DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 345 374   EA 023 969

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TITLE   The Impact of the ENSI Project on School-Community
                Relations: Issues and Possibilities.
PUB DATE   Apr 92
NOTE   11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the
                American Educational Research Association (San
                Francisco, CA, April 20-24, 1992).
PUB TYPE   Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports -
                Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE   MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS   *Conservation (Environment); *Cooperative Planning;
                Elementary Secondary Education; *Environmental
                Education; Foreign Countries; Participative Decision
                Making; *School Community Relationship; *Shared
                Resources and Services

ABSTRACT
                Developments in schools that redefine the
relationship between school and community are described in this
paper. The Environment and School Initiatives (ENSI) project seeks to
combine two apparently contradictory aims of education: to develop
"environmental sensitivity" and to promote students' "dynamic
qualities" by involving them in coping with problems in their
immediate internal and external environments. The first part of this
paper presents examples of ENSI activities in which students and
teachers are involved and describes the features common to these
activities. Programs implemented in Austria, Bavaria, Italy, and
Norway are briefly described. Two new tasks of education that have
emerged from the process of opening the schools to the community are
the production of local knowledge, and action to improve
environmental conditions. In addition, opening the schools has
facilitated the growth of dynamic exchange networks. The second
section of the paper outlines the social forces that stimulate
development and the challenges they pose for schools. Increasing
social complexity and insecurity and the reduced decision-making
capacity of socioeconomic systems contribute to the need for
decentralized responsibility. (13 references) (LMI)

Peter Posch

THE IMPACT OF THE ENSI PROJECT ON SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONS: ISSUES AND POSSIBILITIES

Introduction

The project "Environment and School Initiatives" (ENSI) tries to combine two apparently contradictory aims of education: to develop 'environmental sensitivity' and to promote 'dynamic qualities' by involving students in defining and coping with problems in their immediate environment inside and outside school.

In this presentation I want to point out some developments in schools which appear to redefine the relationship between school and community. In my first part I shall give a few examples of the kinds of activity teachers and students participating in ENSI are involved in and shall try to describe common features of these examples in more general terms.

In the second part I shall delineate some of the social forces which seem to stimulate this development and the challenges they pose for schools.

1. Opening schools and the emergence of new community-centered tasks in education

Let me first give you a few very different examples of activities of ENSI schools (OECD/CERI 1991):

A primary school in **Thomasroith** (Austria) has developed a number of small initiatives to raise the awareness of environmental problems. One of them was an "environmental pillory" set up in front of the school, at a site easily visible for everyone. The pupils (ages 6 - 10) attached all the waste objects collected in the streets and in nature to this pillory. In a period of three months there were less and less objects found on the road. It obviously had an effect on most adults passing by to see their carelessness made visible by the children (Haas 1991)

In a primary school in **Baiern-Antholing**, Bavaria (FRG), a class teacher together with his pupils (ages 8 - 10) developed the surrounding area of their school. On a plot previously used for agricultural purposes, a natural meadow, a village pond, a field with historical types of grain and wild herbs as well as a protective hedge were set up in cooperation with parents and local farmers.

In **Mantova** (Italy), five vocational upper secondary schools and 12 middle schools cooperate to perform a continuous study of the water quality and the degree of pollution of ground- and surface waters

in individual communities.
The activities are coordinated by a steering group of teachers and students of the technical schools (age 18 -19) and financed by the municipality. The responsibilities of the pupils range from the selection and drawing of samples, the chemical, bacteriological, and microplancton analysis to the reporting of results to the responsible authorities. The Water Analysis Project is part of the normal curriculum. 13 teachers and pupils of 20 classes are involved in it (Sutti 1991).

Two schools in **Overhalla** (Norway) were involved in the project "Archeology at School". In cooperation with the archeologists of the local museum and a scientist of the University of Trondheim, and in the framework of the subjects natural sciences, civics, history and language the pupils (age 15) documented historical relics, reconstructed the changes of the landscape on a map, rebuilt Stone Age and Iron Age dwellings and cultivated a field with Iron Age methods. The pupils wrote texts on their local history and dramatized a study on the living conditions during the Iron Age.

