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Moral relations in encounters with nature

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The overall aim of this article is to develop in-depth knowledge about the connection between outdoor experiences and moral attitudes towards nature. The study focuses on processes in which moral relations are at stake in encounters between students and nature. The purpose is to identify such events, describe their specific circumstances and clarify how moral relations are established in these events. The empirical material consists of video-recordings of activities in three different outdoor education practices. In order to identify and categorise moral situations, an analytical tool called the ethical tendency is used. This tool is based on Wittgenstein's language game method. The findings show that in the investigated outdoor education practices, moral relations towards nature are established in several different ways. The article concludes with four educational implications: responsibility when dealing with moral reactions; bringing ethical questions to the fore; different educational conditions create different encounters with nature; and the consequences of different language games.

Keywords: outdoor education; nature experience; nature connectivity; moral relations; ethical reflections; environmental concern

Introduction

Our ambition with this article is to examine the different ways in which moral relations towards nature are created in outdoor education practice. Moral relations are here understood as feelings of responsibility and care. This study relates to the common belief within the outdoor education discourse that encounters with nature can lead to more environmentally friendly attitudes and behaviour; that is, such experiences can change people's moral relations towards nature. This belief is often based on an idea of a causal relationship between rich experiences, positive attitudes and behavioural change. Research connected to this educational ambition is therefore largely about trying to find evidence that establishes this relationship. In the past, such research has been conducted mainly as surveys or interviews before and after a specific outdoor activity in order to measure its effects (see for example Schindler, 1999). The results of these studies are varied. In some cases they have shown a significant change in one of these variables; that is, knowledge, attitudes or behaviour (Johnson & Manoli, 2008; Milton & Cleveland, 1995). Bogner (1998) shows a connection between environmental knowledge and more favourable environmental attitudes, and also points to the complexity of the connections between these variables. In the same way, Bradley, Waliczek, and Zajicek (1999) point to the complexities of their study where they show a weak connection between knowledge and positive attitudes. There are a few environmental psychology studies that examine our relations towards nature. The study undertaken by Sevillano, Aragonés, and Schultz

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(2007) is one example of a pre-test/post-test design, where the participants show more biospheric environmental concern when stimulated by slides representing animals that have been harmed by nature. In the same field, Dutcher, Finley, Luloff, and Buttolph Johnson (2007) show that connectivity with nature focuses on our subjective experiences of nature; for example, seeing ourselves as part of the environment, which in turn reflects a sense of empathy. In this way, research into environmental connectivity or connectedness is closely connected to this study of moral relations. Beery (2013a) explores whether there is a relationship between nature-based outdoor recreation and environmental connectedness, and his quantitative study shows that there is a significant relationship. However, Beery (2013b) also highlights the measurement difficulties and complexities in this field. In addition, Sandell and Öhman (2013) claim that there are many indications that encounters with nature play a significant role in people's moral attitudes towards the environment. The complex relationship between rich experiences of nature, attitudes and behaviour is also emphasised in this study. In line with this complex picture, Sandell and Öhman highlight a pedagogical question; namely the difficulties for outdoor educationalists to make appropriate research-based, pedagogical choices if their aim is to use encounters with nature as a path to environmental concern. The contribution from Sandell and Öhman (2013) is an outdoor education model based on a combination of theoretical perspectives and models. Their study also points to the need for empirical research in order to deepen our knowledge of the 'outdoor pedagogic bridges' between nature encounters, attitudes, behaviour and so on.

To improve outdoor teaching and make it subtler, further knowledge about the educational processes involved is necessary. This request was raised in the extensive review of outdoor research by Rickinson et al. (2004), although there is still a lack of this kind of research, especially concerning the value dimension of these processes. From a pedagogical point of view, the pre-test and post-test design of earlier studies tends to make the processes that take place between the moments of measurement a 'black box'. With reference to these studies, it is therefore difficult to say why some outdoor education activities are successful and others are not. Many of the existing studies of ethical and moral content have generally focused on social relations and social development in relation to different outdoor programmes (Allison, Carr, & Meldrum, 2012; Mygind, 2009; Rothwell, Siharath, & Badger, 2008; Smith, Strand, & Bunting, 2002). These studies are based on interviews, pre-tests and post-tests, surveys and a quantitative analysis of interaction processes. It is noticeable that none of the studies have qualitatively analysed ongoing practice. Very few studies try to develop methodologies for investigations of processes in outdoor research. An exception is Rea (2008), who made direct observations and talked to participants in order to produce rich descriptions of processes at work in outdoor education centres. There is consequently a need for process studies in general, and specifically studies focusing on participants' relations towards nature.

In order to develop more in-depth knowledge about the connection between outdoor experiences and moral attitudes towards nature, the present study focuses on processes in which moral relations are at stake in encounters between students and nature. The ambition of this article is thus to contribute to such knowledge by clarifying how different environmental moral relations can be created in ongoing outdoor education practice. The study is based on the assumption that if encounters with nature have an impact on students' environmental morals, it should be possible to detect specific events in which moral issues are at stake during outdoor education activities. The purpose of the study is

thus to identify such events, describe their specific circumstances and clarify how moral relations are established in these ongoing events.

The empirical material in this study consists of video-recordings of activities in three different outdoor education practices. The observed practices are Outdoor Education Centres with roots in traditional biology excursions, 'all weather' outdoor schools with nature as the basis for children's development, and outdoor education connected with the radical, Nordic outdoor movement. In order to clarify our research questions we have used an analytical tool, developed by Öhman and Östman (2008), to identify and categorise moral situations. When addressing questions concerning the processes of moral relations we have been inspired by Lundegård and Wickman (2007) and their language game analyses. We have analysed ongoing practice using these methods, and the results are illustrated by transcripts from the video-recordings.

