with South African colleagues. She recently carried*

*out the study 'Children, sustainability and hope' and is the PI of the research project 'The Child and Curriculum. Existential Questions and Educational Responses', to be finished in 2024.*