Bratteberg School is situated on the island **Öckerö**. In this school, an attempt was made to reorganize school-life in order to counteract the negative effects of the economically difficult situation on the island. An "Alliance for Better Learning" of teachers, parents, trades-people and others was founded to help overcome the isolation between school and the population by means of projects and to give the pupils the opportunity to take an active and creative part in the cultural and economic life of the community. Numerous projects were implemented, which were partly of a long term nature. Among other things they established a fish farm, a greenhouse, a studio for radio- and TV productions, and a wind power plant. One third of the total time available for lessons is used to carry out the projects. The projects are partly financed by the alliance, but partly they they are commercially utilized and finance themselves (Rapp 1991).

In a secondary school in the **Tyrol**, Austria, 13 to 14 year old students studied the use of energy in four small villages. They prepared a questionnaire, went from house to house in pairs, asked for collaboration and offered assistance in data collection. Nearly 70 % of the households had filled in the questionnaire. The students processed the data at school and produced a comparative analysis of the use of energy for each house and for each village. The results were presented by the students at a public event. People who had asked for it were provided with proposals for saving energy on the basis of their individual data. The teachers involved and their students kept "research diaries" to facilitate reflection on the progress of work. A follow-up activity which - though originally not intended - emerged from this initiative was the establishment of several local initiatives to manufacture sun collectors. In 1990 the project was followed by another project, in

The network that emerged during the energy project described was quite large (Mair 1991a):

<u>The project team:</u>

o 2-3 teachers
o students of 2 classes
o energy expert

<u>The local community:</u>
o community, council, mayor
o municipal planning office
o population of the community
o elementary school of the
  community and kindergarten

