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Business education in transition : a phenomenographical study on Oulu Business

School teachers' perceptions of sustainability and responsibility

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Enhancing sustainable development in the society can be regarded as a key factor in providing a good and safe future for the coming generations. The business sector can be seen as an actor that has a great role to play in doing so. However, business education seems to still have a long way to go before reaching the goal of educating business professionals that take sustainability and responsibility into account as core values in business.

The aim of this study is to investigate what the perceptions of the (10) teachers of Oulu Business School in Finland are on sustainability and responsibility, how they have implemented sustainability and responsibility in their teaching, what kinds of challenges they have faced in doing so and how could implementing these topics be enhanced in Oulu Business School. One of the aims of the study is also to find out how the teachers perceive the contradiction between the goals of sustainability and responsibility and on the other hand the goals of neoclassical economic theory that is the prevailing paradigm within business schools. This has been done by utilizing phenomenographical methodology that is interested in people's conceptions, perceptions and experiences. The teachers have been interviewed in Oulu, Finland, in May and June of 2017. The data has been analyzed by categorizing the utterances into a pool of meanings and by dividing these utterances into further categories which formed the outcome space.

The findings of the study show that the teachers of Oulu Business School see sustainability and responsibility as important topics *per se*. However, the ways in which they see that these topics should be enhanced in the society and who should be responsible for it are different. Some of the teachers see that business school teachers have a great agency in sustainability and responsibility whereas others find that other actors in the society and other teachers in the business school should take responsibility of these issues. It can be argued that some of the perceptions are outsourcing and represent a neoclassical economic paradigm whereas other perceptions represent a change agent perspective that seems to be in line with an ecological modernization paradigm.

Based on the empirical findings of this study and on previous research on the subject, the possibilities of critical pedagogy in enhancing sustainability and responsibility in business education are being discussed in the end of the study and practical suggestions for doing so are given at the levels of curriculum as well as teaching and study methods.

Keywords: sustainable development, sustainability, responsibility, business ethics, higher education, phenomenography, critical pedagogy

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Kestävän kehityksen edistämistä yhteiskunnassa voidaan pitää keskeisenä tekijänä hyvän ja turvallisen tulevaisuuden takaamisessa tuleville sukupolville ja liiketoiminta-alan voidaan nähdä olevan tässä avainasemassa. Vaikuttaa kuitenkin siltä, että kauppatieteiden koulutuksella on vielä matkaa tavoitteeseensa kouluttaa liike-elämän ammattilaisia, jotka ottavat kestävyiden ja vastuullisuuden huomioon liiketoiminnan keskeisinä arvoina.

Tämän tutkimustyön tarkoitus on selvittää, mitkä ovat Oulun yliopiston kauppakorkeakoulun opettajien (10) käsitykset kestävydestä ja vastuullisuudesta, miten he ovat toteuttaneet kestävyttä ja vastuullisuutta omassa opetuksessaan, millaisia haasteita he ovat kokeneet siinä, ja miten näiden aiheiden toteuttamista voitaisiin edistää Oulun yliopiston kauppakorkeakoulussa. Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on myös selvittää, miten opettajat käsittävät ristiriidan kestävyiden ja vastuullisuuden tavoitteiden ja kauppakorkeakouluissa vallitsevan ajatusmallin, uusklassisen taloustieteen tavoitteiden välillä. Tutkimus on tehty hyödyntämällä fenomenografista tutkimusmenetelmää, joka on kiinnostunut ihmisten käsityksistä, ymmärryksestä ja kokemuksista. Opettajia on haastateltu Oulussa touko- ja kesäkuussa 2017. Tutkimustiedot on analysoitu lajittelemalla ilmaisut merkitysyksikköjen joukoksi ja jakamalla nämä ilmaisut eteenpäin kategorioiksi, jotka muodostavat tulosavaruuden.

Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat, että Oulun kauppakorkeakoulun opettajat näkevät kestävyiden ja vastuullisuuden itsessään tärkeinä aiheina. Heillä on kuitenkin erilaisia näkemyksiä siitä, miten näitä aiheita tulisi edistää yhteiskunnassa, ja siitä, kenen tulisi olla siitä vastuussa. Joidenkin opettajien mielestä kauppakorkeakoulun opettajilla on suuri vaikutusmahdollisuus kestävydessä ja vastuullisuudessa, kun taas toisten mielestä muilla yhteiskunnan ja kauppakorkeakoulun tekijöillä ja yksilöillä tulisi olla vastuu näistä asioista. Voidaan väittää, että osa käsityksistä on ulkoistavia ja edustaa uusklassista taloustieteellistä ajatusmallia, kun taas osa käsityksistä edustaa muutosagentti-näkökulmaa, joka vaikuttaa olevan yhteneväinen ekologisen modernisaation ajatusmallin kanssa.

Tämän työn empiiristen tutkimustulosten ja aiempien kriittistä pedagogiikkaa koskevien tutkimusten perusteella työn lopussa kartoitetaan kriittisen pedagogiikan mahdollisuuksia kestävyiden ja vastuullisuuden edistämässä kauppatieteiden koulutuksessa ja annetaan käytännön ehdotuksia tämän toteuttamiseksi niin opetussuunnitelmatasolla kuin opetuksen ja oppimismetodien tasolla.

Avainsanat: kestävä kehitys, kestävyys, vastuullisuus, liiketoimintaetiikka, korkeakoulutus, fenomenografia, kriittinen pedagogiikka

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1 Introduction

Among all the challenges our human race is facing in order to survive on planet Earth it can be argued that fighting climate change is indeed the biggest one. Due to the rapidly changing economical, ecological and societal changes in our world there is a growing need for enhancing sustainable development at all levels of the society from individuals to multinational companies.

Sustainable development can be defined as economic growth that happens without decreasing the world's non-renewable resources and on the other hand helps enhance social equality (DeSimone & Popoff 1997, 3). The World Commission on Environment and Development was the first to define sustainable development as development that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (1987, 8). The Sustainable Development Goals were launched in 2015 by the United Nations General Assembly to “end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all” (United Nations, 2017).

When trying to find out how sustainable development could be best enhanced in the world one could wonder, who has the power to make a change. There are many actors working on sustainability, mostly governments or non-governmental organizations. The power of individuals in acting sustainably seems to be in consumption or non-consumption. As I see it, the individuals' effort has a potential to lead to a bigger entity and this leads us to the one actor that I see as having power to make a change: the business sector.

Much of the responsibility in making the future sustainable lies indeed on corporate businesses. According to the UN Global Compact Principles, in order to be sustainable, corporate companies “must do five things: Foremost, they must operate responsibly in alignment with universal principles and take actions that support the society around them. Then, to push sustainability deep into the corporate DNA, companies must commit at the highest level, report annually on their efforts, and engage locally where they have a presence” (United Nations Global Compact 2015, 7).

Due to the important role of companies on implementing sustainability in the society it is of great importance that sustainability and responsibility issues are taken into account in university level business schools (Morsing & Rovira 2011, 16). According to previous research business schools still have a long way to go before succeeding in doing this. It can be argued that some

fundamental changes need to be made in business education to educate corporate leaders who are able to perform responsibly and make sustainable decisions in the complexity of today's world (Dyllick 2015, 17).

My pre-assumption is that, although sustainability and responsibility issues are a part of many business schools' curricula, they are experiencing challenges in combining the goals of traditional neoclassical economic theory and the goals of sustainability and responsibility. According to some scholars there is a division between two different paradigms or worldviews within the discipline of business and economics: the neoclassical paradigm and the ecological modernization paradigm (Stubbs & Cocklin 2008, 208). The standpoint of this study is to examine how sustainability and responsibility are being implemented in Oulu Business School, Finland, by investigating the perceptions of the teachers of that particular business school. The interest in this study also lies within how the teachers themselves perceive this contradiction of paradigms.

The research questions are: "What are the perceptions of the teachers of Oulu Business School on sustainability and responsibility?", "What kinds of challenges have they faced when implementing those topics in their teaching?", "How do they perceive the division between the goals of neoclassical economic theory and the goals of sustainability and responsibility?" and "How could business education be improved to make it more responsible and sustainable?"

Because the aim of this study is to understand the perceptions and experiences of the teachers of Oulu Business School, phenomenographical methodology is being used in this work. Phenomenography aims to find out "the differing ways in which people experience, perceive, apprehend, understand, or conceptualize various phenomena in, and aspects of, the world around them" (Keeves 1997, 97). The method is empirical because the interest lies within other people's perceptions and ideas. As the human experiences and perceptions are the object of the study, the method used for collecting data is through individual interviews. They have been completed as semi-structured face to face interviews in Oulu in May and June of 2017.

This study has a transformative and emancipatory nature and it aims for a *change*. After the analysis of the empirical findings, some practical suggestions will be made on how sustainability and responsibility could be enhanced in business education through critical pedagogy. The critical perspective rejects the dichotomy between positivist and interpretivist ontologies and epistemologies and instead, views the world as a reality that is constantly shaped by power relations in the society (Morrow & Brown 1994, 59). The suggestions will be based on the

answers of the teachers of Oulu Business School as well as on previous research on critical pedagogy, sustainability and business education. The suggestions are focusing on Oulu Business School but they also provide grounds for looking at sustainability in business education more largely through critical pedagogy.

2 Sustainability and responsibility in the business school context

In this study the perceptions of the teachers of Oulu Business School on sustainability are being investigated. This section will provide the context of the research by explaining how sustainability can be defined with regards to business education and why sustainability and responsibility should be part of business education. This chapter will also provide definitions for the concepts used in this piece of research. Sustainability and responsibility will be conceptualized and scrutinized from the perspective of the discipline of business and economics. The three different paradigms of the sustainability framework (the neoclassical economic paradigm, the ecocentrism paradigm and the ecological modernization paradigm) will be familiarized with.

2.1 Definitions of sustainability

It can be argued that fighting climate change and the societal and economical changes related to it are the biggest and most urgent challenge of the human kind. After the industrial revolution and the explosion of the population growth on our planet the total anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions have grown at an increasing speed. The growth between years 1970 and 2000 was 1,3 percent per year when between years 2000 and 2010 it was already 2,2 percent. This increase was by 78 percent due to fossil fuel combustion and industrial processes. (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2015, 6).

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has pointed out that the main drivers of increases in CO₂ emissions are population growth and economic growth. If this process should continue, it has been estimated that the global mean surface temperature would be increased from 3,7°C to 4,8°C by year 2100 when compared to time before industrialization (IPCC 2015, 8).

Global warming has and will globally affect all areas of life from the environment to socioeconomics. It has already affected agriculture, nature diversity both on land and under water, people's living conditions and their access to water. (IPCC 2014, 2). Extreme weathers, floods, heatwaves, drought and wildfires have become more common and they will continue to be a bigger risk (The AAAS Climate Science Panel 2014, 10). World Health Organization has estimated that climate change will cause 250 000 additional deaths between years 2030 and 2050. The risks involve exposure to heat, diarrhea, malaria and childhood undernutrition. (World Health Organization 2014, 1). From a social perspective climate change has affected and will

affect the groups that are already in the most vulnerable situation, such as the economically disadvantaged both in rural areas and in the cities (O'Brien & Leichenko 2000, 229).

The international community started working against climate change and its socioeconomic impacts in 1987 when the World Commission on Environment and Development, run under the General Assembly of the United Nations, published its report "Our Common Future". It is a 384-page publication describing the threats and challenges related to climate change and suggestions for managing them. The authors of "Our common future" can be described as the founding mothers and fathers of the concept of sustainable development.

The most commonly used definition for sustainable development is created by the World Commission on Environment and Development that has defined sustainable development as something that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development & Brundtland 1987, 8). It can also be described as "a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development, and institutional change are all in harmony and enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations" (World Commission on Environment and Development & Brundtland 1987, 46).

After being published in 1987 the so called Brundtland report has been used as a framework for both the United Nations Millennium Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The aim of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is to "end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all". The goals cover many areas of life such as poverty reduction, education for all, economic growth and life on land and under water. (United Nations, 2015).

2.2 Different business approaches to sustainability and responsibility

The focus of this piece of research, however, is not on the concept of sustainable development but on the concepts of *sustainability* and *responsibility*. One might wonder why the use of the word "sustainability" wouldn't be sufficient but these two words have been chosen to emphasize both the environmental and social responsibilities of business. A visual representation of the definitions used in this study and the way they relate to each other can be seen in Figure 1 (page 23). When it comes to business and economics, the concept of sustainability can be seen

in two ways. The narrower interpretation puts the businesses in the focus by looking at their economic performance (Crane & Matten 2010, 35). In that point of view interest lies within the sustainability of the economic growth. In this piece of research, the focus is on the broader concept of economic sustainability, e.g. “the company’s attitude towards and impacts upon the economic framework in which it is embedded” (Crane & Matten 2010, 35).

In the context of business and economics there seems still to be an understanding of sustainability as something that is merely related to the environment (Crane & Matten 2010, 34). Originally the concept has actually concentrated on the use of environmental resources (Fisher & Lovell 2009, 339). The social part of it has been understood as subjective – the effects of humans’ and companies’ activities on their surrounding nature (Fisher & Lovell 2009, 355).

Crane and Matten (2010, 34) see sustainability as a concept related to business ethics. They define it as “the long-term maintenance of systems according to environmental, economic and social considerations”. They also define sustainability as a goal for business. The relationship between business ethics and sustainability can be explained by the triple bottom line concept by John Elkington. It broadens the scope of business goals from mere economic value to also environmental and social value (Elkington 1999, 2). Henriques (2010, 65) even sees sustainability as a continuum from the idea of progress in the enlightenment era through the era of evolution and competition of the 19th century and the economic progress of the 20th century.

Business ethics can also be scrutinized from another angle, the stakeholder theories. Stakeholders can be defined as groups that have an interest in the business’s actions (Fisher & Lovell 2009, 17). Traditionally these include for example the company’s shareholders, owners and employees (Fisher & Lovell 2009, 17). However, according to Fisher and Lovell, it is difficult to define who actually has an interest and they also ask whether for example some nature elements could be regarded as stakeholders when they are so easily affected by different companies’ actions. An example of these kinds of stakeholders could be the beaches of Alaska that were polluted by the Exxon Valdez oil spill in 1989 (Gill, Picou & Richie 2012, 5).

2.3 Corporate social responsibility (CSR)

The most commonly used way of addressing the issues of sustainability and responsibility within the field of business and the discipline of business and economics is through the concept

of corporate social responsibility (CSR), which has been established in the 1950s (Van Oosterhout & Heugens 2006, 197). However, it is a concept that is not easily defined (Crane et al. 2008, 5). The problem in doing so is that there is not a commonly shared understanding about what companies should be responsible of. The ‘father’ of neoclassical economic theory, Milton Friedman, has for example suggested that “the social responsibility of the firm is to increase its profits” (Friedman 1970, as cited in Crane et al 2008, 6).