Methodological approach

To investigate how moral relations appear in educational practice, we use a socio-cultural approach to moral meaning-making inspired by the later works of Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953/1997, 1969/1997) and developed by Öhman and Östman (2008). This socio-cultural approach assumes that children's moral thoughts and actions largely evolve through participation in communicative interactions within a specific moral discourse (see Buzzelli, 1996, 1997; Tappan, 1997). As a consequence, morals are not seen as hidden within humans' minds, but as being available for empirical investigations of people's actions (Öhman & Östman, 2007). Crawford (2001) also maintains that the contextual and situational character of morals implies that moral meanings can be made by one and the same individual at different levels depending on the circumstances. In this way, socio-cultural approaches can be seen as alternatives to the dominating cognitivist approaches based on Kohlberg's stage model. The understanding of morals in our study takes its departure from everyday practice, and attempts to clarify moral issues by pointing to our common experiences of morals in different situations and how they appear in our everyday lives.

The ethical tendency

In Öhman and Östman (2008), ethics and morals are approached as features of human thinking and behaviour, termed the ethical tendency.¹ They use this concept in order to facilitate investigations of the various ways in which people communicate what they find to be fair, unfair, self-sacrificing, insulting, selfish, unselfish, greedy, generous, honest, dishonest, just, unjust and so forth in everyday practice.

Based on analyses of video-taped lessons, Öhman and Östman (2008) developed a typology for studies of the ethical tendency in educational practices. To highlight the different conditions of learning, distinctions were made between the three different ways in which right and good attitudes are communicated: moral reactions; norms for correct behaviour; and ethical reflections.² In the present study we use this typology to identify and categorise moral situations in the observed practices.

The first category, *moral reactions*, classifies those situations in which we, without any previous considerations or reflections, take spontaneous responsibility for another being. For instance, this can happen when we see someone or something being treated badly, or when we spontaneously act in order to save someone or something that is in need. One can say that these are situations in which we are personally affected and experience a deep inner feeling of empathy and care.

The second category, *norms for correct behaviour*, concerns those situations in which the ethical tendency appears as social rules that are communicated to us by the way that authorities and peers actively respond to our present or future actions by encouraging, condemning, neglecting, answering, questioning, making gestures and so forth. These rules indicate a common opinion on how we should act. One example is the norms connected with school biology excursions: not picking more plants than is necessary for the particular study, putting water bugs back into the pond after they have been examined, not damaging shrubs and trees, not disturbing nesting birds and so forth.

The third category, *ethical reflections*, is when we ethically reflect on good values and the right way of acting. In these situations we often try to find systematic and rational arguments for how to handle certain moral issues. When we communicate and discuss such reflections, we are not usually in a situation where we need to immediately decide how to act. These ethical discussions therefore normally concern the general ethical principles that human beings ought to follow, presupposing that we are part of the same cultural community.

Based on the use of this typology in comparable studies,³ we have reason to believe that this can lead to fruitful and interesting results with regard to moral processes.

Language games

In his later works, Wittgenstein (1953/1997) highlights solutions to some of the philosophical problems that philosophers have been wrestling with. The problems are grounded in the way of analysing meaning of human phenomena as something apart from human practice and language use. By using the term ‘language game’, Wittgenstein points to the fact that the use of language is part of an activity or form of life. Wittgenstein emphasises language as being interwoven with ways of acting, and emphasises that the connection between language, meaning and the world is not to be found in theory, but in practice. This way of understanding differs from the perception in which the meaning of a word corresponds to reality. Öhman and Östman (2008) hold that this perspective of language implies the ethical tendency is not necessarily hidden in the minds of human beings, but is often clearly visible in our everyday activities. This has crucial methodological implications for this study, namely that *in situ* examples can be used as clarifying reminders of how moral judgements appear in educational practice. With Wittgenstein’s alternative it is possible to refer to concrete examples and experiences from our everyday lives when studying moral relations. The examples from educational practice presented in this study can be seen as reminders of how we act and communicate in everyday life when dealing with moral issues. The term language game also indicates the variety of ways in which words and actions can be used to create meaning, depending on the different settings and circumstances. Wickman (2005) explains that we also learn new meanings by taking part in new language games, using new words and using familiar words in new ways.

When analysing communication in which moral relations are created, we have been inspired by the analytical tool—language game analyses. This tool is based on Wittgenstein’s ideas, and has been further developed by Lundegård and Wickman (2007). As an alternative to linguistic analysis, and separated from language use, they analyse the exchange of meanings that occur in action in a dialogue. Sentences and actions are not analysed independently of the context, and ‘a statement has meaning only when it is put in motion, in context through the speech acts that precede it and those that follow it’ (Lundegård & Wickman, 2007, p. 6). This method is based on Wittgenstein’s (1953/1997) understanding of language use. Wittgenstein tries to dissolve

the idea that every word corresponds to one distinctive meaning in absolute terms and draws attention to the fact that, in the act of communication, we do not usually differentiate between the words we use, the meaning of the words and reality. Therefore, when clarifying the meaning of words, we have to observe the different ways in which people use them. In our case, this means that we can study how moral relations are created by analysing utterances and bodily actions in ongoing practice.