o national OECD/CERI team

o environmental and educational
  offices of the regional
  government
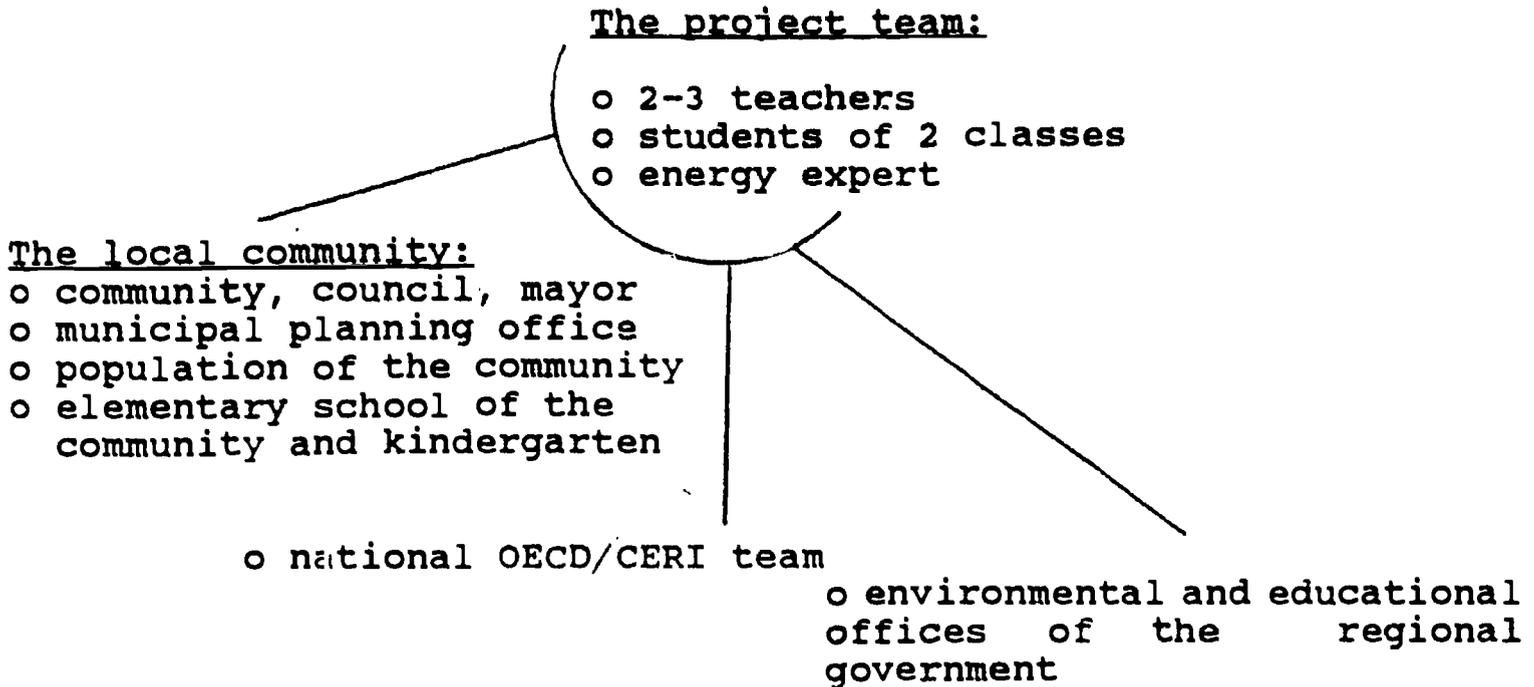
This example illustrates a remarkable development in schools: the evolution of non hierarchical "dynamic" networks (a term introduced by Miles and Snow 1986). These networks of communication are developed by teachers and students because they appear to be necessary to help them understand and influence the situation they live in. The networks are non hierarchical because they do not follow predefined routes of (generally top-down) influence. They are dynamic because they are limited to the demands of specific tasks as defined by the teachers and students involved. As a result, they are flexible with respect to the kinds of exchange processes and with respect to partners and duration. The essential feature of dynamic networks is the autonomous and flexible establishment of relationships to assist responsible action in the face of complexity and uncertainty.

Dynamic networks contradict one of the traditional assumptions of schooling: the assumption of a separation of school and society. If dynamic networks develop it is difficult to say where the educational organisation ends and where society and its abundance of personal and institutional relationships begin.

In most cases, dynamic networks are still limited to the local level. The idea that they could also develop on a regional, national and even international level is eloquently expressed by one of the pupils involved in the energy project:
"The polluters are linked on a world-wide scope. One should also link all people involved in environmental education. The efficiency of activities against inacceptable states of affairs and abuses

would increase. We should build a network of students who investigate the energetic and environmental situation of their immediate localities, develop improvements and exchange data via computer networks. Then we could react more quickly to positive and negative environmental changes, could go public more effectively and could exert more influence on the regional and supraregional energy politics." This sounds utopian but points into a direction in which interesting developments can be expected.

2. Background forces

What are some of the forces "behind" these phenomena? There are, of course, many developments in society that influence schools in a substantial way and that seem to enforce a change in the conceptualisation of teaching and learning to include a crossing of borders between school and community. I cannot go into detail here but want to summarise them in two theses:
- The effects and side effects of human activity become less and less predictable. As a result, decisions have to be taken more and more in the face of conflicting demands and insecurity.
- More and more effects of human activity pose a threat to survival. In other words: the enormous 'life potential' of economic/technological development is confronted with a growing 'death potential' creating serious problems for the established decision making mechanisms.

In short, social complexity and insecurity is increasing and the decision-making capacity of socio-economic systems is decreasing. If this is correct, some implications can be derived which affect schools. Abilities that traditionally have been demanded from the elites in society are now increasingly demanded from each citizen: the readiness to take responsibility in *shaping* public and private affairs.