After the era of the previous quote of Friedman, the idea of the responsibility of companies has been widened to different approaches of CSR, which Melé (2008, 48) has divided into four groups of theories: Corporate social performance (based on sociology), Shareholder value theory (based on economics), Stakeholder theory (based on ethical perspectives) and Corporate citizenship theory (based on political studies). Melé suggests that there are differences in how these theories are being applied in different geographical areas: “In practice, many companies, especially in the USA, are probably better described as following the shareholder model, while in other countries (Japan, Europe) the social behavior of many companies is closer to the stakeholder model” (Melé 2008, 76). It can be argued that it would be fruitful to approach CSR from a more interdisciplinary point of view where all these different approaches would be combined.

CSR is mostly connected to the field of management but there are approaches also in other fields of business that have applied it. Some example of these include socially responsible investment (SRI) which emphasizes “an alignment between a potential investor’s ethics and expectations of corporate social performance, suggesting a relationship with reputation and market value” and cause-related marketing. The standpoint of these approaches is that some value is created for the company through the good reputation that it receives through these actions (Kurucz, Colbert & Wheeler 2008, 90).

Although CSR has been widely adopted in the field of business, a lot of critique has been addressed towards the concept. There is a brand of critical theory that criticizes the whole standpoint of CSR as embracing the goals of companies just to “make profit and protect shareholder wealth” (Blowfield 2005, 523). Some scholars have paid attention to the ways in which companies with CSR policies do not take responsibility for their supply chains’ actions and the human rights violations related to that (Mares 2010, 243). CSR has also been criticized for not being efficient enough to prevent enormous environmental catastrophes from happening, caused by companies that have had a CSR strategy, as with the case of the oil company BP’s Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010 (Cherry & Sneirson 2010, 984).

2.4 The division of paradigms

According to previous research it seems that the discipline of economics has been and still is experiencing a divide concerning its relationship with sustainability, responsibility and ethics. Gladwin et al. (1995, 874) describe it as an “epistemological crises”, a “conceptual division” and a “disassociation between humankind (and its organizations) and the remainder of the natural world”. Carrithers and Peterson (2006, 373) have studied higher education in the United States and they have identified a similar phenomenon which they describe as a “gap” and a “pedagogical gulf”. One way to approach this divide in business education is through a sustainability framework by Stubbs and Cocklin (2008, 208) who have classified three paradigms in economic thought: the neoclassical economic paradigm, the ecocentrism paradigm and ecological modernization paradigm. Gladwin et al. (1995, 876) have defined similar groups of thought as technocentrism, ecocentrism and sustaincentrism. These worldviews are constantly evolving and can be seen more as a line than as static categories (Gladwin et al. 1995, 881; Stubbs & Cocklin 2008, 208).

According to Stubbs and Cocklin (2008, 208), the neoclassical paradigm is the prevailing one within the discipline of business and economics today and “underpinning this paradigm is neoclassical economic theory, which focuses on unlimited economic growth via the operation of free markets and increasing consumption of products and services. Proponents of this view believe that the limits to growth are very distant or non-existent.” An essential part of this worldview is the idea that technology will solve all environmental problems caused by humans and their business activities (Stubbs & Cocklin 2008, 208). Social issues are not seen as the organization’s problem but as a responsibility of lawmakers and governments (Stubbs & Cocklin 2008, 210).

Ecocentrism is described as an opposite of the neoclassical paradigm. Ecocentric paradigm sees that infinite growth is not possible and that the ecosystems of the world should have value *per se*, regardless of human beings (Stubbs & Cocklin 2008, 208). According to this worldview, human species should have no rights over nature (Gladwin et al. 1995, 887). Gladwin et al. (1995, 889) argue that neither of these opposing paradigms is able to enable sustainability in the society and they propose sustaincentrism as an alternative worldview. Stubbs and Cocklin have referred to a similar paradigm as ecological modernization which is an approach that aims for “win-win” possibilities in business: making profit while “improving the welfare of its stakeholders” and “minimizing its environmental impacts” (Stubbs & Cocklin 2008, 208).

2.5 Business schools' challenges in implementing sustainability and responsibility

There has been a lot of criticism towards business education. According to Thomas Dyllick, “(t)he feeling is spreading that the current business school model needs fundamental changes, if business schools want to be a provider of solutions to the multi-faceted global crisis we are facing and thereby regain their legitimacy” (2015, 17). Business schools are even being criticized for “doing more harm than good” (Morsing & Rovira 2011, 18). The focus seems to be mostly on enhancing business activity without concern of its impacts on the world (Henriques 2010, 1). When making management education more responsible and sustainable the transformations should happen in the areas of curricula, research, teaching methodologies and institutional strategies (Godemann et al. 2014, 19). The main problems concerning business schools' education's responsibility seem to be their disability to integrate ethical, societal and sustainability values into their curricula (Adom̄ent et al. 2013, 2). This can partly be seen as a result of criticism towards addressing responsibility in business education, which is sometimes even seen as something that leads to “job-destruction” and, although the rhetorics of responsibility and sustainability seem to appear in the strategies and curricula of business schools, the traditional goals of shareholder value maximization still lead the way (Cornuel & Hommel 2015, 3).

The business schools' tendency seems to focus only on narrow areas of the discipline and disregard critical thinking and self-knowledge of the students. According to Dyllick, business students also often seem to be focusing on goals such as careers and good salaries, which effects their study choices. (Dyllick 2015, 21). Cornuel and Hommel (2015, 2) have described the business students as universities' customers who are mostly concerned about employment issues. They also point out that with the globally ongoing virtualization of studies it can be even more difficult for business schools to create a learning environment where students develop ethical thinking.

Challenges on research concern the business schools' tendency to produce scholarly knowledge that is far from practice and the way business schools often seem to ignore sustainability issues in economics, ecology and politics. Issues around managing faculty concern their lack of relevant work experience and attention to ranking-based research (Dyllick, 2015, 27).

Fortunately, many concrete suggestions for improvement have been made by researchers of business education. The research on responsible and sustainable business has focused on the

field of management and it has mostly been done within two institutional frameworks: The United Nation's Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) (Godemann et al. 2014, 16) and the 50 + 20 Agenda (Muff 2013, 488). PRME works as a network for the world's business schools that are dedicated to responsible management education (RME) (Godemann et al., 2014, 16). The 50 + 20 Agenda is a vision that was created in an 18-month think tank by different stakeholders such as business schools, NGOs and student organizations (Muff, 2013 488). PRME is a network that business schools need to apply to (Godemann et al., 2014, 18) whereas the 50 + 20 Agenda is a project that shares information and inspiration on how to educate responsible leaders for the future (Globally Responsible Leadership Initiative, 2018).

Katrin Muff, a member of the lead authoring group of the 50 + 20 Agenda, has introduced three "enablers of change". Transformative learning (1) should raise the students' self-knowledge, help them uncover their earlier thoughts and beliefs and change their perspective. Issue-centered learning (2) should take students towards more interdisciplinary learning where global and local problems are the objective. Field-work (3) should be seen as an important part of the learning (Muff 2013, 492). Also Hesselbarth and Schaltegger (2014, 27) have pointed out the importance of cognitive skills, attitudes and real life work practice. They have stated that business school alumni should become "corporate change agents for sustainability", actors "who deliberately tackles social and ecological problems with entrepreneurial means to put sustainability management into organizational practice and to contribute to a sustainable development of the economy and society" (Hesselbarth & Schaltegger 2014, 26).

According to Muff (2013, 492) research in business schools should be improved so that it would be more in service of society and support companies toward stewardship whilst helping leaders in their transformation. When it comes to managing faculty, Muff (2013, 492) has stressed the importance of its responsibility to society. Faculties' actions such as promotion, reward structures and development should be changed to serve the common good. The transformation within the economics and business studies discipline should be holistic in a way that it would cover all levels of business schools from individual teachers to their curricula and values (Khurana, 2007, 365).

As the 50 + 20 vision was published only in 2012, there has not yet been much research on how many business schools actually follow this agenda and how it is working in practice. A good overview of a successful program is made by Hesselbarth and Schaltegger (2014) who have studied the practical experiences of the students of the first master's program in sustainable

management at the Leuphana University Lüneburg. They have concentrated on the competencies that the management students in this program have gained. Their main finding is the importance of soft skills, interdisciplinary learning, life-long learning and informal learning for the students' competence and future career. These results seem to parallel with the aims of both the 50 + 20 vision and the PRME. It seems that there is still a long way ahead before responsibility issues are truly taken into account in business schools and that responsibility in business education is not yet a fulfilled promise (Cornuel & Hommel 2015, 3). According to Cornuel and Hommel RME should become "part of business schools' institutional DNA" (2015, 7) and that management should be defined as a profession "built on virtues" or a one that has certain ethical values, such as already lawyers and doctors do (Cornuel & Hommel 2015, 8; Dyllick 2015, 27).

3 Critical approaches

The aim of the study is to examine how sustainability and responsibility are being implemented in Oulu Business School, what kinds of challenges the teachers have faced in implementing those topics and what are the causes of these possible challenges. The aim is also *transformative*: to find out, how business education could be *improved* to make it more responsible and sustainable. In the end of this study, critical pedagogy will be suggested as an approach to enhance sustainability and responsibility in Oulu Business School. This chapter will provide theoretical insight of critical theory and pedagogy and their relationship with business education.

3.1 Critical theory

Critical pedagogy has its philosophical foundations in critical theory, which can be seen as an “alternative to dominant philosophical paradigms” (Bronner 2011, 23) that rejects the dichotomy between positivism and interpretivism and looks at the world as a reality that is constantly shaped by the power relations in the society (Morrow & Brown 1994, 59). The nature of critical theory is emancipatory and its aim is to change inequalities in the society (Luttrell 2010, 73; McLean 2006, 8). Instead of only describing how things are, it also focuses on “how things should be” (Bronner 2011, 1). The theory critiques prevailing conditions (McLean 2006, 8), capitalism (Keeves 1997, 169) and its goal of profit maximization (Bronner 2011, 40). Being aware of historical reasons for the current structures in the society is a fundamental feature in critical theory (Luttrell 2010, 73).

Critical theory has its roots already in the thought of Socrates, who “subjected long-standing beliefs to rational scrutiny and speculated about concerns that projected beyond the existing order” (Bronner 2011, 1). Later on, Kant and Hegel were building grounds for critical theory by emphasizing moral and consciousness as the most important human values (Bronner 2011, 2). The concept of “critical theory” was first used by Max Horkheimer in 1937, who was part of the so called “Frankfurt school” of social theorists in Germany and later on in the United States (McLean 2006, 8). Later on one of the most influential critical theorists has been Jürgen Habermas (McLean 2006, 9). Critical theory has a strong connection to economic thought: its roots are in the writings of Karl Marx and it even had connections to early communism, although these connections faded out along with the events of the second World War (Bronner 2011, 28).

3.1.1 The four elements of critical theory

Prasad and Caproni have described critical theory from the perspective of the field of management and identified four different angles to it: social construction, power relations and ideology, totality, and praxis (Prasad & Caproni 1997, 286). These themes can all be also seen as applicable to this study. Critical theorists see that the world is not only *socially constructed* by human beings but also by the power relations in the society:

Similarly, dominant ideologies dictate societal members' conceptualizations and expectations of organizations, work relations, standards of managerial effectiveness, measures of personal success, and so on. For the most part, these perspectives are so taken for granted that they are rarely, if ever, questioned. And even when these ideologies are questioned, the challenges and concerns are subjected to a host of rationalizations and institutional defenses that are designed to preserve the status quo and the logic that supports it. (Prasad & Caproni 1997, 287).

It can be argued that the thought of an ideology-based social construct can well be applied to the way that many ideas presented in economic theories are seen as self-evident "truths" which seem to be rarely contested or questioned in business schools. The neoclassical idea of increasing shareholder value being one of the main goals of business could be regarded as an example of such social constructs.

It seems that in many ways, the field of business and economics can be regarded as a social construction. Also critical pedagogy can be tied to the idea of education as a social construction, as Giroux suggests:

Educators and parents will have to come to view knowledge as neither neutral nor objective and, instead, to view it as a social construction embodying particular interests and assumptions. Knowledge must be linked to the issue of power, which suggests that educators and others must raise questions about its truth claims as well as the interests that such knowledge serves. Knowledge, in this case, does not become valuable because it is legitimized by curriculum experts. Its value is linked to the power it has as a mode of critique and social transformation. Knowledge becomes important to the degree that it helps human beings understand not only the assumptions embedded in its form and content, but also the processes whereby knowledge is produced, appropriated, and transformed within specific social and historical settings. (Giroux 1988, 7).

The idea of a social construction has originally been formed by Berger and Luckmann, according to whom, “the reality is socially constructed” (1985, 13). They have further explained this to mean that what we perceive to be real and true and how we get knowledge of the truth depends on the individual. According to the authors, “what is ‘real’ for a Tibetan monk may not be ‘real’ to an American businessman” (Berger & Luckmann 1985, 15). Thus, what may be “real” for a business teacher may not be “real” to another business teacher.

This construction can be seen as a part of the way in which the whole field of economic thought can be understood as a socially constructed phenomenon with structures that are man-made and that can be perceived in very different ways. Uskali Mäki, for example, has suggested the following:

Economics as a scientific discipline is, among other things, a matter of social interaction between economists, and between economists and other people, such as students, other social scientists, some natural scientists, university administrators, politicians, and the media. These interactions take place within a changing social structure, within the evolving institutions of economics. I find it almost trivial to claim that the models designed by economists are shaped by the institutions of economics. They are so shaped regardless of whether and how well they represent economic reality. Models are socially constructed. (Mäki 2002, 23).

In the field of business, the notion of *totality* can be seen as representing “its multiple interconnections and its location within holistic, historical contexts” (Prasad & Caproni 1997, 288). According to the authors, “the concept of totality dissolves many taken-for-granted analytic boundaries that customarily have shaped our images of management and organizations” (Prasad & Caproni 1997, 288). The notion of totality seems to be well applicable to the context of sustainability and responsibility within business education. To be able to teach and understand what aspects there are to sustainability and responsibility, it can be argued that the issue should be approached from a holistic stance and from a broad context as critical theorist suggest.

Prasad and Caproni argue that *praxis* can be seen as the most important element of critical theory:

Above all, critical theory is committed to praxis, the ongoing construction of social arrangements that are conducive to the flourishing of the human condition. Praxis implies

a combination of the awareness gained from ideological critique with reflective strategies for social change, thus transforming critical theory into an inspiring and constructive springboard for action. On account of this commitment to praxis, those who employ critical theory must go beyond challenging particular social realities, identifying various ideological issues, and unmasking systems of domination. (Prasad & Caproni 1997, 288).

It can be argued that praxis can also be seen as an important part of enhancing sustainability and responsibility within business schools. If the topic remains just a disciplinary exercise, it cannot become a “part of business schools’ institutional DNA” (Cornuel & Hommel 2015, 7). Hence, also in this study some practical suggestions will be made in the end of this study on how sustainability and responsibility issues could be enhanced in Oulu Business School.