Data and data collection

In our investigations into the research questions concerning moral relations and use of the ethical tendency typology, we have used video-recorded material from three different kinds of outdoor educational practices: outdoor education with roots in traditional biology excursions; outdoor activities as a means for children's development; and outdoor education connected to the radical Nordic outdoor tradition. Our empirical data were collected within a multidisciplinary research project, titled 'Encounters with Nature and Environmental Moral Learning'. In the first part of this project several policy documents and websites outlining different outdoor education practices were analysed (Östman, 2013). From these analyses we selected three practices that were qualitatively different in their educational aims, but had a common explicit purpose to promote good relations between nature and the participants. The first practice is Outdoor Education Centres with roots in traditional biology excursions. In Sweden about 70 such centres encourage day visits from ordinary school classes. Their main aim is to provide opportunities for students to learn basic ecology and to encourage positive attitudes towards nature through personal experience (Naturskoleföreningen, 2005). The children in the classes we observed were between the ages of eight and nine years. The second practice is 'all weather' outdoor schools ('*Ur och Skur-skolor*' in Swedish). These are independent schools which follow the ordinary curriculum but use nature as the basis for children's physical, emotional, social and intellectual development (I ur och skur, 2005). Here we observed classes of children aged 9 to 11 years doing diverse activities like skiing in the winter, studying plants in the autumn and outdoor crafts in the spring. Our third case is outdoor education associated with the radical Nordic outdoor movement, where deep ecology perspectives are an important source of inspiration (Sandell & Öhman, 2010; Tordsson, 2003). The life lived out-of-doors is meant to inspire people to live a more eco-friendly life. The idea is that the participants learn from their own experiences in real outdoor-life situations. The participants are expected to acquire skills that help them relate to the demands of nature in different kinds of situations. The activities we observed included a trekking tour in November and a follow-up seminar. On the tour the class was divided into smaller groups of two or four students. They decided to sleep in wind shelters and cook their food over an open fire. The ages of the four girls we observed ranged from 19 to 25 years.

When visiting the above-named practices we always conducted the research in pairs. One of us operated the video camera and the other made notes as a complement to our video-recordings. We analysed about 40 hours of observations and 8 hours of film, 3 hours for each practice, apart from the 'all weather' outdoor schools where we have 2 hours of taped data. Every sequence in which moral issues were identifiable was transcribed, and amounted to 23 pages of text. The transcriptions provided in the text have been translated from Swedish to English with a view to reproducing the original version as accurately as possible. The analyses and transcripts of the examples presented in this study have in turn been presented and discussed in several research seminars. The validity of the analyses has thus been confirmed by experienced process-oriented researchers.

Analytical steps

To answer the research questions included in this article, and to identify and describe the moral relations in the studied outdoor practices, we had to conduct our analyses in two steps. In the first step we identified video-taped situations where moral issues were at stake. The ethical tendency typology was used as a first-order categorisation. In the interplay that occurs between students, teachers and nature in the video-taped educational practices, we looked for utterances, expressions and bodily actions that corresponded to the three different kinds of situations, namely moral reactions, norms for correct behaviour and ethical reflections. According to the purpose of this study we also made a demarcation and focused on ethics and morals in relation to nature. For example, utterances like 'It is bad to tease someone' can be seen as a moral statement, but are not related to nature.

In order to make this analysis more stringent and transparent, we decided on criteria for each of the three ethical situations according to Öhman and Östman's (2008) typology. Recognisable features were used for each of the three situations—moral reactions, norms for correct behaviour and ethical reflections—in the following way.

Moral reactions—situations in which the participants:

- demonstrate responsibility—for example, when they act in order to save, rescue or take care of someone or something;
- react spontaneously and immediately without any observable consideration of the possible consequences of their reactions; or
- show personal and emotional involvement by expressing emotions such as sympathy, anger, shame, sorrow, sadness, happiness, love and so forth.

Norms for correct behaviour—situations/events in which the participants:

- show consideration by habit—when the participants' actions are automatic and repeated in the specific practice, like picking up rubbish or not doing any damage;
- encourage each other to act in a specific way—for example, to treat the animals with care or not pick up plants by their roots; and
- act responsibly in response to others' demands.

Ethical reflections—situations/events in which the participants:

- make statements that are valid for everyone, everywhere and for every occasion;
- make rational and systematic reflections on their reasons for moral actions and make general enquiries into what is 'good' and 'right';
- question norms and what they mean in the specific practice; and
- make utterances about how people ought to act.

In our second step we used Lundegård and Wickman's (2007) language game analysis to explain the nature of the situations and describe the specific conditions for the processes. By focusing on the participants' use of language, spoken words and other actions, we were able to examine how students established relations towards nature in the different language games. In this step we analysed the participants' communications in the ethical situations identified in the first step. In order to capture the moments in which relations with nature were established, we searched for utterances and bodily actions that expressed some kind of epithet of nature; for example, characterisations, descriptions and terms of nature. In

accordance with Lundegård and Wickman (2007), we also placed these utterances and expressions in relation to the context of the actual situation being analysed. This means that the pupils' expressions and words are connected with how they are used and the actual situation in which they are used.

Results

In our analyses of the studied outdoor education activities we identified several situations in which moral issues were at stake. All three types of ethical situations are represented. In some cases, different examples were found within the same typology. This has also enabled us to develop and differentiate the typology.

In the following section we present the most illustrative examples in the different categories. These have been chosen to illustrate the richness and diversity of situations in which the ethical tendency appears in ongoing practice. These examples have also provided us with detailed knowledge about the processes in which moral relations towards nature are established.

Moral reactions

Moral reactions were mainly found at the observed Outdoor Education Centres. Most of the examples found in this category occurred when the children were involved with animals, and especially when they were divided into smaller groups in order to study the characteristics of the animals scientifically. We also observed several examples of the children giving the animals names, talking to them, making their trays cosy and comfortable, kissing the glass jar in which the animal is kept, and so on; that is, demonstrating different expressions of care.