Complexity and increasing risks seem to enforce a decentralisation of initiative, responsibility and competences from the institutions and traditional powers to the individual citizen. This implies that the individual citizen must increasingly be ready to deal with complexity and to take initiatives.

This development has produced substantial challenges to schools:
- How are students prepared to cope with contradictory demands, insecurity and plurality of values?
- How are they prepared to take initiative and to influence the world they live in, and do this in a responsible way?

It seems that the traditional understanding of the tasks of schooling cannot answer these questions in a satisfactory way. The cultures of teaching and learning in school are still attuned to a static society. in which the necessary knowledge, competences, and values are predefined and stored in curricula, tests and accredited

textbooks, and in which schools are expected to prepare the majority of children and young people to satisfactorily meet the demands which others have defined for them. The main characteristics of this culture are:

- *Predominance of systematic knowledge:* It gives priority to well-established facts and enables schools to maintain a close relationship to the results of academic knowledge production. Low priority is given to open and controversial areas of knowledge and to the process of knowledge generation.
- *Specialization:* The knowledge is compartmentalised in subject matter fields which more or less correspond to the academic disciplines. This again facilitates the orientation on academic knowledge structures. On the other hand, complex, real-life situations tend to be disregarded because they cross the disciplinary borders.
- *Transmission-mode of teaching:* This mode facilitates the retainment of the systematic character of knowledge and its reconstruction by the student. It tends to discourage the generation and reflective handling of knowledge.
- *Prevalence of top-down communication:* It facilitates the control process for pre-defined knowledge structures and discourages self-control and cooperation between students (or teachers).

Environmental school initiatives seem to offer a constructive way of introducing dynamic elements into the culture of teaching and learning. They represent situations in which students have to define problems in view of uncertainty, contrasting evidence, and divergent values, in which the quality of their work (of the knowledge produced, and of the activities engaged in) potentially makes a difference for other people and in which strategies to negotiate, to organise, to make compromises, to cooperate, and to solve conflicts are needed.

It is a specific characteristic of environmental school initiatives that they have a political dimension "here and now" and that they provide opportunities to teachers and students to take part in the shaping of conditions influencing their lives.
Teachers and students involved in successful Environmental school initiatives are sooner or later intrigued by the experience that they are gaining influence not only inside school but also outside. They experience a shift in the distribution of power which can be felt in diverse ways: they are listened to, they are consulted, they are invited to negotiations, they are offered access to resources, etc. They are no longer only passive recipients of demands from other institutions but are also respected as partners - though often reluctantly at first.

Environmental school initiatives are still on the margin of main stream education (ELLIOTT 1991). There is a relatively small minority of teachers involved in them, they are often done outside regular classes and they are generally not included in the traditional assessment system (although much "real-life" assessment

is occurring). But there are two characteristics which may indicate some change:
In some countries environmental school initiatives constitute one of the most rapidly growing innovations and - if the energy and time invested by teachers and students is taken into consideration - one of the most powerful innovations.
Secondly, nearly all of these initiatives are not mandated but are grass roots developments. They happen because teachers and students want them to happen (although there is an increasing outside support by parents and by the communities concerned).

It seems important therefore to have a close look at these developments in order to better understand their potential to transform education in view of a rapidly changing world.

In what ways do these initiatives increase the "significance value" (Tenbruck 1975) of the school for students and what are their spin-offs for main-stream education?

What are the problems and potential pitfalls of these initiatives and how are they coped with?

In what ways do they change the balance of static and dynamic elements of school culture?

In what ways do they effect the status of schools (and teachers) in the community and perhaps in society at large?

It is one of the aims of the International Environment and School Initiatives Project to pose such questions and to contribute to their understanding. But ENSI is not only a group of academic researchers engaging in research on involved teachers and students to evaluate what they are doing. It is primarily an organisational structure linking teachers and students who are already involved in environmental initiatives. Increasingly research is emerging from a systematic reflection by these teachers (in some cases also by their students) on their initiatives. This - it seems - is in itself an innovation.

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