3.1.2 Critical theory and business education

A critical lens has been applied to business studies mostly within the field of critical management studies (CMS). Building on critical theorist Habermas, Willmott (1992, 9) has argued that critical theory (CT) “provides a (not the!) critical-constructive intellectual counterpoint to mainstream management studies. For CT has the strength of being sufficiently broad to serve as a source of critical reflection on a large number of central issues, notions of rationality and progress, technocracy and social engineering, autonomy and control, communicative action, power and ideology”. CMS focusses on the power relations within the field of management, questions the existing structures of it and draws “attention to contradictions in society and organizations” (Willmott 1992, 12-13).

There is not much research on combining critical theory with a phenomenographic methodology, but for example Ashwin and McLean (2005) have written an experimental paper on combining phenomenography with the perspective of critical pedagogy by looking at the viewpoints of Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1996) and Marton and Booth’s *Learning and Awareness* (1997). They have concluded that, despite the differences of these two perspectives, their views of social reality are similar: that it is produced by the people (Aswhin & McLean 2005, 5). Both perspectives also emphasize that learning happens through becoming aware of the fact that other people’s perceptions of the reality might differ from our own (Aswhin & McLean 2005, 6).

3.2 Critical pedagogy

In the field of education, critical theory has been applied as critical pedagogy, originally developed by a Brazilian author Paulo Freire, whose work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) can be seen as the cornerstone of critical pedagogy. Although Freire's work is originally aimed at people who suffer from *oppression* (economic or social), it has been applied to other contexts as well. According to McLean (2006, 2), Freire "insists that education is always political; and – because all educational policies and practices either enable or constrain injustices – that every educator should be asking such questions as What am I teaching and why am I teaching it? And, How am I teaching and why this way? In whose interests am I teaching?" Wink (2005, 68) has described critical pedagogy as a "radical pedagogy that makes concrete the values of solidarity, social responsibility, creativity, and discipline in the service of common good and critical spirit".

On the other hand, for example Aittola and Suoranta (2001, 9) see Henri Giroux and Peter McLaren as the founding fathers of critical pedagogy, combining thoughts such as American pragmatism, feminism, postcolonial critique, the thoughts of Karl Marx, Frankfurt school and Paulo Freire's thoughts. Aittola and Suoranta also suggest that emphasizing the "economic field" is an essential part of the thought of critical pedagogues: "According to them, new ethics is needed to change the market based economic policy, that is based on maximizing business profit, into economic policy for common good" (2001, 13; translation mine). It can thus be argued that critiquing the foundations of modern economic thought is in the core of critical pedagogy. Giroux has also called for teachers to become transformative intellectuals, who actively aim for change instead of reproducing the existing conditions in the society (Aittola & Suoranta 2001, 18).

In the class-room level, critical pedagogy can be applied by for example moving away from standardized teaching methods and curricula that are based on a behaviorist idea of man (Aittola & Suoranta 2001, 18). Wink has described critical pedagogy in the following way:

Critical pedagogy is learning, relearning, and unlearning. It often involves rethinking our histories and rewriting our world. The notion of learning-relearning-unlearning has had different meanings through the years. Relearning can be uncomfortable at first, but eventually, it becomes doable. For example, most of us have to relearn a lot of pedagogy while we teach. We think we understand pedagogy (teaching/learning) when we begin teaching, but we come to understand that *teaching is learning*. Unlearning, however, is

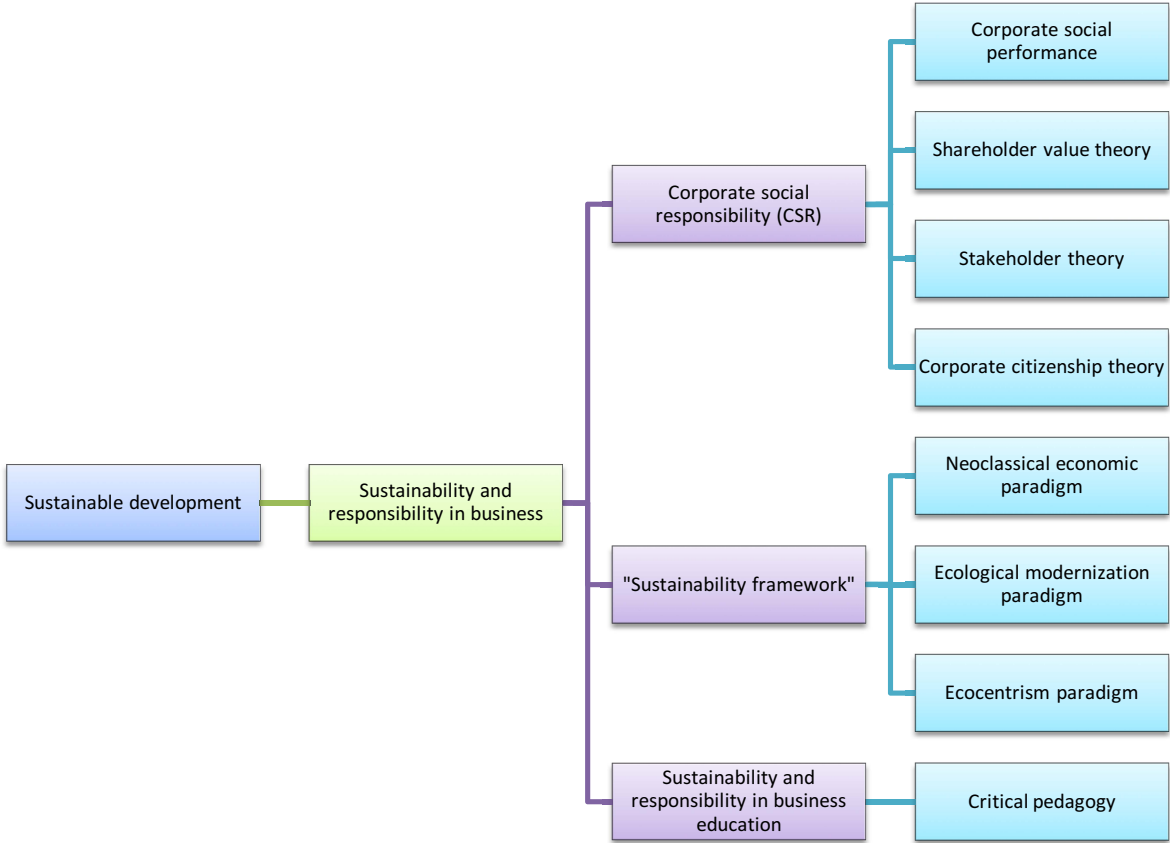
something very different from relearning. It is fundamentally more painful. It involves a complete re-examination of philosophy, beliefs, and assumptions. (Wink 2005, 67).

In the context of management studies, one of the areas of the discipline of business and economics, Dehler, Welsh and Lewis (2001, 502) suggest the following methods to be applied when using critical pedagogy in the management classroom: “de-centering power in the classroom, challenging disciplinary boundaries, and taking up issues in a genuinely problematizing way”. In addition, Welsh and Murray (2003, 228) have mentioned adopting an “action orientation” as an important part in critical pedagogy of management.

Critical theory has been applied to the management classroom (Prasad & Caproni, 1997) and critical pedagogy has been applied to management studies (Dehler, Welsh & Lewis, 2001). When it comes to teaching sustainability and responsibility in business studies through a critical approach, for example Springett (2005) has introduced a practical example from the business classroom in her research. In the end of this study, some suggestions made by these authors will be applied to the suggestions made by the teachers on improving sustainability and responsibility within Oulu Business School.

The following figure presents the different theoretical concepts of this study that have been familiarized with in the second and third chapter of this study and the way they are connected to each other:

Figure 1. Summary of the theoretical framework



4 Methodological choices

This chapter will provide justifications for the methodological choices in this study as well as its ontological and epistemological premises. The process of data collection and analysis will be described. The concept of *outcome space* and the way it was formed from the research data will also be familiarized with.

4.1 Phenomenography as a methodology

As I started conducting this research, the primary interest was in the perceptions of the teachers of Oulu Business School and in the ways they *perceive* the relationship between the goals of the discipline of economics and the goals of sustainability and responsibility. This aim led me to choose phenomenography as a research methodology. The concept of phenomenography has been introduced in the 1980's by professor Ference Marton from the University of Göteborg (Niikko 2003, 10). The origins of the word "phenomenography" are in Greek words "fainesthai" ("how something appears") and "grafia" ("to describe") (Uljens 1991, 82). Phenomenography was originally developed for the purposes of educational research (Marton 1986, 43).

Phenomenography has most often been described using Marton's definition of it as "a research method for mapping the qualitatively different ways in which people experience, conceptualize, perceive, and understand various aspects of, and phenomena in, the world around them" (Marton 1986, 31). In a phenomenographical study the subject (the research participant) and the object (the experienced phenomenon) form a unity, an "internal relation" and this relation is in the center of the interest (Keeves 1997, 97). According to Reed (2006, 2), "The subject and object of an experience are not separate and an individual's experience of a phenomenon is the internal relationship between them. It is this relational view that forms a cornerstone of phenomenography." A central concept in phenomenography is the "second-order" perspective which means that the researcher's aim is to understand phenomena through someone else's perceptions and experiences (Marton 1986, 33), whereas a "first-order" perspective happens directly from the researcher's point of view as in methodologies such as ethnography or anthropology.

Phenomenography seems to be closely connected to *phenomenology* which also focuses on the individual's perceptions, experiences and feelings. Some scholars have even suggested that

these methodologies are the same (Richardson 1999, 59). The differences between these two approaches have been however described for example in Niikko's words as phenomenology being a "theory and a philosophical method that has been aimed at the pre-reflective level of awareness and the reduction of it" whereas phenomenography "aims instead at describing the relationships between individuals in a certain group and the different dimensions of the world around them" (Niikko 2003, 44-45, translation mine).

It seems that phenomenography is still constantly evolving and positioning itself as a scientific field (Niikko 2003, 48). Although Ference Marton has the founding role in this approach, differing points of view and critiques can be identified regarding its implementation as well as its ontological and epistemological premises. Säljö (1997) has provided a comprehensive critique of the emphasis on *experience* in phenomenography. He argues that language and discourse have a priori importance in what phenomenographers should study, whereas Marton himself seems to disregard language in his conceptualization of phenomenography (Säljö 1997, 176-178). It can be argued that Säljö has justified his critique well when arguing that a phenomenographer cannot be studying purely the essence of the experiences of individuals, but the *accounts* of these experiences (Säljö 1997, 185). Säljö suggests that "we could learn much more about actors' definitions of the world if we viewed their accounts primarily as attempts at communicating in situated practices rather than as ways of experiencing" (1997, 188). Also Richardson has made similar remarks on how interviewees' accounts could be regarded as "examples of people's discursive practices, without making any assumptions as to their evidential status (1999, 67). Niikko, on the other hand, has questioned how phenomenographers can really turn "the informants' implicit experiences into explicit ones" (2003, 47, translation mine) and suggests that they should make it clear that they are analyzing individuals' *ways of thinking and acting* instead of their experiences and conceptions (Uljens 1993, as cited in Niikko 2003, 47).

This study remains faithful to Ference Marton's descriptions and conceptualizations of phenomenography as a methodology, while at the same time acknowledging the gaps provided by other authors. The standpoint in this research is in investigating the perceptions/conceptions of the business school teachers of Oulu University. However, I do see that language and discourse (or accounts as Säljö has put it) are an essential part of getting to know these perceptions.

4.2 Ontological and epistemological premises

As there are different viewpoints on the implementation of a phenomenographical inquiry, there seems to be also some flexibility in the ontological premises of phenomenography. According to Uljens (1991, 82), in phenomenography a *conception* is the main “starting point from which a person views some aspect of reality”. It can be seen as relational: the reality is what an individual understands it to be (Uljens 1991, 82). This kind of an ontological position suggests that there is no reality as such; all we can know about it is what people conceive about it (Uljens 1991, 85). Marton has conceptualized this as a “non-dualist ontology” (Richardson 1999, 66). Uljens has described the relationship between phenomenography and reality in the following way:

Whether it is possible or not to describe reality as such, phenomenography shares the latter position, i.e. that the reality is best studied through people’s understanding of it. Still if we look at the ontological assumptions implicit in the phenomenographical argumentation we cannot end up with another conclusion than the presented one, namely that the only reality we have access to is the reality experienced by ourselves. (Uljens 1991, 85).

On the other hand, the same author has also described the same relationship in the following way: “The standpoint of phenomenography is also that there is a reality outside the person but that the purpose or meaning of the reality is constituted through the person’s conception of it” (Uljens 1989, 14; translation mine). Also Richardson has pointed out that there are gaps in Marton’s application of a non-dualist ontology in phenomenography. According to Richardson, if the reality is only what people understand it to be, it means that there is no reality outside our experiences (1999, 66). It can be stated that there is a contradiction in Marton’s ontological and epistemological standpoints when he has suggested that the existence of nature is independent from our conceptions but at the same time the reality is dependent on our conceptions of it (Richardson 1999, 66).

The ontological standpoint of this study is that there *is* a natural world outside our understanding of it but that in order to get knowledge of the reality we should research the people’s accounts on their experiences of the world. In this sense I dare to reject the purely interpretivist nature of Marton’s definition of phenomenography. Neither do I embrace a purely realist/positivist point of view where there is a single, objective truth about the world for us to discover (Richardson 1999, 64). To negotiate between these dichotomous ontologies, I wish to apply the ontology of

critical theory, according to which the reality is constantly shaped by the power dynamics in the society (Morrow & Brown 1994, 59). I believe that this approach also allows to overcome the issues of disregarding social and structural factors in doing phenomenography, that has been addressed by for example Ashwin and McLean (2005, 7) and Morrow and Brown (1994, 59).

4.3 Collection of the empirical data

Because teachers have great power in knowledge production in higher education, it seemed interesting to interview business school teachers to find out how sustainability and responsibility are being implemented in the context of a business school. Individual interviews can be seen as the appropriate method for data collection in phenomenography (Keeves 1997, 99). During May and June of 2017, I had discussions with ten teachers of Oulu Business School (Finland) utilizing semi-structured thematic interviews. There were some questions at hand in the beginning of the discussions, but every interview turned out to be different as the answers of the participants led the interviews. The interviews were recorded and between June of 2017 and April of 2018 transcribed into text. Due to the different nationalities of the respondents, some of the interviews were held in Finnish and some of them in English. The differences between the length of the interviews (from 30 to 60 minutes) is quite notable; some of the participants were very eager to talk about the subject whereas some of them provided short answers and found that they did not have that much to say on the subject. The interviews were recorded with Apple Garage Band audio software on a MacBook Air device. One of the interviews was conducted through a telephone call due to practical reasons and also recorded with the same software.

The choice of the University of Oulu was practical: the researcher is also a student in the same university. However, the fact that the participants were from another faculty made it possible for the researcher to view them from a considerable distance. The ten interviewees were recruited by contacting the dean of the faculty who suggested ten possible interviewees that would represent the whole business school as comprehensively as possible, representing different master's programmes, age groups, nationalities and genders. Five of the respondents were female, five of them male. To protect the respondents' anonymity, their gender will not be otherwise mentioned in this study. Some of the teachers are experienced and have a long teaching career, while others had just finished teaching their first courses. Because I had no connections to the business school, the help of an "insider" was very crucial for finding suitable interviewees.