This illustration is from an Outdoor Education Centre, where the students were encouraged to catch lacustrine animals in landing nets. During the entire research period we noted that this was a common activity. In the following example the students are aged between eight and nine years. They gathered in an idyllic landscape consisting of fir trees, deciduous trees, grazing animals, wetland and a lake. When the lesson began the teacher tried to direct the pupils' attention to the surrounding environment and presented the tasks for the day. The children were used to being outdoors and were suitably dressed for this kind of activity, with the appropriate footwear and so on.

The following event took place when a salamander that a group of children had captured in a tray seemed to be dying. In this excerpt the group is trying to put it back into the lake. We have tried to illustrate how the children spoke and acted in this specific moral reaction situation, although it has not always been easy to reproduce all the expressions in the film in the text:

1. Olle: Hold on now, hold on now [shouting].
2. Max: Everybody.
3. Linus: No wait, you too [shouting].
4. Max: Carefully [expressive voice].
5. Olle: Bye bye [they throw the salamander back into the water].
6. Max: Is he out?
7. Olle: Yes.
8. Linus: I can't see it.
9. Olle: There [points into the water].
10. Linus: No, it's not alive [sad voice].

11. Olle: Yes, it's alright, it's alright, it's swimming [shouting].
12. Max: No.
13. Olle: It is.
14. Olle: Yes it's swimming.
15. Pontus: This is almost cruelty to animals [serious voice].
16. Pontus: He did this [waves his hand in the air] he is very scared [the salamander].
17. Olle: It'll survive.
18. Teacher: Is it alive? [Most of the children involved shout for joy]

Identification from the typology

The children show spontaneous and emotional feelings of care and responsibility for the salamander. The theme of the lesson—animal characteristics—is neglected due to the rescue operation. The children react without any observable consideration, and in this situation are concerned as to whether or not the creature will survive. The communication between the children is characterised by exclamations rather than reason or argument. Their use of utterances such as 'carefully', 'bye bye' and 'this is almost cruelty' illustrates care and sympathy. These utterances are also expressed in a very engaged way. This makes it an ethical situation and, more specifically according to the typology, a moral reaction.

Language game analysis

A central part of the process in the above language game is the children's encounters with the animals. They do not just catch the animals, but also keep them for a while during the lesson. This kind of practice creates opportunities for a child to make an animal one's own, something that appears to be an important part of the process. Also, the educational tasks to identify and describe different water animals contribute to the children's possibilities to notice small details. Tasks that involve taking a close and careful look at things in nature enable the participants to notice things they might perceive as human features.

At the beginning of the transcript (lines 1–3), the children indicate the gravity of the situation by asking 'everybody' to take part in the rescue. This also illustrates the importance of everyone showing responsibility. Lines 10–14 of the transcript outline the main issue, namely to rescue the salamander and make sure that it survives. The educational task to examine the animals is put to one side, and the focus is instead transferred to the rescuing act. At the end of the transcript the teacher also confirms this responsibility by asking 'Is it alive?' The utterances 'carefully' and 'this is almost cruelty to animals' indicate an expression of care. In lines 5 and 16 an additional aspect of the event appears, which is that the children say 'bye bye' to the salamander when putting it back in the water. Then one of them notices that the salamander responds by waving its hand. Their explanation of this situation is that 'he is very scared'. In this language game the salamander appears as something that can feel fear and can signal this to others. The children act and react as though the salamander has human features. This nature relation is created between the children as caretakers and the salamander as the scared victim. This relation implies a feeling of responsibility for the salamander's life and well-being, where the children become the moral subjects and the salamander the moral object.

Norms regulating actions towards nature

In our analyses we identified two different types of situation within the typology in which norms regulating actions towards nature are at stake. The first situation type is norms in

the form of general rules that regulate our actions towards nature; for example, rules that are connected to the right of common access. The second is social norms, known as specific norms in the given practice. These are norms that are created within the ongoing practice and are not always explicitly expressed. There is also an expectation that these norms have to be followed in order to be socially accepted in the group.

Norms in the form of general rules

Within this type we observed norms such as do not leave any rubbish, break branches or disturb the animals. The following illustration shows how children conform to the law concerning protected species. The transcript illustrates how the rules connected to the law regulate the actions of the participants. This example is also from an Outdoor Education Centre, where children from eight to nine years of age were asked to collect lacustrine animals. The teacher gave instructions at the beginning of the day and in the following excerpt explains how to collect the small animals:

1. Teacher: Today it is also important to remember that we are just borrowing the animals for a while, in order to find a few things out about the animals. Afterwards all the animals will be put back into the water. They are just living creatures. Frogs and toads are a little bit special; we were just talking about toads. What do we need to think about when it comes to toads and frogs? Do you know?
2. Sune: They need air.
3. Teacher: They need air. Yes exactly, they actually need water and air.
Is there anything else we need to think about regarding toads and frogs? Can you take them to school?
4. All at once: No.
5. Teacher: No, they are actually protected. What does protected mean? Someone from another class said that they were wanted. But they are protected.
6. Julia: Er, well, that there aren't very many of them.
7. Teacher: And that means that we mustn't move them away from here, but that they have to remain in this very place.

Identification from the typology. Here the teacher wants to remind the children that the frogs and toads in the area are protected species. The teacher also gives an account of what the rules are in this specific situation, namely that they are not allowed to remove frogs and toads from that particular place. The teacher asks the children to follow the general rule and take responsibility. In this case they do not act from habit or as a response to the expectations or demands of others. Rather, they have to act in a specific way for protected animals. Based on the typology, we recognise this as norms in the form of general rules.

