



History of ENSI

Beginnings of ENSI

by Peter Posch

The idea originated at the Ministerial Conference 1984 in Paris, where the Austrian Minister of Education presented Environmental Education as “one of his strongest priorities for the future of education and as central issue of educational quality”. In consequence, the CERI working group responsible for discussing CERI activities in Austria started to prepare a formal project proposal on environmental school initiatives.

In 1985 the CERI Governing Board in which I represented Austria at that time, started a so-called forward planning phase to define its agenda of activities for the next five years. I opted to be one of five members to prepare suggestions for the next meeting. In my short paper¹ I referred to two new demands on the educational system: environmental sensitivity and dynamic qualities and their consequences for school development. In a break between sessions we (that is the representatives of Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Finland, France, Italy, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and Austria) met in the lobby to discuss the idea of an international project. Back in the session the initiative received considerable support.

In December 1985 both Directors, Mr. Gass (Education Committee and Mr. Papadopoulos (CERI) gave their o.k. for an “Innovation Exchange Activity”, a low cost type of project, primarily financed by the interested countries with small support by the Secretariat to coordinate it. Mrs. Kathleen Kelly was appointed to do this job. The project “Environment and School Initiatives” should last for two years and aim at identifying, supporting and studying environmental initiatives at school level.

At the next meeting in June 1986 the CERI Governing Board discussed a formal Austrian proposal² and decided to invite OECD member countries interested in

¹ Peter Posch: Dynamic Qualities and Ecological Sensitivity in Education. In: CERI Governing Board: Future Orientations for CERI. Paris: CERI/CD(85)15, Nov. 4th 1985. (Later published as ENSI Series No.9)

² Center for Educational Research and Development: Environment and School Initiatives - Proposal by the Austrian Authorities, Paris: OECD/CERI 1986, Doc. Nr. CERI/CD(86)11.

participating to send experts to a meeting scheduled for 20th and 21st October 1986 in Paris.

This meeting was the actual start of the project. Experts from thirteen countries participated (some as observers): Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Sweden Switzerland and United Kingdom). In my opening statement I introduced the emerging philosophy of the project and its main aims as “food for thought”:

The project should supply findings concerning two relatively new educational aims which are not normally related to each other: the promotion of environmental awareness **and** the promotion of "dynamic qualities", such as initiative, independence, commitment, the readiness to accept responsibility, etc. The former of the two is often rather regarded as telling of a conservationist spirit and of hostility towards economical and technological development. The latter is rather interpreted as stimulating change and a positive attitude towards economical and technological development. The project should be based on the assumption that environmental awareness and dynamic qualities can be regarded as closely interdependent, that the sustainment and construction of an acceptable environment is in need of initiative and creative human potential and that - on the other hand - the environment offers **the** breeding-ground for dynamic qualities. Does such a connection provide the basis for an increased understanding and for innovation of the teaching-learning process at school?

There was a common understanding among the participants that the experiences of teachers and pupils were of decisive importance in this respect. Main concerns were discussed and agreed upon in this meeting:

- (1) The school initiatives should have four dimensions, if at varying degrees of intensity: personal involvement of students and emotional commitment, interdisciplinary learning and research, reflected action to improve environmental conditions, involvement of students, at least partially, in decision-making on problem-finding, on procedures and on monitoring their work.
- (2) The concept of 'environment' should be a broad one, not limiting school initiatives to the natural environment, but also including the built, social, economic, cultural, technological environment.
- (3) The activities of the schools should transgress the boundaries between school and community and there should be links to outside institutions.
- (4) Different kinds of schools should be represented, including e.g. primary, secondary, and vocational schools.

The participating **teachers** should be asked to find their own context-specific interpretation of the two general aims of the project (i.e. environmental awareness and dynamic qualities) and to systematically reflect on their activities in order to improve them and in order to contribute to their own and other people's knowledge of environmental education.

There was also agreement on reports, coordination, costs and on the final conference in Austria in 1988³.

³ Kathleen Kelley: Draft Minutes of the Meeting of Country Representatives. Paris 27th October 1986 (OECD CER/HA/86W2288r)