I recognize the ethical concerns regarding the fact that the dean of the faculty is now aware of the possible participants of this study, but otherwise the identities of the interviewees are kept strictly confidential. One of the teachers refused to take part in this study and another one was found to replace that person. The interviewees signed an interview contract that confirmed their willingness to participate and their rights as research participants, including the right to withdraw from this study. The contract can be seen in Appendix 1.

The interviews held for this study were semi-structured (Uljens 1991, 89) so that there was a list of questions that was used as a standpoint for the discussions which in the end took slightly different paths. This can be seen as an appropriate method in phenomenography (Niikko 2003, 32). Some of the interviews were following the questions all the way while others soon diverged from the given questions and became more of philosophical discussions, so it can be said that the preliminary questions can only be seen as a rough structure, a skeleton for the interviews. The preliminary interview questions are shown in Appendix 2.

According to Niikko, “the interview process is dialogic and reflective and the sensibility of the researcher’s role is being emphasized in it” (Niikko 2003, 31; translation mine). This realized well in the interviewing process. The interview questions evolved through the whole process and were open enough to give space to the participants’ own framework of thought (Niikko 2003, 31). The way there seemed to be mutual trust between the researcher and the participant (Niikko 2003, 32) varied very much but this was something that was taken into account and the interview occasion was made as comfortable for the participants as possible. After the interviews were finished, they were transcribed into text that were to be used as data (Marton 1986, 42). This took a very long time, from June of 2017 to April of 2018. The final amount was over a hundred pages of interview transcriptions.

4.4 The analysis process

The nature of the phenomenographical analysis does not need to be nor can it be very strictly structured because of the interconnectedness of the analysis and the content (Niikko 2003, 32; Uljens 1991, 89). According to Uljens (1991, 88), in phenomenography “there is no path which is ‘absolutely correct/wrong’”. There are, however, some guidelines for doing the analysis. In this study, the idea of an “outcome space” was utilized (Reed 2006, 8). The first phase of creating an outcome space consists of reading the data carefully so many times that the researcher gets a complete understanding of its contents while trying to find *utterances* that are important

to the research question. (Niikko 2003, 33; Uljens 1991, 89). According to Marton (1986, 42), “(t)he phenomenon in question is narrowed down to and interpreted in terms of selected quotes from all the interviews.” In this kind of analysis, the focus is only in the content of the expressions, not the language used *per se* (Niikko 2003, 34) nor in trying to find any kinds of explanations to these conceptions (Uljens 1991, 90).

The second phase of the process of creating an outcome space consists of categorizing utterances that seem most important into different themes by comparing these utterances with each other (Niikko 2003, 34). According to Reed (2006, 7), quotes from the interviews should be cut out and put into piles on the table, which form the so called “pool of meaning” (Marton 1994, as cited in Reed 2006, 7). In the analysis process of this study, these “piles” were formed by copying the excerpts from the interviews into a table in a Word file. Each time a new utterance was found, a new category was formed into the table. These categories formed the first level of *categories of description* of the data. Some of the first level categories included only one quote while others included many. However, it seemed important to take into account even the rare categories to provide a complete picture of the perceptions of the teachers. Because there are usually no purely unique conceptions, nor people share completely identical conceptions, it is important to decide, what level of description is most useful for the study (Uljens 1991, 92). This should, again, be done by constantly bearing in mind the aim of the research and the research questions. Uljens also points out that the conceptions should be separated from the informants so that if a person changes their conception during the interview, those conceptions are both counted as separate ones (Uljens 1991, 92). This was also done in this particular study.

The purpose of these categories of description is to recognize the different ways in which a group of people experiences a phenomenon (Uljens 1989, 39). It is important to try to find similarities and differences between these units of analysis. Every expression should be thought at through the research questions of the study. Niikko (2003, 34) points out the importance of constant reflection: the researcher should discuss with her data and work with it in a never-ending circle of reading, analyzing and theorizing. The analysis process was indeed time-consuming and the groups were reorganized and renamed many times in order to find the most suitable expressions.

There were altogether 78 first level categories formed. The names of these categories were printed on paper and cut out, and then formed into groups that became the second level of categories of description. These nine categories were grouped on into third level categories of

description: *Society level, Business level and Business school level*. These categories form the outcome space and a visual representation of them will be provided in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Outcome Space of Data Analysis

Pool of meanings	1st level of categories of descriptions	2nd level of categories of descriptions	3rd level of categories of descriptions	Outcome space
20	6	Definitions of sustainability and responsibility	Society level perceptions	Perceptions, conceptions and experiences
6	4	Economic growth		
21	7	Transformative utterances	Business level perceptions	
28	10	Transmissive utterances		
60	10	Enablers of change	Business school level perceptions	
15	9	Outsourcing		
84	20	Obstacles and challenges		
36	8	Suggestions for improvement		
4	3	Metaphors		

5 Findings

This chapter will present the findings of the study by providing a closer look at the content of the outcome space and the three levels of categories of description. Three third level categories were identified regarding the informants' perceptions, conceptions and experiences of sustainability and responsibility. These categories are *Society level perceptions*, *Business level perceptions* and *Business school level perceptions*. The following tables and discussion will describe how these categories were formed and provide examples from the interviews.

5.1 Society level perceptions

Because the interest in the interviews conducted for this study were in the teachers' perceptions of sustainability and responsibility, many utterances were found that had to do with the society overall and its relationship with sustainability issues. These utterances were grouped into two categories: *Definitions of sustainability and responsibility*, and *Economic growth*. Table 2 provides an overlook on these categories:

Table 2. Society level perceptions

1 st level of categories of description	2 nd level of categories of description	3 rd level of categories of description	Outcome space
Sustainability and responsibility is something that has to do with the environment (4)	Definitions of sustainability and responsibility	Society level perceptions	Perceptions, conceptions and experiences
Sustainability has to do with preserving something to the future generations (3)			
Governments have responsibility in sustainability issues / it is a matter of law (8)			
Laws and governments' actions are not enough to achieve sustainability and responsibility (1)			
What happens in developing countries is out of our reach (1)			
Things that look "green" or responsible might not be that or might be harmful to the society (3)			
Growth is essential (2)	Economic growth		
Technology will solve the sustainability issues that come along with economic growth (2)			
Growth needs to happen responsibly (1)			
Eternal growth is not possible and not worth striving for (1)			

5.1.1 Definitions of sustainability and responsibility

Although this category does not involve only *definitions* in the strict sense of the meaning, it involves utterances that show what kinds of similarities and differences there were in the teachers' perceptions of what sustainability and responsibility mean and of who should be responsible for them. Sustainability and responsibility were described by many informants as something that is related to environmental issues such as climate change and recycling:

And then if I talk about Oulu Business School I think overall they share a common sentiment that because climate change is a megatrend around the world the businesses have a greater part to play in this. For instance, companies in Bangladesh, for instance clothing companies, I read somewhere that it takes about 2700 litres of water to produce one t-shirt. So the waste produced from having a Finnish product would go somewhere in the waters or elsewhere. (Informant 4)

Irresponsibility, on the other hand, was in some answers seen as something that is connected to damaging the environment:

I guess this idea of irresponsible business is really uhh... That I think can be a matter of perception. Umm... I think most people would agree with uhh, let's say the chemical company in [place X], is this [chemical company X] right, if they just dumped all their waste right into [river X], nobody's gonna be happy about that. Umm... That's totally irresponsible and people can agree on that so... (Informant 1)

Although many of the informants were uncertain when asked to define what sustainability and responsibility were according to their understanding, all of them had some way of conceptualizing them. As in the most often used definition of sustainable development, the Brundtland report (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987, 8), many informants saw that responsibility means leaving something for the future generations:

The community's responsibility for its own actions, so, it's always also a cultural responsibility and, and well, that you have to take into account also how the society's own value will be taken forward, its own purpose, no matter what the community is, Finland or the University or whatever, then there always needs to be the responsibility of taking your own area forward to the future generations. (Informant 2)

It's that you're doing things that you don't need to be embarrassed of or hide for some reason. That you don't cause damage to the future generations, maybe that is a bit fancy way to put it but [laughs]... And so that one doesn't... Let's be fair to others. (Informant 6)

It was notable in the discussions that many of the teachers saw that the greatest power and responsibility were in the hands of some other actors in the society than the business sector. This finding seems to be in line with the notion of Stubbs and Cocklin (2008, 210) of how social

issues are seen as governments' problems instead of organizations' when the neoclassical paradigm is prevalent. The importance and responsibility of the governments and the law-makers of the states in making a sustainable and responsible society through laws and taxes was often pointed out by the teachers. One of the interviewees talked about the taxes on oil in the following way:

And so, if for some reason the market cannot find the solution to that like, uhh, oil is a good example of this like, oil is still too cheap, we all drive cars, probably too much, umm, and pollute too much and, because it's still cheap. And we're not paying the costs for it. And some countries more than others like, taxes on fuel are higher here than they are in the U.S. But until there becomes a real agreement that says whether it's supposed on the oil companies or the users of the oil in the end then it's, then the government says it's just gonna be more expensive for the users, it's gonna cost you more. Until that happens, umm, there will be pollution, too much pollution. (Informant 1)

Others mentioned how the governments can affect responsibility and sustainability through for example road user charges, environmental taxes and by taking part in international agreements on carbon emissions. One of the informants also saw that politicians are responsible of defining what is ethical or unethical:

It is clear that in case it's illegal then it is then also unethical but then if we are in that area, in that grey area where, where there is like a procedure that is allowed by the law, but then *some people* think is an unethical procedure then this is like a political question then that... That who accepts what so. So there is like no absolute right answer that this is ethical, this is unethical, that all depends on the political views on what is ethical and what is unethical. When we are there where it's not about breaking the law. (Informant 2)

5.1.2 Economic growth

The informants were asked about how they perceive the idea of economic growth. Out of six utterances on growth, five had a positive stance towards it. This result can also be seen as a sign of the neoclassical paradigm, which emphasizes the unrestricted nature of economic growth (Stubbs & Cocklin 2008, 208). One of the teachers had following perceptions of growth: "Growth is essential. Nothing can remain stagnant or stable in a way. Growth it is natural,

even... Yeah companies are there to grow if we see the businesses. --- So, overall, growth is essential, businesses will grow and..." (Informant 4). On the other hand, the same informant saw that this growth needs to happen under certain requirements:

--- but this growth has to be then responsibly... Because Earth has been here [---] and it will remain here, it's us human species which are then in trouble because if we keep on harming the natural resources and then Earth would respond accordingly and maybe it would be difficult for the mankind to survive on planet Earth because of the rising temperatures. (Informant 4)

One of the teachers put an emphasis on how the advancement of technology has reduced the harmful effects of growth and how it will continue doing so:

So that kind of a categorical idea that the limits of growth are without doubt such that you have to take them into account in every matter that we cannot for example do this thing because the limits of growth will be met so... Science has proven that in most cases they will invent very efficient... I mean so efficient things that we cannot even imagine at this point how efficient things are being invented [---]. (Informant 2)

Only one of the teachers, who seemed to represent a different paradigm of ecological modernization (Stubbs & Cocklin 2008, 208), saw that economic growth was not essential which was quite an opposite view compared to the other teachers' answers. This teacher also approached the idea from a more philosophical stance:

My first comment would be that I do not believe in eternal growth. No matter how sophisticated our technologies will be, growth as far as I know, can forecast, will always depend on resources, to some extent at least, and they are... They are not infinite. They will end at some point. I also think that growth, pursuing growth, is not very good for us, ummm, spiritually. I think that this race for growth, doesn't make us very good human beings. (Informant 3)

5.2 Business level perceptions

The other third level category of description was identified as the Business level perceptions. This category includes the teachers' perceptions on sustainability and responsibility with regards to the business sector. The perceptions in this category could be divided into two groups according to how the informants saw that there is or is not a need for a change in business,

responsibility and sustainability. The groups were identified as *Transformative utterances* and *Transmissive utterances*. An overview of these categories is provided in Table 3 below:

Table 3. Business level perceptions

1 st level of categories of description	2 nd level of categories of description	3 rd level of categories of description	Outcome space		
Business needs to become more sustainable (3)	Transformative utterances	Business level perceptions	Perceptions, conceptions and experiences		
If businesses want to be successful long term they need to employ sustainability and responsibility (6)					
Businesses are still lacking a holistic stance towards sustainability issues (1)					
The market doesn't always manage to find a solution (2)					
Gives an example of socially irresponsible business (2)					
Businesses could take the role of enhancing responsibility when political actors fail to do so (1)					
There is a contradiction between paradigms (6)					
The business sector is constantly becoming more responsible (2)	Transmissive utterances			Business level perceptions	Perceptions, conceptions and experiences
Businesses are not more responsible than before, but they are making responsibility more visible and explicit than before (2)					
There are also sustainable and responsible businesses (1)					
The responsibility of businesses has to do with their media appearance (1)					
Companies will get caught if they act irresponsibly and it will hurt their reputation (5)					
Not all companies should be "labeled" because of some irresponsible ones (1)					
Companies need to make profit (3)					
There is no contradiction if people think long-term (3)					

There is a grey area in irresponsibility/responsibility/ethics or it is a matter of perspective (4)			
The market will find a solution (6)			

5.2.1 Business needs to change: Transformative utterances

In the discussions with the teachers of Oulu Business School there were many utterances that called for a change when it comes to sustainability and responsibility within the business sector. Some of the teachers gave practical examples of businesses that have worked irresponsibly. One teacher (4) mentioned oil company Shell's actions in Nigeria and overconsumption caused by the marketing of some clothing companies. One of the informants (5) pointed out that responsibility issues are now often implemented as small separate actions when they should be more holistically included in the businesses.