Language game analysis. The central aspect here is that the children learn a general rule about how to act in relation to frogs and toads, because they are protected animals. The teacher hints that there is something special about frogs and toads, and asks 'What do we need to think about regarding frogs and toads?' Further on, in line 5, she also explains that they are 'protected' animals. She wants them to know what that will mean in this specific activity. In line 5 she asks 'What does protected mean?' In this language game a connection is created between the concept protected, frogs and toads. In line 7 the consequence is that the children are 'not allowed to move' these creatures. There is no discussion about whether this is for the animals' own good or not. It does not seem to be a question of sympathy, but is

rather something they have to accept to be law-abiding and is not necessarily associated with care or sympathy for the animals. The reason for the general rule is suggested in line 6: 'there aren't very many of them' and due to that they have to remain where they are. In this case, the relation towards nature is created between the participants as law-abiding moral subjects and frogs and toads constituted as protected animals and moral objects. The established relation implies that you are not allowed to move protected animals and, in this example, specifically frogs and toads. We observed several situations like this, where the norms were presented as predetermined rules in the ongoing practice. In these cases, how to act according to the norms is also prescribed, and in that sense it is obvious what the relationship should imply.

Specific norms in the given practice

During our observations of different outdoor education practices we noticed a lot of norms in the form of repeated habits. The participants mostly followed these specific norms habitually, and in some cases also encouraged each other to follow these norms. One of the specific norms that we identified in this study stands out from the rest regarding our interest in nature relations. From our video-recordings at the 'all weather' outdoor schools and the Outdoor Education Centres, we noticed several instances where teachers and pupils used a special language game, particularly when talking about the animals and plants as though they had human features: for example, when talking about some birds having a nursery with nestlings nearby or some passing geese saying 'hello'. In the same way, the children wished the animals a great summer when putting them back into the lake, told them they would miss them, held funerals for the animals, gave them names, kisses and so on. In several examples we found that this social norm also articulated a specific way of acting. This kind of utterance embraces aspects such as having respect for animals and plants. These processes are shown here in two steps, by two illustrative examples. In the first example we show how this kind of language game appears in practice. The following transcript is from an Outdoor Education Centre. The teacher is introducing the tasks for the day to pupils sitting on a slope outside when a pied flycatcher suddenly flies past:

Teacher: Up there in the tree. I'm now talking about something completely different, a little black and white bird called a pied flycatcher. He's sitting there and singing and saying that this space is occupied, he's a right little pest. He chases great tits and chaffinches and other birds away from their nests. He came here last week ... and thinks that he should decide where to live. It doesn't matter if it's already occupied. You might see a few birds today, you can talk to me about them and we'll see if we can identify them, but now, I want to tell you what kind of things you will need, because it's time for you to start work.

Identification from the typology. As we observed several situations in which this language game occurred, it can be defined as a habit. Our analyses show that there is no questioning or arguing for or against this specific way of talking. Talking about animals and plants as though they have human features is natural for the teachers and children alike. In this sense, this language game occurs as an unspoken norm and not as a general rule, as was the case in our last example. In accordance with the criteria of the typology, it also occurs automatically and repeatedly. We identify this as a specific norm in the given practice.

Language game analysis. The main aspect of this language game is talking about living organisms as though they had human features, such as thoughts, feelings and so forth. In the above transcript the teacher talks about the pied flycatcher as having human features. By

utterances like 'saying that this space is occupied', the bird is portrayed as being able to talk and tell us things that we can understand. When 'he chases ... other birds away from their nests' it becomes a flycatcher that plans its actions. In this example, the teacher also talks about the flycatcher as 'a real pest' and as if it 'thinks that he should decide where to live'. By this use of language the bird also becomes a moral subject, with some kind of responsibility for its actions and intentions, like a human being. In the example the relation is created between the participants and the flycatcher. In contrast to previous ethical situations, it creates a relation between two moral subjects. This in turn implies that the created relation has a reciprocal form of respect and the possibility to make demands on each other. In this relationship it becomes more of a question of how to relate and act towards living organisms. In this language game, relations are created that more allude to our feelings for these organisms, and that it is up to each participant to decide how to act and relate in accordance with these feelings.

A specific way of acting

The following example shows how this social norm of talking about animals and plants as though they have human features is adopted by the children. In this case, it also regulates their way of acting towards a little oak tree. A group of children are examining plants at an 'all weather' outdoor school during the spring term. The main task for the day is to investigate plants growing at ground level. They have been given a paper by their teacher listing the different tasks and in this excerpt they are trying to write down the names of the plants they have found. In this particular case they have found an oak sapling:

- Lina: No a little oak.
 Edvin: What should we write then, a little oak?
 Tuva: Yes a baby oak.
 Sara: Yes we can write a baby oak.

They continue with their tasks and a few minutes later are expected to talk about some of the plants they have found at the common gathering at the end of the lesson:

- Ann: Oh, we have to pick a baby oak too.
 Sara: No, that's evil.
 Miranda: Can't we just pick a leaf from the baby oak then?
 Sara: Good idea.
 Ann: Yes, let's do that.

Identification from the typology. In the same way as the example with the pied flycatcher, they give the little oak human features by their use of language. We identify this as a specific norm in the given practice. The difference with this example is that it shows how this kind of language game also has consequences for how they treat the plants. You are supposed to treat them with respect and care, like a human friend.