Many of the teachers saw that in order to be successful in the long run, businesses should take into account sustainability and responsibility issues:

But I would see it sort of as a diverse phenomenon that that if you think about long term success of a company then not really today like I know from even big companies in Finnish companies so there cannot be very many that wouldn't have taken a stand on these... So it is sort of being seen as a factor that is like this kind of a sustainable, a topic that serves companies long term on sustainable grounds. (Informant 5)

Some of the informants pointed out that trying to maximize profits in short term cannot be done endlessly:

If you do something really horrible then yes, okay in short term you can get profits but once it turns out that you have done, well like some Talvivaara [laughs], so, we know it's not going to end up well. So in that sense it might *not* be that contradictory in [business school programme x], unfortunately of course in practice there may still be a contradiction at some point but... I would want that people would think so that... You cannot endlessly maximize it by acting unsustainably. (Informant 6)

Some of the teachers saw that the market doesn't always find a solution to responsibility issues. Even the teacher who mostly thought that the market will find a solution came up with an example where it doesn't manage to do so:

Of course there are bad examples of like... We may not impose... The business men may not impose the costs in its own country even, it can be a worldwide issue like with... Isn't it that a lot of electronic waste... You know you throw your old phone away and you think it's gonna get recycled and a lot of them end up in dumps in Africa. And old ships are sent to Bangladesh to be broken down and people are working in just awful conditions in there, doing that job. And while those things really should not be sustainable, the companies are able to perform, do those businesses, do their business now or not facing high enough costs because they couldn't dump that stuff in Europe or the U.S. but they can do it in Africa and Asia. So, I think the market is not perfect, those things do happen, unfortunately. (Informant 1)

Many of the teachers found that there was a contradiction between the goals of neoclassical economics and the goals of sustainability and responsibility. One of the informants (4) saw that there was "added cost to sustainability" which made it unappealing to companies. Another teacher (5) pointed out that some companies might not invest in responsibility because they find that the company's main purpose is to produce shareholder value. When asked about the possible contradiction of thoughts within the business discipline, one of the teachers answered:

Yeah. Yes there is. Unfortunately. That is part of the... This transitional period that I just mentioned that we're trying to change that. And that means that ummm, it means nothing less than putting... Or questioning some of the basic assumptions that we... That the whole curriculum is based on. That the teaching syllabi and you know... Theories are based on, theories that we're using. So... Yes, there is a big contradiction. I think a lot of it is on... neoclassicist thinking, very pragmatic, outcome, focus-oriented, mind-rational-based... A very, how should you say, stream-lined, targeted, categorized way of thinking. So on different levels that is what is happening. (Informant 3)

Another informant also found that the contradiction of these different goals was still prevailing in the contents of the business school studies:

Yes, yes, that is really true that we are... In the business school it can probably be seen in the study contents since a long time, that kind of a profit maximization assumption and that companies are only there to make more... money to the shareholders and then this kind of a responsibility does broaden the company's existence into a very different and versatile kind. So well, but that it is probably true that for a long time still it has

been written into our study contents that old thought but that in which point will this kind of a change begin... Change will begin to arise then well... (Informant 8)

5.2.2 Business does not need to change: Transmissive utterances

Utterances that didn't emphasize the need for change within business sector regarding sustainability and responsibility issues were put under this category. There were both perceptions according to which there is no need for change at all and perceptions according to which there was already enough change in practice or in sight. Although almost all teachers found that there were some problems regarding the topics of sustainability and responsibility, some of their perceptions showed that there were already existing practices that were found to be sustainable and responsible. One of the informants found that the business sector was already going into a more sustainable direction:

Well in Finland I would say that this kind of... This social responsibility for example then it is now somewhat becoming stronger also in companies; the companies see also their role more and they take it, maybe it's due to this whole turning point in the society that the society cannot... afford all that we would like to put into practice so then the companies also take some tasks in there... (Informant 5)

One of the informants found that there had never been irresponsibility in business in the first place but that only the way in which the businesses made the responsibility explicit had changed:

So I, that's what I said that like I think that companies have really acted always responsibly. I mean all those kinds of companies that have like aimed at this kind of a long-term business. So... There hasn't happened any kind of a significant change according to my understanding. But then of course like in what way it has changed business is that more and more companies make it like transparent how their business is responsible. Report, tell on their own website or like in other ways in the media bring forth that the solutions that we make so they are now responsible solutions. (Informant 7)

In many parts of the discussions the teachers pointed out that companies don't get away with irresponsible actions. One of the informants (1) took car company Volkswagen as an example of a business that did well until it got caught with the emissions scandal. Another teacher (6) mentioned that if a company acts irresponsibly it will get a bad reputation and that will also

affect their stock prices. One of the teachers described the credibility of companies in the following way:

But yes there has to be some kind of sense in it that one cannot just act in whatever [laughs] any kinds of means... Well, so... I would personally see it so that it is already involved in a sense that in the modern world you cannot get away with doing whatsoever, that cannot be even credible. (Informant 9)

When asked about the contradiction between the goals of neoclassical economics and the goals of sustainability and responsibility, some of the teachers argued that there was no contradiction and that companies can be sustainable while striving for growth and increased shareholder profit. Often the possible challenges were seen as something that had to do with the short-term thinking:

In the purest theoretical long-term sense, no there should be no difference. Because if you think about uhh, again this is a cheap example, with climate change, you know, we could uhh keep using oil, invest in oil stocks now, you --- making money, but if things don't change in 20-30 years well then, suddenly either by law, we'll be no longer able to use oil and oil companies will be outlawed or things... You know... Climate catastrophes and... You know we're living in some kind of apocalyptic after-world where money doesn't matter anymore... Umm... So people really could see long-term, that you, because the idea of investing is you should discount or think about those future profits. (Informant 1)

I don't think there is any kind of a contradiction as I said that like if you want to work long-term then it requires that kind of responsible action. So that it is like in long-term the only way to maximize the shareholder value. So... No, I wouldn't see there any kind of... So well, I think the fact that it is being talked about more and more and researched more and more, taught more and more, it hasn't changed the business itself at all. (Informant 7)

The idea of the long-term business and the reputation of the company can be linked to the ideas that many teachers had, that the market will find a solution to the sustainability and responsibility problems regarding the business sector:

I feel like I'm repeating myself with this idea of that generally market finds a solution. That companies that really are conducting business irresponsibly or unsustainably, that

usually doesn't continue for very long, at some point when the customers find out what's going on, generally the business will stop. (Informant 1)

Some of the teachers found that it was not always clear what can be called responsible or irresponsible. Illegal actions were seen as irresponsible but there were differences in the way the informants perceived the responsibility of legal business actions. These perceptions were categorized as utterances of the "grey area" of business. One of the informants (1) argued that "It's a question of perception whether it's irresponsible or not". When asked about the difference between responsible and irresponsible business, one of the teachers replied in the following way:

If we think about the black market question, then the black market can be well divided actually into the kind that is illegal and then legal but unethical *according to some people*. So now it's the question of *according to whom* it is unethical. (Informant 2)

5.3 Business school level perceptions

The utterances that were discovered from the data regarding the teachers' perceptions on sustainability and responsibility on the business school level were identified as five different categories: Enablers of change, No need for change, Obstacles and challenges, Suggestions for improvement and Metaphors (figures of speech with a hidden meaning). Table 4 will provide an overlook of these categories:

Table 4. Business school level perceptions

1 st level of categories of description	2 nd level of categories of description	3 rd level of categories of description	Outcome space
AACSB's effect (10)	Enablers of change	Business school level perceptions	Perceptions, conceptions and experiences
Teacher's attitudes towards AACSB (1)			
Teachers find the topic important (3)			
Students' interest (9)			
University of Oulu promotes enhancing the topic (1)			
Pedagogical view (3)			
Practical example (5)			
Personal relationship (6)			
Topic is applicable (12)			
Narrative change (10)			

Topic is not applicable (2)	Outsourcing		
Difficult to implement (1)			
No need to be part of the curriculum (1)			
Topic is easier to implement in some programmes /courses (3)			
Some other teacher is responsible (1)			
Responsibility course has the responsibility (3)			
AACSB doesn't affect (2)			
No contradiction within OBS (1)			
Topic not applicable to student recruitment (1)			
Hasn't thought about (1)	Obstacles and challenges		
Not very important personally (3)			
Hasn't discussed with others (3)			
Has to teach ideas that doesn't agree with (1)			
Topic is more implemented in some programmes (4)			
There is a divide (11)			
Some teachers are not interested (8)			
Some teachers outsource the topic to one course (1)			
Depends on teacher (4)			
AACSB as a burden (4)			
Students' goals (11)			
Application process (4)			
Students not happy with methods (2)			
Students' disinterest (10)			
Students' short-sightedness (1)			
Efficiency (2)			
Other business schools more responsible (1)			
University of Oulu does not enhance the topic (2)			
Location in Oulu (1)			
OBS's image (10)	Suggestions for improvement		
Business education needs to change (6)			
Topic is part of modern business education (1)			
Finnish universities should follow others' lead (1)			
Practical suggestions (7)			
Training on the topic (5)			
Raising students' awareness / changing mindsets (11)			
Teachers' personal development (2)			
Teachers' discussions (3)			

Sustainability oriented students are left-leaning (1)	Metaphors		
“Soft” and “hard” subjects in business schools (1)			
There are some other teachers who are “fanatics” on the topic (2)			

5.3.1 Enablers of change

In many ways, the teachers of Oulu Business School seemed to look at sustainability and responsibility from a positive point of view and as something that was already evolving positively. In six utterances the informant found that she/he had a strong personal relationship with these issues. One of the informants (3) even answered: “I have a very strong relationship with that topic personally. Umm, I would go so far to say that if I wasn’t able to teach and or research in that field then I wouldn’t be here anymore.” Some of the teachers had previous experience in the working life where they had been proactive within corporate social responsibility issues. Some of the teachers had developed a relationship with sustainability issues because they had started to find out more about them through their work:

So I wasn’t much aware that what this climate change is all about and stuff. And then somehow I got to teach this course in year XX, [course name X]. Then I dig deeper into it, then I really came across this information that how [business school subject x] or the business side is contributing to this climate change and depletion of natural resources. So I became very much interested in sustainability issues. (Informant 4)

Some teachers also gave examples on how they try to make responsible and sustainable choices in their everyday lives, by choosing products that were produced in the vicinity or by teaching their children responsibility.

Overall many teachers seemed to share an understanding that the topic is applicable to the field of business. Many of them saw that the business school has the power to make the students aware of the issues of sustainability and responsibility and to implement that knowledge in their future working life. All of the teachers found some examples on how the topic is applicable to their own taught programme or subject. One of the teachers talked about the subject in the following way:

As soon as you talk about multinational companies, the connotation is like ‘Shell that ruins the environment and waters’ and stuff or then like umm clothes... Clothing companies that use child labor and stuff. So in that sense, like sort of, it provides a “delicious opportunity”. So like the starting point is that we start to discuss, or usually the students start to discuss like that there are these kind of big multinational companies, are they good or bad. And that has precisely to do with that responsibility and then that corporate social responsibility stuff. (Informant 7)

One of the teachers saw that the topic played a crucial part in business education:

To me, to me that is the core of what I’m doing, I see that as the... One of the most important things in teaching students in the field of business. And I do not see it as only an add-on to current and existing contents that is being taught in business studies but I think we need to embrace that idea at first and then on top of that develop our understanding of business. (Informant 3)

Many utterances described that there were students who were interested in the topic and wanted to make their thesis on it or work on it in their future working life. Some of the teachers had in mind a particular individual student who had been notably interested in sustainability and responsibility. According to one of the teachers (8), he/she had a “really good feeling about how the students think about these things in the course and what kind of topics they raise”. Some of the informants saw the students interest as a sign of “modern youth”.

Many of the teachers found that there was a change process going on where business education was transforming into a more sustainable and responsible field. It was seen as a part of a bigger, world-wide process that involved the whole discipline of business and economics. Some of the informants found that the process was just in the beginning phase whereas others found that the change had already been happening for a long time. One of the informants described this process as a *narrative change*:

Now I think we’re currently in a shift, a transitional period, we’re now trying to change that narrative. And we’re... There is, you can see that happening on different levels. There is the accreditation, that is backed up by certain UN bodies, so that is a very high administrative level where the need for responsibility in business education is acknowledged and also is being supported. Then you have us here for example changing curricula, syllabus, to, syllabi, to implement that... And, the hope is that that will slowly start,

you know, the word will be spread. And... In different ways so among students within the business school, within the guild, Finanssi, and then last but not least also through future business graduates. Our graduates who have maybe a better insight into responsibility and embrace the importance of the topic; live up to that when they are doing business so when they are working they may be also able to contribute to this narrative change... So when they talk to future potential students then maybe they will tell about other things than just “this is about calculating this and that” but they will maybe have a more... holistic view of the role of business and the role of responsibility there and... (Informant 3)

University of Oulu has received the so called AACSB accreditation from AACSB International (The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business). One of the aims of the accreditation is to commit to corporate and social responsibility (AACSB International 2017, 7). The accreditation was often mentioned in the discussions with the teachers. The informants were asked what their perceptions on the accreditation and its requirements on sustainability and responsibility were. Many of the teachers thought that the accreditation had affected implementing sustainability and responsibility issues positively in Oulu Business School:

And without the AACSB accreditation I don't know if that [Globally Responsible Business] course would have been introduced or not, it's hard to say. And I don't know, the research they were doing in the International Business Department prior to that like were they heading down that road anyway or was it out of the blue from this AACSB accreditation, like suddenly “oh we have to have this course and now we gotta figure out a way to do it”. But I think it's definitely good that, and it's because of this AACSB accreditation or I think it's because of that, that we're at least pushed to think about this sustainability stuff a little bit and try to incorporate it in the classroom. (Informant 1)

Many of the teachers found that the accreditation gave this kind of a push from outside to pay more attention to sustainability and responsibility issues. One of the teachers (3) even saw that it made it easier for them to advocate for the topic with other teachers. Some of the teachers argued that the accreditation had not changed the content of the studies much, but had made them more structured:

I'm sure that there has started to be more of this kind of being systematic, that you really have to *think* about what you mean with a particular goal or content of a course and

really, like, I could say that maybe even mostly that you have to think about how genuinely the student learns, how he/she learns and what he/she can learn... And not just 'what' but 'how', and are the learning goals met at the course and how do you measure them. (Informant 10)

5.3.2 Outsourcing perceptions

On the other hand, there were also a few utterances that didn't find a need for business education to move into a more sustainable and responsible direction or that were *outsourcing* in a way that they saw the topic as something that should be implemented by other teachers or courses in the business school or other actors in the society. In many utterances, the faculty's responsibility course was mentioned as something that covers the sustainability issues and takes the responsibility of it. One of the teachers perceived that the topic was not that applicable to his/her programme. Another one saw that the subjects that were being handled in his/her courses did not have anything to do with sustainability issues. Many of the teachers found that sustainability and responsibility were easier to implement in certain subjects than in others:

So in some subjects it [sustainability and responsibility] has probably been tied to almost all courses but then subjects are so different that... For example, [taught programme x] is the kind where we produce so clearly some certain professional set of skills that there are pretty certain, no matter which business school, they always teach the same things, whereas in other subjects, where the professional identity that is being produced is not so clear, they can profile their own programmes so that 'in here we study these kinds of things' and then you are sort of more free to plan the courses in that sense. (Informant 6)

Although almost all teachers found that the AACSB accreditation had at least in some way positively affected enhancing the topic within Oulu Business School, one of the teachers didn't find that it had affected their teaching in any way:

Researcher: Well then, the University of Oulu has received the AACSB accreditation, does it affect your teaching somehow and in what way?

Informant 2: [interrupting] No, not in any way whatsoever.

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Informant 2: Of course we all participate in it in a sense that we are implementing it but, well, it doesn't affect my working in any way, so, it's nice to have all kinds of stamps so, well I just think it's just another stamp among others.

5.3.3 Obstacles and challenges

From the interviews, many utterances could be identified that described the difficulties in enhancing sustainability and responsibility issues within the business school. Stubbs and Cocklin (2008) have written about the division of different paradigms within the field of business. According to many informants, there seemed to be a divide also between the teachers of Oulu Business School depending on how they perceive the importance of the topic and how it should be implemented.

Researcher: Would you say that there are many business teachers here at Oulu Business School who share your ideas about growth?

Informant 3: No. To be honest, you ask me if I think, I don't think so. I do not know, but I don't think so. That's a topic that goes into the very roots of who we are as teachers, I see that as a big split. You know. So I feel, if I raise those topics and if I defend my thinking, I feel more like 'the hippie' among them umm, which is not always a good thing, so I try to do it in a subtle way. Umm and I'm not putting myself on either side completely, I'm trying to just show that there are different sides to it. And, in the end if each and every one of us, individuals, teachers and also students, they need to decide for themselves, but I think that the goal of us teaching needs to be provided at least the possibility to consider different perspectives. And to critically analyze them. But yeah, I don't think, I don't think that there are very many... I know, my feeling, my gut feeling is that there is maybe a handful, or maybe two handful, two hands full of people who think a little similar. It's not a thing that one would, you know, openly discuss. That's maybe something that you would talk about with... With somebody you know very well.

In many utterances the informants described that there was some kind of resistance to change and skepticism that caused the divide between the teachers who were proactive in sustainability and responsibility issues. One of the teachers felt really strongly about the difference of opinions:

Well it feels obviously like really... Somehow you're awfully disappointed that... That there are these kinds of... Reactions... That really like, can it be so inconsiderate or can it be somehow so narrow-minded that you really think like that and then it of course comes to mind that if a teacher thinks like that then how can we ever pass on to students anything... Bigger, then... So well, yes, there have often been these kinds of discussions and then it has turned out that the opponent thinks that this is not important so obviously it is mostly that kind of a disappointment but then... (Informant 8)

Some informants found that there were other teachers who didn't find sustainability and responsibility issues important or not important enough to enhance them. Some of the teachers saw that this was due to lack of resources or overwhelming amount of work that the teachers had. The research profiles of different teachers were also seen as a factor that affected their interest towards the subject. One of the teachers described some other teachers' attitudes towards the Globally Responsible Business Course in the following way:

So there was a little bit these kinds of suspicions that is this like a kind of a, I'm not sure if anyone really said so but, I felt like "is this that kind of a nonsense course" or the kind of a light, light course that doesn't fit into "our demanding programme" [laughs]... (Informant 8)

Many of the teachers argued that the business students' professional goals were often not related to the goals of sustainability and responsibility, as also Dyllick (2015, 21) has argued. One of the teachers (3) saw this as a part of the narrative that was being produced about the business discipline and profession. Another teacher (4) described that sustainability was seen as somehow "uncool" and that the students would need some kind of a reward mechanism to get interested in the topic. Some teachers saw that the goal of "making money" was related to the fact that finance was such a popular programme in the student application process. One informant found that the starting point of the business school students was usually not related to sustainability and responsibility issues:

I guess this is one of those issues where at least for [business school programme x] students when they graduate they're probably not thinking "I'm going to go into this. I wanna find a job where I can affect these type of sustainability issues." Now ok, this is my assumption. And... At least for me I think it's the type of thing where you fit it into whatever it is you're doing. Let's say if you're working, let's say in finance, you're a money manager, and, if you don't have a *specific* obligation or you haven't promised to

only invest in corp... socially responsible or sustainable firms, that you're free to invest into whatever you want, if you have the choice between one firm that practices sustainability and the other one that does not, but they have, at least, the level of the risk is the same as the level of the suspected returns in the future, your reward for investing is about the same, then hopefully people would choose the sustainable. So in that sense people are often incorporating sustainability in their work. But other than having that specific goal of being a money manager focused on corporate social responsibility firms or sustainab... sustainable firms, or somebody who goes to work for a... this NGO that's promoting wind power production... So, other than those really specific examples I think in general people just go do their regular job and then *maybe* find some other ways to incorporate this idea of sustainability in their work. (Informant 1)

According to many teachers, there were some students who did not seem to be at all interested in the topics of sustainability and responsibility or found them the kind of topics that were not relevant to business studies. As Cornuel and Hommel (2015, 21) have pointed out, business students sometimes see themselves as the university's customers who have certain expectations on where the studies take them and it can be argued that studying sustainability issues might not be seen as a way to do that. Many of the teachers had received direct feedback from the students. In some cases, the teachers had experienced critical attitudes from the students who thought that sustainability issues are mostly "greenwashing". Some informants also found that students may see sustainability issues as something that just prevents business from being efficient:

Umm, and then there are others who... Who maybe regard that as umm... Some form of 'hocus pocus', something that is an obstacle to business. It is just making business difficult and blurry; maybe they see business more as pure 'mechanics' so it's tools you apply, you make certain calculations, you estimate certain things, and then you make something to work, so it's the business works, the model is being put into work and it then hopefully if they are right about their estimates and their calculations it produce a certain... Certain profit. And it will increase its shareholder value. So I think that there's both reactions. And the challenge for me is, especially to create interest and hopefully convey the importance of the topic to those who are more critical about it. (Informant 3)

5.3.4 Suggestions for improvement

Cornuel and Hommel (2015, 3) have concluded that, although responsibility and sustainability might be already involved in the strategies and curricula of business schools, in practice the traditional goals of maximizing shareholder value are still prevailing. Also in the discussion with Oulu Business School teachers there were many utterances according to which there was a need for further change within the business school when it comes to sustainability and responsibility. Most of the teachers found that there was already a changing process going on but that there were things that should be improved:

Weeeell, yes I'm sure it could be improved or as we just talked that, well how it then shows in our teaching that, how like these kinds of... Ethical matters, are they being talked about and... Often it then does appear to some outsiders who don't, or what they think about the field of business and economics that "yeah, it's cold business and people don't matter" and, that "money only matters"... But somehow, it's obviously not like that, and I feel that of course no one wants to teach or teaches that kind of a value system in here... It is in that sense surely indirectly involved, but yes, I'm sure there is something to improve in there also. So that we could bring these kinds of discussions more consciously, thinking sort of what is right and what is wrong. (Informant 9)

In the discussions with the teachers, it came out repeatedly that according to them, the best way to enhance sustainability and responsibility in Oulu Business School would be through raising the students' awareness or changing their mindset. This seems to be in line with Muff's (2013, 491) notion of *transformative learning* to change the business students' perspective. Many teachers pointed out that telling the students what is right and what is wrong is not the appropriate way but that the students should be encouraged to make their own choices. Critical thinking was seen as an important part in many utterances, which can also be seen as a part of Muff's idea of transformative learning. Some teachers saw that moving away from traditional teaching methods would be an important part in the change process:

And then when it comes to teaching, it requires that this kind of a traditional classroom teaching well... And sharing knowledge, they don't really work in this. So it requires that we are able to raise this kind of a mindset among the students. And those methods are a really important part of this, I think. The way we take... We must get the students involved in it. So then there will be different levels of, part of the students have already thought a lot so they are able to progress maybe more, and part of them will only then

just *wake up*. I think it requires that. That kind of a... That kind of a, thinking also through methods how we build up those studies. And they are not necessarily teacher-centered methods but student-centered. And integrating. (Informant 5)

Half of the teachers also pointed out that the teachers of Oulu Business School should receive some kind of a training themselves in sustainability and responsibility issues and methods related to them to be able to better implement those topics in their teaching. Many informants saw that this should also be done by involving the teachers in the process in the same way as with the students:

So in some participatory way I would approach it anyway, so everyone probably has their own, own stuff so maybe we should all take that Globally Responsible Business course. It probably wouldn't be a problem [laughs] at all! So probably it would require also training but somehow in this kind of a participatory way that everyone could bring their own skills and knowledge, made out of those, then. Because when you're being integrated then it is easier to also make it your own. That's the way it always goes. (Informant 10)

Many teachers also saw that Oulu Business School should change its profile into a more sustainable one. Different ideas were given on how this could be done, by for example emphasizing those topics in the public relations of the business school, breaking stereotypes of a business student as a "money maker", making University of Oulu a "campus of sustainable development", promoting interdisciplinary research and writing out the goals and values that have been addressed in the strategy of the University and of the Business School. It was also pointed out that the topic should move from a one-course subject to something that is being covered throughout the whole programme.

5.4 Summary of the findings

Overall, it can be argued that the teachers of Oulu Business School interviewed for this study saw sustainability and responsibility as important values that can be applied to business education. All of the teachers could define, what these concepts mean according to their understanding. The different perceptions, however, could be seen on all the three third level categories of description (society, business and business school level), and they can be seen as representations of the different paradigms within the field of business: the neoclassical paradigm and the

ecological modernization paradigm. In the *level of society*, some of the teachers found that business schools have only limited agency in sustainability and responsibility issues and that other actors in the society, such as governments, have greater agency. Most of the teachers argued that economic growth was inevitable whereas one teacher explicitly pointed out that growth could not be eternal.

In the *business level*, according to some perceptions, the field of business was already sustainable and responsible enough and there was no need for it to change in a significant way. Many teachers argued that responsibility or sustainability problems that businesses cause would be diminished because the market would find a solution to those issues. This, according to many informants, would happen because businesses that act irresponsibly would eventually “get caught” and lose customers because of the bad publicity.

On the other hand, there were many perceptions according to which the field of business should change to become truly sustainable and responsible. Most of the teachers argued that in order to succeed long-term, the businesses should act responsibly. An essential finding in the discussions was the way many teachers experienced the contradiction between the goals of neoclassical economics and the goals of sustainability and responsibility. Some teachers saw that these two paradigms could not be consolidated whereas others argued that shareholder value can be pursued as long as the businesses think long term.

In the *business school level*, most of the teachers saw that the sustainability and responsibility issues were well applicable to the field. Many of them experienced that they had some kind of a personal relationship with the topic, whether it was through their working experience or their personal life choices. An important finding was that there were several perceptions where the teachers experienced a process of transformation within the business school, which was named for example as a “change process” or a “narrative change”. Many of the teachers seemed to feel like the business school was moving to a more sustainable and responsible direction. Most of the teachers saw that the AACSB accreditation had worked as a “push” towards that. Although few, there were also some utterances that seemed to *outsource* the topic to some other actors, such as the responsibility course of the Business School, some other teachers or some other programmes.

The teachers mentioned many obstacles and challenges when it comes to implementing sustainability and responsibility in their work. Many teachers described that there is a divide be-

tween different worldviews of the teachers which can be seen as similar to the division of paradigms in business school overall (Stubbs & Cocklin 2008, 210). They argued that there were some other teachers who didn't find the topic important or that were outsourcing the topic to other actors. The business students were also sometimes regarded as uninterested or critical towards the subject.

The teachers had many suggestions for improving sustainability and responsibility within Oulu Business School. Many of them emphasized that the students' awareness should be raised and their mindset should be changed through critical thinking, as also Muff (2013, 491) has suggested with her idea of transformative learning. It was also suggested many times that the teachers should receive some kind of training in sustainability and responsibility issues and the teaching methods related to them and that the teachers should be made a part of planning implementing that training.

6 Improving sustainability and responsibility in business education through critical pedagogy

In this part of the study a more transformative stance will be taken towards the topic. Critical pedagogy that was familiarized with in chapter 3 of the study (*Critical approaches*) will now be applied as a way of approaching these suggestions made by the teachers. Some complementary suggestions will also be made, based on previous studies on applying critical pedagogy to business education and education for sustainable development. Suggestions will be provided at the level of *curriculum* and the level of *teaching and study methods*.

6.1 Applying critical pedagogy to business education

It can be argued that, according to the empirical findings of this study, many of the challenges of business schools in implementing sustainability and responsibility in their curricula and teaching that were described in the 2nd chapter of this study (*Sustainability and responsibility in the business school context*) are prevalent also in Oulu Business School. There were some differences in the way the teachers saw their own role in implementing sustainability and responsibility in the business school as well as in the role of the business school in implementing sustainability and responsibility in the society. It also seems that these topics are still not completely a part of Oulu Business School's "institutional DNA" (Cornuel & Hommel 2015, 7). Fortunately, the teachers themselves had many suggestions on how these topics could be enhanced in the business school, such as *raising the students' awareness and changing their mindset through critical thinking* and *improving the teachers' awareness on the topic through discussions and participatory training*.

Sustainable business education has already been studied extensively (see for example Dyllick, 2015 and Hesselbarth & Schaltegger, 2014) and critical theory and pedagogy have been applied to business education (see for example Currie & Knights, 2003 and Welsh & Lewis, 2001). Teaching sustainability through critical pedagogy in an interdisciplinary setting has also been studied by Welsh and Murray (2003). However, *applying critical pedagogy to sustainable and responsible business education* has not yet been much studied, part from Springett (2005) who has applied critical perspective to her participatory study. This provides an interesting and fruitful point of view for this thesis and for further studies.

6.2 Curriculum

It seems, according to the teachers of Oulu Business School, that responsibility and sustainability are already a part of the business school's curriculum as also the AACSB accreditation requires. However, it seems that the way this part of the curriculum is being taken into account is not always consistent but depending on the individual teachers and their preferences. As Hesselbarth and Schaltegger (2014, 26) have suggested, business school graduates should become "corporate change agents for sustainability" and this would require for the topics to be an integral part of most, if not all, courses of the business school.

The emancipatory nature of critical theory can be seen as applicable to the way students are being approached with sustainability and responsibility issues. As many of the teachers interviewed for this study pointed out, they did not want to "lecture" or tell the students, what is right or wrong. Instead, the teachers emphasized in many ways the importance of raising the students' awareness on the topic and enabling them to "change their mindsets" to a more sustainable and responsible direction. Critical thinking was seen as an important method in this process. It can be argued that the notion of **problematizing concepts** (Welsh & Murray 2003, 230) can be applied to this kind of a process: "In critical pedagogy, the process of complication occurs through problematizing, where the interests and agendas of specific people in specific situations are represented and organized around a general conceptual scheme, core idea, or problem" (Dehler et. al., 2001 as cited by Welsh & Murray 2003, 230). It seems, according to the interviews, that many of the teachers already implemented similar teaching methods especially in the courses that were related to responsibility issues. However, it could be suggested that critical thinking and problematizing concepts should become part of the curriculum of all the courses of the business school so that the whole study path of the students would build up their complicated understanding of business.

Another important part of critical theory that could be applied to the business school context is the notion of **totality**, that emphasizes acknowledging the historical context and "implies an understanding of management as a cultural and social practice, influenced by intra-organizational forces as well as by the broader ideologies and material conditions of a particular society" (Prasad & Caproni 1997, 288). Although the authors write about totality in the context of management studies, it seems justified that it could be also extended to the context of the whole discipline of business and economics. Welsh and Murray suggest that **disciplinary boundaries should be crossed** by "creating a hybridized space or borderland where these domains overlap

and interact” (2003, 229). In the area of sustainable management education, Muff (2013, 492) has also pointed out the importance of going towards more interdisciplinary learning. In practice this could mean that business students could acquire for example historical and biological points of view to business and economics and the sustainability and responsibility issues related to them. If business is only being looked at from the one discipline’s perspective, it leaves out many points of view that can be seen as crucial to a complete and overarching understanding of the businesses’ role in the society. As some of the teachers also pointed out, a more interdisciplinary approach would be needed to enhance addressing sustainability and responsibility issues in the business school.