Language game analysis. In this group the children give the oak sapling human features by their use of language, 'a baby oak'. This special way of talking also seems to influence their way of acting. One girl, Ann, reminds the others that they 'have to pick a baby oak too' and take it back to the gathering with the teacher. Sara answers 'No, that's evil'. She thinks it is evil to pull up the little oak plant. In the end they solve the problem by picking a leaf to take

to the class gathering. The language game construes the limits for right or wrong moral actions, in this case in relation to small plants or saplings. This example also illustrates that the children are talking in this way of their own accord, which indicates that they have learned how to play this kind of language game. This is also an example in which the educational task evokes moral questions about the consequences of their actions and creates a relation between the children as caretakers, moral subjects and the oak sapling as a moral object in the form of a baby. Further, in this case the relation also appears as responsibility for and care of the oak sapling. The children are not just talking about the plant as a human, but are also treating the baby oak as a human in this language game.

In line with the above example, we have observed how teachers also use this kind of language game to regulate children's actions. One example is when a child asks: 'If we catch a pike can we take it home?' The teacher answers: 'No, it has its friends and relations here in this lake, so you have to say bye, bye, have a good time and see you next summer.' This is also an example of when feelings such as sympathy are intended as guidelines for the participants' ways of acting in nature.

Ethical reflections

Ethical reflections are not common activities in the outdoor education practices that we have observed. The cases that have been identified occur among adult students. This kind of ethical situation also includes a retro-perspective or a future perspective, in contrast to earlier presented situations. The participants reflect on actions that have already been done or on possible future actions. In this typology we also identified two different types of ethical reflections. The first is about breaking common rules and the other is reflections on situated norms.

Ethical reflections on the breaking of common rules

In our studies we noticed that in some situations a conflict arises between the Swedish right of public access and the outdoor activities we video-taped. This in turn leads to critical reflections among the participants on how to deal with these kinds of situations, such as breaking off branches to start a fire or to use as a groundsheet. The following excerpt is from an outdoor education seminar connected with the radical outdoor movement. In the excerpt the participants are exchanging their experiences of a one-week trekking tour in November:

Susan: Something that I thought about was that this was a trip where we could light camp fires and use windbreaks and so on and that we were in a nature reserve, or whatever it is called, nature conservation, yes a nature reserve. It would have been better not to have been there, because if you are supposed to light a fire then you want to do just that, wherever you like. Just stop where you want to and light a fire. As it is now you can only light a fire where there is a windbreak and a special fireplace, which makes a trip like this a bit more difficult.

Teacher: Did anyone else experience this as a limitation?

Sam: I thought it was ... or do you think that not being able to light a fire was a disadvantage?

Susan: Yes I think so.

Karen: Yes the ruling is that you are only allowed to light fires in the permanent fireplaces. We lit ... sometimes broke the rules, but on the other hand we did use the windbreaks. Or at least at the beginning we were really focused on having lunch and using the windbreaks and lighting a fire. We wondered whether there was any wood in the next windbreak

area and we carried a lot of wood between those places. We later realised that this was not necessary because we could use twigs to light a fire and discovered that this was much easier. So it was ... we became more [makes a sign for coordinated] in that we could use the windbreaks and that was good because there were a lot of them, but at the same time it was a bit of a pity I think.

[Later on in the discussion]

Teacher: Of course there are these rules and so on, but on the other hand well it is also possible to evaluate every situation. I mean, you can make your own fireplace and then eradicate any trace of it afterwards. And it is true that these kinds of rules are mainly for ... even if the rules apply all the year round the main fire hazard is between May and September or October. In our case the fire risk might not have been all that extreme [general laughter].

Identification from the typology. In this conversation the participants talk about and question a universal rule that is valid for everyone, every time. Based on their own judgements and their own experiences from the trip and the fire restrictions, the participants are here trying to formulate their own ethical principles. Also, according to the typology criteria, it can be noted that the participants use the third-person perspective. We recognise this situation as ethical reflections, where the participants express their rational and systematic reflections on the reasons for their moral actions and try to discern what is 'good' and 'right'—ethical reflections on the breaking of common rules.

Language game analysis. This particular ethical discussion is based on the purpose of the trekking tour, which was to light a camp fire in a nature reserve. Susan begins this reflection by saying 'this was a trip where we could light camp fires and use windbreaks and so on and that we were in a nature reserve'. There is a universal rule about fire restrictions in the area due to it being a nature reserve and, as Karen says, 'the ruling is that you are only allowed to light fires in the permanent fireplaces'. Some of the participants felt restricted by this during the trip. One of the groups even broke the rules and made their own fireplaces when it seemed appropriate. Karen then continues by saying, '... we sometimes broke the rules'. The reason why this ethical discussion continues is that the participants try to justify breaking the rule by deciding if and when a general rule can be broken. In this process they talk about fire hazards and it is obvious that during this particular trip the risk was minimal. Rather ironically, the teacher says that 'the fire risk might not have been all that extreme'. At the end of the conversation the teacher also makes an ethical statement; that although there are rules, every situation can be evaluated, and that any signs of human activity can be eradicated before leaving the site so that any risk of fire is eliminated. This situation has arisen because a formal rule relating to fire restrictions has been apprehended as troublesome and somewhat unnecessary. The trekkers' experience of the restriction during the trip initiates these retrospective reflections on their actions. In contrast to the other ethical situations, here we need to consider the retrospective dimension of ethical reflections. A relation has already been created between the participants and the nature reserve area by the fire restriction, which states that you are only allowed to light fires in areas provided with a special fireplace. This is a relation that is similar to the earlier example of protected animals and norms in the form of formalised rules. The relation created in this retrospective ethical reflection is also between the participants and the actual area, but appears to be quite different. Unlike the example of the protected animals, the participants become moral subjects as users and the actual area (nature) becomes a moral object in the sense of the used place. Another difference in this case is that the participants try to recreate the meaning of the responsibility in this retrospective reflection. By using their own judgement and experience, it is possible to light fires and be responsible. This process

also creates a new relation to nature which implies that you can light fires as long as it is safe to do so and take responsibility for these actions. The fact that nature is changeable makes this reflection much more complex.