6.3 Teaching and study methods

In the discussions with the teachers it was many times suggested that in order to better enhance sustainability and responsibility issues within the business school, all teachers should get involved in the process through mutual discussions and participatory training. It can be argued that the emancipatory aspect of critical theory can well applied into this suggestion. Prasad and Caproni (1997, 285) argue that “critical theory is deeply committed to the emancipatory potential of management and organizations”. Also Dehler, Welsh and Lewis (2001, 494) have emphasized the emancipatory and transformational nature that management education should have in the modern society. As one of the teachers mentioned in the interviews, it is hard to make something “your own” if you have not been part of creating it.

Also Prasad and Caproni have proposed that, instead of merely identifying and discussing difficult issues in the business school environment, academics should be involved in radical engagement: “working consciously and systematically on action plans for rebuilding organizations [---] while having a realistic appreciation of social and cultural constraints” (Prasad & Caproni 1997, 289). It seems that, in order to enable a sustainable and responsible business school, it could be fruitful to aim for practices that make all the teachers part of the planning process and create an open environment for all to discuss the sustainability and responsibility issues and the perceptions that the teachers have on them. In practice, this could mean training sessions where all the teachers could participate in conceptualizing what sustainability and responsibility mean in the business context and to them personally. Different teaching methods could also be acquainted with during these kinds of sessions. It would be important to have all the teachers taking equally part in these situations and in planning them.

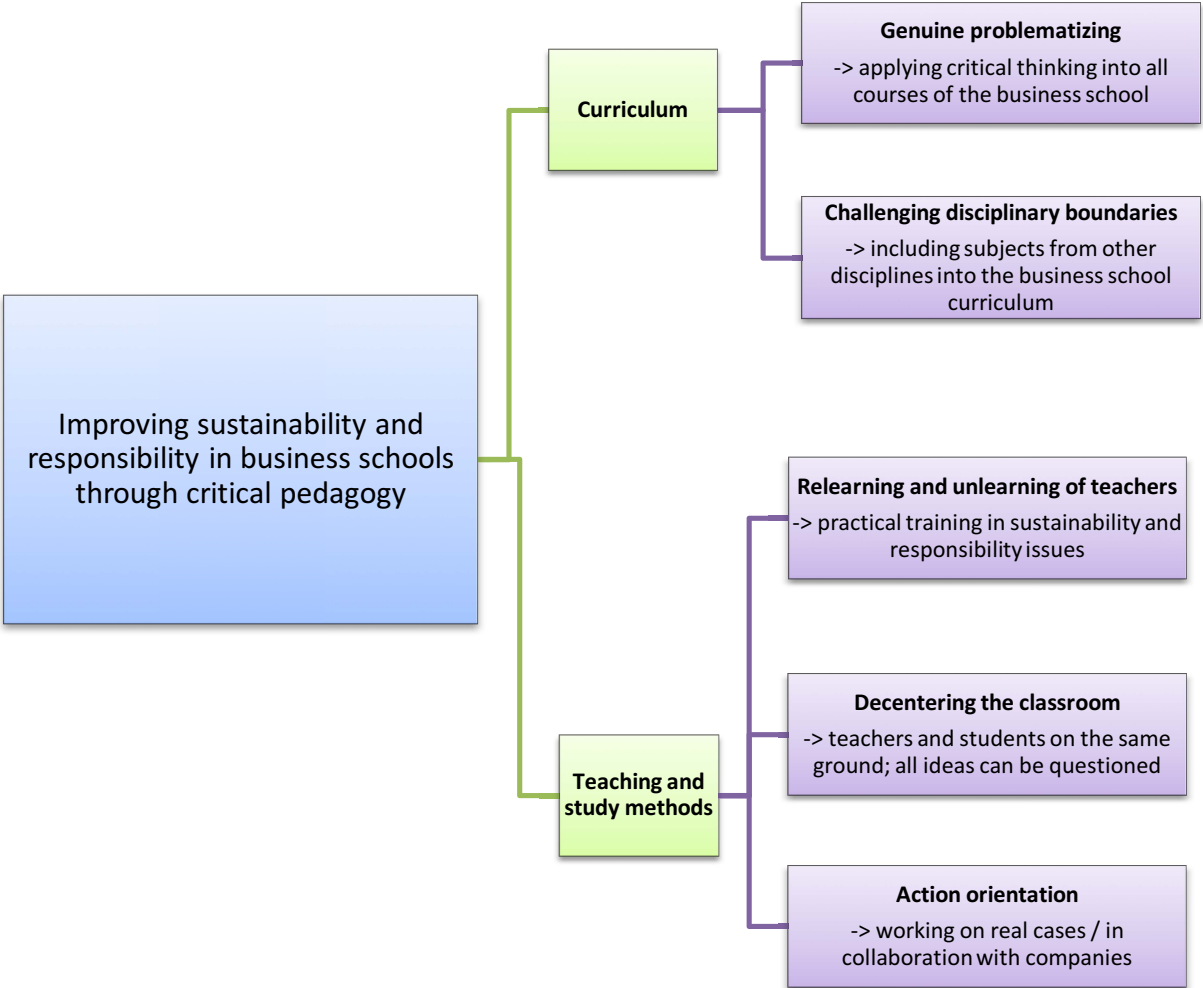
As Muff has suggested, to enable business schools to truly become sustainable and responsible, the teaching should aim towards transformative learning of the students (Muff 2013, 492) to “raise the students’ self-knowledge, help them uncover their earlier thoughts and beliefs and change their perspective”. In the field of critical pedagogy, Wink (2005, 67) has suggested similarly that teachers should get involved with constant **relearning and unlearning**. It can be thus argued that the transformative nature of critical pedagogy could serve both the students and the teachers in the process of building more sustainable and responsible business schools.

Another aspect of critical pedagogy can be applied to the context of Oulu Business School teachers’ suggestions for improvement. Welsh and Murray have suggested that the **classroom should be decentered** so that the “faculty and student stand on the same epistemologic ground” (2003, 228). Dehler, Welsh and Lewis have pointed out that the business faculty have their own personal worldviews that affect the way they approach teaching. They suggest that business teachers should create a learning space where “critical commentary becomes something not to be feared but relished and embraced”. This requires that all teachers recognize the “contestability of any and all ideas (even one’s own)” (Dehler, Welsh & Lewis 2001, 500). In practice this could mean that in the training sessions with the teachers, methods could be used where everyone gets to question their pre-assumptions about the purpose of business education and the purpose of businesses, as well as the socially constructed “truths” of economic thinking. It would be important to bear in mind the importance of an open and safe atmosphere for discussion.

Welsh and Murray (2003, 231) suggest that, in order to avoid feeling powerless in the face of the issues related to sustainability, an **action orientation** should be acquired as a part of critical pedagogy in business education: “The process of producing, defending, and advocating their design forces students to make choices and understand their implications. From a critical perspective, as students acquire more skills in reappropriating knowledge, they also acquire a greater capacity to act.” (Welsh & Murray 2003, 231). Also Muff (2013, 492) has pointed out the importance of field-work in business schools that wish to enhance sustainability and responsibility. In practice this could mean working on real business cases and in collaboration with companies, for example by creating or updating a corporate social responsibility plan for a company or auditing their supply chain.

Figure 2 below represents the researcher’s suggestions for improvement, that are based on the empirical findings of this study and on previous literature on critical pedagogy:

Figure 2. Improving sustainability and responsibility in business schools through critical pedagogy: practical suggestions



7 Discussion and conclusions

This chapter will provide discussion on the findings of the study. The division between the perceptions of the teachers of Oulu Business School will be analyzed and the role of the business teacher will be looked at as a social construct. The potential of critical pedagogy in enhancing sustainability and responsibility in business schools will be discussed. The research process will be evaluated and suggestions for further research will be provided.

The aim of this study was to find out, what the perceptions of Oulu Business School teachers were on sustainability and responsibility and on implementing them in their teaching, what kinds of challenges they have faced in doing so, how they perceived the division between neo-classical economic theory and the goals of sustainability and how sustainability and responsibility could be enhanced in Oulu Business School. Answers to these questions have already been provided in the 5th chapter of the study (Findings of the study).

It turned out in the discussions with the teachers that some of the teachers had experienced a lot of challenges in implementing the topic in their work while there were some other teachers who argued that they hadn't experienced any challenges because they did not think that implementing the topic was their duty. When it comes to the possible contradiction between the neoclassical economic goals and sustainability goals, some of the teachers experienced this as a fundamental division while others thought that there is no contradiction because businesses must think long-term to succeed and that is why they always work responsibly.

It seems that the way the teachers perceived the importance of sustainability and responsibility overall in the society did not differ much: all of the teachers found them important. However, when it comes to who should be responsible for implementing those values, the perceptions were fundamentally different. It can be argued that the *agency* of the business teachers in implementing sustainability and responsibility is more real to some teacher than to some others. It seems that the teachers' perceptions on sustainability and responsibility can be seen as *socially constructed* and this notion seems to be in line with both critical theory (Prasad & Caproni 1997, 287) and critical pedagogy (Giroux 1988, 8).

The teachers who saw their agency as *real* can be described to have acquired a *change agent perspective* while some of the teachers seemed to *outsource* the agency to other actors in the business school and in the society. These two categories are not static and they represent indi-

vidual perspectives. The teachers cannot be divided into two groups but their different viewpoints can, as the phenomenographical methodology suggests (Uljens 1991, 92). I will now take a closer look at these two perspectives respectively.

7.1 Outsourcing perspectives

Some perceptions in the interviews could be categorized as *outsourcing perspectives*. In those perspectives, implementing sustainability and responsibility in the society was seen as a factor that was not the business sector's responsibility. There were views that argued that the business sector already is (and always has been) responsible enough because in order to thrive, the long-term thinking of the companies has to be responsible. It was argued also that some "truths" of the prevailing economic models, such as economic growth, cannot be disregarded. In many utterances, "the market" was seen as something that will solve all the responsibility issues itself. In that sense it seems that most of the teachers felt that change towards more sustainable and responsible business can only happen within certain economic limits. This worldview can be linked to the neoclassical economic paradigm described by Stubbs and Cocklin (with references to other scholars):

The neoclassical economic worldview is the dominant paradigm today (Cotgove, 1982; Egri and Pinfield, 1996). Underpinning this paradigm is neoclassical economic theory, which focuses on unlimited economic growth via the operation of free markets and increasing consumption of products and services. Proponents of this view believe that the limits of growth are very distant or non-existent (Beckerman, 1974, 1995; Simon, 1984; Simon and Kahn, 1981). Technology can, and will, solve any issues of environmental degradation through the substitution of natural capital with human-made capital and the development of new technology and processes to deal with pollution and waste. (Stubbs & Cocklin 2008, 208).

Also at the business school level, according to this view, the responsibility of implementing the topic of sustainability does not belong to all business teachers but to certain programmes, specific responsibility-oriented courses or expert teachers. It can be argued that this perspective rejects the idea of all business teachers as change agents (Hessebarth & Schaltegger 2014, 26) and it rejects the idea of the business profession as a profession "built on virtues" (Dyllick 2015, 27).

7.2 Change agent perspectives

The opposite perspective can be categorized as the *change agent perspectives*. Hessebarth and Schaltegger (2014, 26) have described “corporate change agents for sustainability” as “driving forces in change processes”, individuals from all levels of the organization who play their part in enhancing sustainable development in all areas of their work. The authors have particularly studied how change agents can be educated in the area of management studies that is one field of business education, but as I see it, this concept can well be applied to the business teacher’s position, as well.

It seems, according to the interviews, that many of the perceptions can be seen as aiming for change within the business school when it comes to sustainability and responsibility. According to many perceptions, there seemed to be a contradiction between the different worldviews or paradigms of the teachers. Some of the teachers that seemed to represent the change agent perspective felt that the division between different views was confusing and frustrating. On the other hand, the teachers that represented the more outsourcing perspective did not mention the division of paradigms.

The perceptions that represent the change agent perspectives saw that the business sector had an important part to play in sustainability and responsibility, which were seen as fundamental values in the field of economics. These notions seem to be in line with the ecological modernization paradigm that Stubbs and Cocklin propose as an alternative to the neoclassical perspective (with references to other scholars):

While not promoting an end to growth, supporters of ecological modernization (EM) do not believe that growth can go on forever in a finite world. EM focuses on improving human welfare and environmental stewardship (maintaining the integrity and variety of nonhuman nature) in addition to economic prosperity – a prosperous economy depends on a healthy ecology and vice versa (Gladwin et al., 1995). (Stubbs & Cocklin 2008, 208).

Many of the teachers seemed to have experienced a change process that was going on where the business school was transforming to a kind that allowed implementing the topics more and more. The transitional period that seemed to be going on was sometimes conceptualized as a “change process” or a “narrative change” where the traditional neoclassical economic way of

thinking was giving way to the more responsible and sustainable one (which could be for example seen as the ecological modernization paradigm).

Part from the neoclassical and ecological modernization paradigms, Stubbs and Cocklin (2008, 208) have also suggested a third category in their sustainability framework, the ecocentrism paradigm. This view sees that infinite growth is impossible and emphasizes the natures and ecosystems' value over other values. It seems that only one informant out of all the ten teachers mentioned a few utterances that represented this worldview, which can be seen quite radical and revolutionary, embracing "post-patriarchal feminist values" and goals that "are aligned with stakeholder welfare (rather than shareholder wealth)" that are prevalent in the ecocentric paradigm (Stubbs & Cocklin 2008, 208). I argue that these perceptions can, however, also be categorized as change agent perspectives because of the similar aims of the ecological modernization and ecocentrism paradigm.

7.3 Critical pedagogy as a way of improving sustainability and responsibility in business education

There has been a lot of research on sustainability and responsibility (or business ethics) in business schools (see for example Adomßent, 2014; Dyllick, 2015 and Cornuel & Hommel, 2015). Also critical theory has been applied to some research on higher education. The notions of social construct, power and ideology, totality and praxis of critical theory can be seen as well applicable to further research on sustainability and responsibility in business schools. It can be argued that there is still a need for the business schools to transform into institutions that educate business professionals who are future change agents and institutions that develop the business profession into a one that is "built on virtues" (Cornuel & Hommel 2015, 8), and critical theory can be seen as a transformative way for doing that.

There seems to be few studies on combining *critical pedagogy* to enhancing sustainability and responsibility in business education. For example, Springett (2005) has studied education for sustainability (ESD) in the business school curriculum through a critical lens. Practical suggestions for applying critical pedagogy to enhance sustainability and responsibility in Oulu Business School were given in the 6th chapter of this study. I argue that those suggestions could be broadened to study further the transformative and emancipatory possibilities of critical pedagogy in sustainable and responsible business education. Literature on sustainable business education, previous research on critical pedagogy in business schools and the findings of this

study seem to support the idea of critical pedagogy as having great potential in helping business schools in their transition towards more sustainable and responsible ones, as it has been suggested in the previous chapter of the study.