Ethical reflections on situated norms

We have found several examples of outdoor education connected to the radical outdoor movement, in which the participants discuss the prevailing norms for this practice. The following example is also from the trekking tour that took place in November. A group of girls have set up camp for the night, and in this excerpt are gathering round a fire they have lit as the snow falls:

Lena: People have always said stuff like oh shit and now ... petrol costs nine [Swedish] crowns ... a litre. No-one will be able to afford to drive, and then it goes up to nine and everything continues as normal.

Maria: Yes.

Lena: And then it goes up to ten and to eleven and that's it folks but nobody really stops ...

Maria: But if I was going to buy a new car today, there's no way I'd buy a new car, even if I could afford it, but in any case I'd never buy a petrol-driven car.

Lena: No certainly not.

Maria: I hope that more people think like that.

Lena: Mm.

Identification from the typology. In this example the girls are discussing people's right to use or not to use gas-driven cars. They are trying to find rational and systematic arguments for what they consider good and right. They are also speaking in a third-person perspective, and for all people in all situations. We identify this as ethical reflections on situated norms.

Language game analysis. Here it is more difficult to say what really initiates this kind of conversation. It is obvious that this discussion arises in the 'outdoor movement situation', which indicates that in this kind of practice discussing such questions is reasonable. We observed several similar situations, where participants reflected on different lifestyle choices. It would appear that opportunities for such reflections are created in this practice. The tasks outlined in this example are more comprehensive and focus on living in nature for a few days. This differs from tasks in which the participants are expected to focus on specific things in nature, such as small animals. The group in the example were hiking without a tent or portable stove, and did not want to use prepared windbreaks for sleeping purposes and so on. This type of encounter with nature seems to contribute to the reflective language game in the example.

There are also similarities with the ethical situation, with norms regulating actions. In the above ethical reflection a specific rule in this practice seems to be to choose environmentally friendly alternatives. As Maria declares: '... But if I was going to buy a new car today, there's no way I'd buy a new car, even if I could afford it, but in any case I'd never buy a petrol-driven car.' No-one in the group voices another opinion or questions this statement. One girl, Lena, shows her agreement by the utterance, 'No certainly not.' The discussion is about other people in society and their thoughts in this case. As Lena begins this excerpt: '... People have always said stuff like oh shit and now ... petrol costs nine [Swedish] crowns ... a litre. No-one will be able to afford to drive, and then it goes up to nine and everything continues as normal.' In this case, the principle

is about whether it is right to have a petrol-driven car or not. The relation is created between the participants as responsible citizens and our common nature or environment as a moral object. In this specific case, the relation implies that you should protect nature by choosing a non-petrol-driven car. In the context in which these girls are studying, they expressed a lot of criticism of society in general. In a wider perspective this relation could imply environmental protection by choosing environmentally friendly alternatives.

Discussion and conclusions

Our study shows that in the investigated outdoor education practices, moral relations towards nature are established in several different ways. By studying ongoing practice, and using the ethical tendency typology, moral reactions, regulating norms and ethical reflections, it has been possible to identify and describe processes in which moral relations towards nature are at stake. Using these categories has accordingly helped to throw light on moral situations in educational practices. We are fully aware that we have only been able to identify the processes that are observable, which is a limitation of our research method. However, it can be assumed that the participants and teachers involved in these practices think about and reflect on them without necessarily communicating or showing this. Furthermore, this study has been conducted within a Swedish outdoor context, which may have yielded different results than would have been the case in other situations. Östman (2009) maintains that moral reactions, norms and ethical reflections are general human features, but that the objects for the reactions, norms and reflections can change and vary between cultures.

As stated in the Introduction, the belief that the encounter with nature can change people's moral relations with nature is quite strong, although the empirical results from earlier studies vary (see for example Bogner, 1998; Johnson & Manoli, 2008). The results also indicate that processes in which moral relations towards nature are established depend on many different educational conditions. In this study we have been able to acquire more knowledge about these conditions. Just being outdoors in nature does not automatically mean that moral relations will be established. In our examples we identified different kinds of relations, which may in turn influence and have implications for future relations. Knowledge about these different conditions may contribute to the understanding of variance highlighted by earlier pre-test and post-test studies, and in this sense is our contribution to the 'black box' referred to in the Introduction. The influence of these educational processes also helps to explain some of the complexities of measuring the effects of outdoor activities according to people's environmental attitudes. The fact that the moral processes of individual participants depend on outdoor educational settings also explains the varying effects of the different outdoor programmes that have been measured, which for example Bradley et al. (1999) and Johnson and Manoli (2008) highlight in their studies. In the following discussion our ambition is to account for these educational conditions and the richness and diversity of the moral processes.

The interplay between the encounter with nature and the way that participants talk about nature (i.e. their language games) is important for and common to the observed processes in which relations towards nature are created. What the participants meet and pay attention to in nature influences their way of talking. Further, different language games influence what they choose to focus on in nature, and how. The results of this study show that the educational purposes and settings have some kind of influence on the participants' encounters with nature. The scientific way of investigating animals and plants, which assumes close and careful scrutiny, also creates opportunities for close

contact between the participants and nature. In particular, encounters with animals seem to stimulate engagement and curiosity among the participants. This close contact is also an important prerequisite for noticing what students might conceive as human features; for example, when students imagine that animals are communicating with them. Another type of educational setting is a more open encounter with nature without the need for detailed tasks and advanced equipment. This type of encounter seems to create more reflective perspectives, where nature is apprehended as a whole; for example, whether the surroundings are attractive or not, comparisons between their everyday lives and life in nature, and so on.