An interesting research methodology to discover in the field of critical pedagogy in business education could be the one of action research that has a transformative and emancipatory nature similar to critical pedagogy. Kemmis, for example, has described critical action research in the following way: “In our view, people who undertake critical participatory action research do so with clear and conscious commitment to the notion that it will be a social and educational process for each person involved and for everyone involved collectively” (Kemmis 2014, 19). The action orientation of critical pedagogy suggested by Welsh and Murray (2003, 231) could be harnessed to a process where students would complete practical work on the topic of sustainability for example in collaboration with companies and the teacher would be part of the process not only as an instructor but also as a researcher doing action research.

It can be argued that the differences in the ways that the teachers of Oulu Business School perceived the contradiction between neoclassical economic theory and the goals of sustainability and responsibility is an interesting finding in this study. Some of the teachers found that these paradigms were very far from each other whereas others did not find that there was any contradiction at all. This could provide grounds for further research for example in focusing more on this contradiction, how it is perceived by business teachers and what the consequences of this contradiction are. On a broader level, the way in which the purpose of business schools can be seen as a social construct would also provide intriguing research questions. Business students’ perspectives on sustainability and responsibility would also be a theme that is not that much studied.

A field that could also provide an interesting and pragmatic point of view to the debate on business ethics, sustainability and responsibility in business schools could be the one of comparative education research that focuses on “international problems in education” (Epstein 1994, 918, as cited in Crossley & Watson 2003, 16). Critical theory has also been applied to comparative education research (see for example Leeman & Reid, 2006), which provides grounds for many fresh points of view to the topic that has been addressed in this paper.

8 Ethical considerations and evaluation of the research process

In this chapter, the issues of validity, reliability, trustworthiness and ethical concerns will be put under scrutiny regarding this work. The interview process and the ethical issues related to the participants' anonymity are being discussed. It is also being evaluated in which way the results of the study can be seen as transferable. The importance and validity of the findings are also being put under scrutiny.

8.1 Validity of the study

Joseph Maxwell has defined the concept of validity as the “correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account” (Luttrell 2010, 280). Because there is no rulebook for validating a qualitative study, Maxwell has approached this issue with the idea of a validity threat: “a way you might be wrong” (Luttrell 2010, 280).

The *subjectivity* of the researcher, which can also be called the “researcher’s bias”, can be seen as a threat when making a qualitative study and it has been argued that the researcher should always make their position as visible as possible (Luttrell 2010, 281). When it comes to this study, it should be pointed out that the researcher herself has a strong view on sustainability and responsibility issues for she is an enthusiast in environmental and social justice issues and a person who is politically active. It seems natural to research on something that one is enthusiastic about. When making this study, it has been indeed a challenge to remain neutral at all stages of the research process. Yet, it has been the researcher’s goal throughout the study.

The research questions posed in this work are largely based on the researcher’s pre-assumption according to which there *is* a contradiction between the goals of neoclassical economics and the goals of sustainability and responsibility. As it turned out in the discussions with the teachers and as it has been discussed in the analysis of the empirical data of this study, many of the teachers found that neoclassical economics were not contradictory with sustainability and responsibility and that the challenges posed by economic growth were something that the market would solve by itself. The notion of neoclassical economics as contradictory with the goals of sustainability and responsibility has been explained in the theoretical part of the study and thus is justified as the deductive starting point of this work.

In the interview situations with the teachers the questions were asked in a way that tried to give as much room for the teachers’ perceptions as possible. If needed, some additional questions

were asked according to the informants' answers and the interviews became more like discussions at some parts. This requires to point out the issue of *reactivity*: the way the researcher influences the informants or the interview situation, which can be seen as something that should be taken into account but also as something that cannot and should not completely be avoided (Luttrell 2010, 282).

Sandberg has approached the problem of the researcher's subjectivity in the field of phenomenography through the idea of *interpretative awareness*, which means to "acknowledge and explicitly deal with our subjectivity throughout the research process instead of overlooking it" (Dall'Alba & Hasselgren 1996, 137). When making this study, the issue of reactivity has been considered and interpretative awareness has been used by trying to not affect the respondents' answers for example by leading them to some direction with questions. When analyzing the utterances of the informants, attention has been paid to give all kinds of perceptions same value in the outcome space.

8.2 Reliability of the study

When it comes to the reliability of the study, there are some issues that are related to the interpretative nature of phenomenography itself. There has been a lot of discussion around the trustworthiness of phenomenographical studies (Cope 2004, 7). It can be argued that when researching a phenomenon through a positivist or realist lens, the ways in which the results of the study can be confirmed as trustworthy are rather straightforward (Lincoln & Guba 1985, 218). However, when conducting an inquiry such as a phenomenographical study, Lincoln and Guba have argued the following: "When naïve realism is replaced by the assumption of multiple constructed realities, there is no ultimate benchmark to which one can turn off justification – whether in principle or by a technical adjustment via the falsification principle. 'Reality' is now a multiple set of mental constructions" (Lincoln & Guba 1985, 295). This means that, due to the respondents' and the researcher's own separate realities, it is not possible to test whether the results of the inquiry are *true* or not.

Instead, Lincoln and Guba suggest that the trustworthiness of a non-positivist study should be considered through the level of *credibility*: "In order to demonstrate 'truth value,' the naturalist must show that he or she has *represented those multiple constructions adequately*, that is, that the *reconstructions* (for the findings and interpretations are also constructions, it should never be forgotten) that have been arrived at via the inquiry are *credible to the constructors of the*

original multiple realities” (Lincoln & Guba 1985, 295; italics original). To make the findings of this study credible, the different perceptions of the informants have been represented as comprehensively as possible, using the three levels of categories of description. The idea of differently constructed realities has also been addressed in the discussion part of this study to treat the different perceptions as equal. Multiple quotes have been used in the findings part to give as much room for the original voices of the participants as possible.

Another issue regarding the reliability of a study that should be addressed is the one of applicability: Are the results of the research *generalizable*? Lincoln and Guba argue that in the case of a naturalistic inquiry, such as a phenomenographic one, it is not possible nor necessary to aim for generalizability (Lincoln & Guba 1985, 297). Also Cope (2004, 9) has pointed out that in phenomenography, the outcome space that emerges in a study by a certain researcher cannot be replicated by another researcher. Again, this relates to the notion of reality in phenomenography: there is a reality which is interpreted by individuals. Thus, if this study was to be replicated in another setting, the respondents and the researcher would have their own constructions of reality. This makes it impossible to generalize the results of this study, but some tendencies might be deduced as the outcomes of the research process.

However, Lincoln and Guba suggest that the way in which conclusions can be drawn from the results of an inquiry could be regarded as an issue of *transferability*. This means that the researcher should provide as much information on the setting of the research as possible so that “the responsibility of the original investigator ends in providing sufficient descriptive data to make such similarity judgements possible” (Lincoln & Guba 1985, 297). In this particular study, this has been done by providing information on the ways in which the respondents have been chosen, what kinds of questions have been asked and by providing an complete overlook on the different categories of description that emerged from the data. However, it needs to be stated that it seems unlikely that identical findings would come up in a study conducted by some other researcher or conducted in another setting. It can also be questioned, whether transferability is an important part of measuring the reliability of a phenomenographical study, where the perceptions of individuals *per se* have the highest value, not the conclusions that can be drawn from those perceptions.

8.3 Ethical considerations

It can be argued that there are several ethical considerations that should be made when doing a phenomenographical inquiry, where the perceptions and experiences of individuals are being studied. It can be seen as the researcher's responsibility to protect the informants from possible risk, harm, vulnerability and embarrassment posed to the participants (Cohen & Manion 2011, 228). During this research process, the standpoint has been to respect the principle of not doing harm to the participants at any point.

Making a written consent with the research participants has been seen as an important ethical measure when conducting a phenomenographical inquiry (Keeves 1997, 159). The teachers were asked to fill out a consent form which reported what this research is about, what the aim of the study was and where they could ask further questions about the study. The participants were informed that they have a right to withdraw from the study at any point, if they wished to do so. The agreement form can be seen in Appendix 1. Although some scholars have suggested that using informed consent in the research process is problematic because of the power relations it reinforces (Luttrell 2010, 103), it can be argued that in the case of university teachers there is not a great power imbalance between the researcher and the participants, as for example when interviewing children or people who are somehow in a disadvantaged situation.

As confidentiality can be seen as a crucial part of a phenomenographical inquiry (Cohen & Manion 2011, 228), it has been made sure that the participants have remained anonymous towards all outsiders, part from the researcher herself and the contact person from the business school, who helped to find individuals from many different kinds of backgrounds to participate in the study. The fact that the contact person is aware of the informant candidates for this study can be seen as an ethical limitation. However, the participants' names have been kept secret and they have been kept separate from the files used in this study, such as interview transcripts and the pool of meanings table. These measures can be seen as important ways of protecting the anonymity of the participants (Keeves 1997, 159). The informants were coded with numbers that are being used throughout this study, for example "Informant 1", "Informant 2" and so on.

An important consideration had to be made regarding the background of the teachers. As this study is interested in the perceptions of the teachers of a particular business school in a rather small town, Oulu, it seemed especially important that the respondents were not identifiable in any way. Hence, the gender of the informants is not made explicit in the codes. Although the gender of the teachers could be argued to have some kind of an effect on their perceptions, it

has not been the purpose of this study to look at the differences from a gender perspective. That is why it seems justified to rather protect the anonymity of the teachers even at the cost of the gender perspective. Also the different programmes that the informants were teaching have been kept secret to make sure that they stay anonymous, as well as their nationalities.

In the analysis process, the identities of the informants were also kept as confidential as possible. When writing about the individual teachers' perceptions and when quoting their answers, all possible measures were taken to ensure that their identity stays hidden. All possible expressions where the teachers' identity could come out were made neutral so that the names of the programmes and courses they teach in were not mentioned, nor the places where they had worked before. All personal information was left out from the analysis. The quotes from interviews that were originally held in Finnish were translated into English. Although this will, again affect the originality of the quotes, it can be argued that the anonymity of the participants should be prioritized in this matter.

8.4 Evaluation of the research process

After studying Oulu Business School teachers' perceptions on sustainability and responsibility for a little more than a year, I find that the topic has become even more relevant than before. The political developments of the recent months in different parts of the world have shown that countries' governments are not enough to take full responsibility of sustainability and responsibility issues. In some countries, companies have even managed to take ethical leadership in situations where governments lack the ability to do that. I have also come to know that there are many topics within the field of business education that are yet left to be investigated in further studies and I think that this study has managed to provide grounds for that.

The research questions for this study were: "What are the perceptions of the teachers of Oulu Business School on sustainability and responsibility?", "What kinds of challenges have they faced when implementing those topics in their teaching?", "How do they perceive the division between the goals of neoclassical economic theory and the goals of sustainability and responsibility?" and "How could business education be improved to make it more responsible and sustainable?" It can be stated that there were some unexpected elements in the findings of this study, as the teachers had in many ways contradictory perceptions of their role in sustainability and responsibility. These different perspectives could even be described as different paradigms.

The researcher has aspired to bring a transformative element into this study by proposing critical pedagogy as a way of enhancing sustainability and responsibility in Oulu Business School and by providing some practical suggestions to the curriculum and teaching.

There are, however, some limitations to this study that should be pointed out. The fact that the researcher of this study does not have a background in the field of business and economics can be seen as one limitation. Getting to a full understanding of the theoretical framework used in this study was a very time-consuming process and it can be stated that there are still gaps in the way that the researcher herself understands the concepts used in this study. It can be argued that it is not possible to become an expert in economic thought during one year of doing research. On the other hand, taking this kind of an outsider's perspective to the sustainability debate in business schools can be regarded as a fresh point of view that might otherwise not be heard. After all, the starting point of this study was to make interdisciplinary and transformative research on sustainability and responsibility in a business school and that goal, according to my understanding, was met.

When it comes to the research process, the methods used in the work seem to have been in line with the goals of the study. The aim was to find out what the perceptions of the teachers of Oulu Business School were on sustainability and responsibility, and using phenomenography was an useful and well-functioning method for doing that. The collection of empirical data was a good experience and the discussions with the teachers were not only fruitful for this study but also an empowering and exciting personal experience for the researcher herself. When evaluating the process afterwards, the interview questions could have been formed in a more consistent way – questions were not covered exactly in the same way. On the other hand, this can be seen as part of the flexible interview process of phenomenography (Niikko 2003, 31). To conclude, having completed this project, broadening the scope of this study to further research appears an attractive possibility.

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Appendix 1

Interview with Oulu Business School Teachers

Agreement form

- **Researcher:** My name is Anni Maria Huovinen and I am a full-time Master's programme student in Education and Globalisation at the University of Oulu in Finland.
- **Research:** I am currently carrying out research for a thesis project which will examine the perceptions and experiences of Oulu Business School teachers of including and implementing sustainability and responsibility in their teaching. The study is a phenomenographical inquiry.
- **Confidentiality:** If you consent to participate in this research, your feedback, opinions, thoughts, etc. as well as your professional and personal details, will be handled anonymously. The information that you provide may be linked to a random reference number. Two recordings of the interview, without your name, will be kept in a secure and private folder until the completion of the research process. Once the research process is complete, the recordings will be destroyed.
- **Choice:** Please do not feel under any obligation or expectation to participate in this research. Also, please be aware that if you wish to withdraw from this research process at any time, the information that you have provided will be immediately destroyed and will not be used.
- **Contact:** If you have any questions or concerns in relation to this research, please contact me at huovinen.anni@gmail.com, or on (+358) 443160286.
- **Agreement:** I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Anni Huovinen, Master's student at the Faculty of Education, University of Oulu, Finland.

I understand that the research is designed to collect information in relation to perceptions, experiences, opinions, thoughts and feelings relating to the topic of including and implementing sustainability and responsibility in teaching economics and/or business.

I understand that I will be one of approximately 10 business teachers participating in this research.

My participation in this research project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If I decline to participate or withdraw from the study, no other participant will be informed. I have the right to decline to answer any questions.

I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this research will remain secure.

Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.

The nature and purpose of this research have been sufficiently explained to me and I agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time.

Signature:

Date:

Name:

Location:

Appendix 2

Preliminary research interview questions

1. Can you tell me briefly about your background as a business teacher?
2. Sustainability and responsibility in business – what do you think?
3. AACSB accreditation (the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business) – does it affect your teaching and how?
4. How are sustainability and responsibility included in the curriculum?
5. What kind of role do sustainability and responsibility issues have in your teaching?
6. Have you experienced any challenges in implementing sustainability and responsibility issues in your teaching?
7. Why do you think these challenges exist?
8. How would you see the difference between responsible and irresponsible business?
9. How do you perceive the relationship between the goals of neoclassical economics (maximizing shareholder value) and the goals of sustainability and responsibility?