This study also shows that the use of language (i.e. the language game) is an important part of the investigated moral processes. Teachers' and students' different ways of talking about nature create opportunities for the establishment of various moral relations. Talking about animals as though they had human features facilitates the establishment of moral relations that are personal and lead to the formulation of personal guidelines. This is in contrast to the language games where teachers direct students by pointing them to the prevailing norms. In such cases there is no need for students to make their own decisions about whether they are doing the 'right' things or not. There is an important difference between having a sense of personal responsibility and being asked by someone else to take responsibility. It is possible that events or activities which require reflection also need more personal involvement. In some situations, the 'game' dimension of the participants' language use is also prominent. For example, in some situations teachers make use of language games to direct the participants' ways of acting. An example of this from our study is when the teacher says, '[the pike] has its friends and relations here in this lake, so you have to say bye, bye, have a good time and see you next summer'. Although this is playful, it includes important information and guidelines. This kind of communication may also help students to make their own reflections and decisions in other similar situations. This also connects to the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess and his understanding of the process of identification 'as a situation in which identification elicits intense empathy' (Naess, 1995, p. 15). He means when you, for example, see a flea fighting for its life, and feel compassion and empathy, because you can see yourself in the flea and identify with it. Based on this, there is reason to believe that the special language game of giving animals and plants human features allows the participants to identify with and create moral relations towards nature.

Another interesting aspect is the kind of moral relations that are established in these practices. It is shown that the participants are often created as subjects and 'nature' as an object. In this kind of relationship the participants receive or feel some sort of responsibility and sympathy for nature. However, the study also shows situations in which relations are created between two moral subjects, which imply that both parties have some kind of responsibility. Here the game dimension of the language use is evident to the participants, which also might have some influence on their understanding of the limits of the responsibility. One example is when the pied flycatcher becomes a real pest. Here the bird appears to be responsible for its actions, although not in the same way as the students.

Beery (2013a) and Dutcher et al. (2007) highlight that connectivity with nature is a key aspect of environmental behaviour and demonstrate that nature-based outdoor recreation shows a positive and significant relationship with environmental connectivity. Our study has shed more light on the process of nature connection. As previously indicated, moral relations can be based on stated rules or norms in the practices or on feelings of sympathy. Several relations occur when norms are communicated within the practices: a way of acting that participants have or are supposed to follow. These situations can be

contrasted to situations that create a sense of responsibility among the participants, and where the way of acting becomes an open question. In this case the relation is not predetermined. Relations that are built on feelings of responsibility also assume personal and emotional involvement. In each situation the participants have to find their own way of acting, and in some cases also reflect on what they find morally defensible. It is our belief that these types of personal relations are often something that people carry with them and take into account in other similar situations. This process could lead to a perception of connectivity with nature. Our study gives us strong reasons to believe that encounters with nature can widen people's environmental and ethical perspectives.

In view of the present results, we would like to suggest four educational points that could help practitioners to improve their educational practices within the field. First of all we want to emphasise that dealing with practices where moral reactions are part of educational processes also implies responsibility. How do we deal with people's moral reactions, and are all kinds of reactions acceptable? Do any of the prevailing norms determine how the participants should react? Are the prevailing norms within the practice negotiable or not? There are also questions about which relations with nature are acceptable. Is there a fixed relation, or are the participants supposed to find and create their own relations towards nature?

If one of the ambitions of these educational practices is to create possibilities for good relations towards nature, our second point is that teachers continuously need to bring ethical questions to the fore in discussions during outdoor activities. We have, for example, observed situations in which pupils try to talk about their emotional experiences when summing up a lesson but where the teacher keeps focusing on scientific learning goals. This can also be connected to the intrinsic values of the nature.

Sandell and Öhman (2013) maintain that outdoor experience as an aim in itself is very much about capturing the moment in which intrinsic values are manifested. Our observations confirm this, in that we identified a lot of situations in which outdoor educationalists make students pay attention to different occurrences in the surrounding nature. But there are also occasions when students encounter intrinsic values and teachers do not grasp the educational potential; for example, by confirming their reactions or taking these experiences into account when summing up learning goals.

The third aspect to take into account is that different ways of working also create different conditions for the participants' encounters with nature, such as the difference between the consequences of scientific ways of investigation and the focus on the experience of living in nature with simple means. The close encounter with animals and plants in the first case allows students to observe details, including aspects they interpret as human features. The experience of living in nature in turn creates more reflective perspectives, such as when students reflect on the consumer society and how it affects their everyday lives compared with a life with simple resources.

As a fourth point, teachers need to be aware of their language and the consequences that different language games might have for the relational processes. It is important to consider the difference between communicating rules for how to behave and situations which in themselves bring a sense of sympathy for nature. Communicating rules does not require any emotional involvement or personal consideration on the part of the participants. The different use of language is also an example of educational complexity. In the observed practices, scientific language and perspectives often gain the upper hand over, for example, moral dimensions. At the same time, scientific perspectives may also fit a teacher's anthropomorphic way of talking, when it is perhaps easier to imagine what an

animal or plant might be ‘thinking’ or ‘talking’ about. However, further research is necessary in order to answer such questions.

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Notes

1. This term was developed from Wittgenstein’s ‘A Lecture on Ethics’, in which he talks about ethics as ‘a document of a tendency in the human mind’ (Wittgenstein, 1993, p. 44).
2. For a more thorough illumination and examples of these situations, see Öhman (2006a) and Öhman and Östman (2008).
3. See Öhman (2006b), Kronlid and Svennbeck (2008), and Öhman and Östman (2008).

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