

Environmental Education in Germany : Towards Sustainable Schools



Heiko Crost*

Biophysically, it is not the best time to have a lecture. In Southern Europe, you have the habit to make a “siesta”, but today that is not possible and so I will use the method of very famous Austrian – British composer, perhaps you all know him, it is Haydn. He used in its symphonies when he had the feeling, that the audience falls asleep a big drum. Unfortunately today there is not a symphony and I have no drum.

First of all, I have to thank very much to the Miyagi University of Education for the perfect organization and even a person with a big jetlag feels comfortable and has therefore to thank Prof./Dr. Mikami, Kazu, thank you very much!

Just a bit about my person: For what I get my money for today, it is to direct the “teacher in-service training institute” in Frankfurt. We are making courses in environmental education, but I am also responsible for courses in mathematics even in literature and so on. And only a small part of our courses are in environmental education, but my passion, my brain and my heart is just till of my students days in environmental education. So I became engaged in the “Deutsche Gesellschaft für Umwelterziehung” that means “German association for environmental education” and I am working there in the executive board.

Europe is compared to the United States or Australia, divided in a lot of countries, very small countries and so we have an umbrella organization for environmental education, and so I am talking today (even if my home country is Germany) as representative of the “Foundation of Environmental Education” this umbrella organization in Europe.

We heard today several times the well known slogan think global, act local and so my lecture today is about global aspects and how to organize it locally. Let it say so: we are working not only in Europe meanwhile also in other countries of the world. I am talking about the every day practice in eco-schools. That is my main topic. I will give you the background of our international dimension, and how it works. This is very similar in all partner countries FEE is an umbrella organization as I already explained. I will tell you something about the NGO organization and his structures about his members and the four programs. This foundation is running also other school-projects like “Young reporters”, “Learning about Forest” and the very important program of “Eco-schools”. In the year eighty-one, four European countries decided to make environmental education together, to run programs together. If someone in Germany puts all his rubbish in the Rhine River the neighbour countries of France, Belgium or the Netherlands will have the result of a polluted river, so you have to make environmental education programs across the borders. Today we have

* Head of the Frankfurt Teachers in Service Training Institute, Hessisches Landesinstitut für Padagogik, GERMANY

nearly no borders in Europe. You can travel from Finland to Sicily without any passport. So we are making efforts to come closer not only in environmental education. For FEE as an umbrella organization with in the moment 29 member countries it is very important that there is no governmental dependency. Governments are changing at least every four years, perhaps even quicker. So we have the chance in FEE, that we can have discussions and decisions without being connected to political parties. The central topic of FEE is the environment.

At my first power-point-page I tell you something about twenty-six countries engaged in our program of eco-schools, but twenty-nine countries are members of our organization, but they don't run all the program of eco-schools. They run other programs of FEE. In the last year, we gave up the third E from FEEE (it was the E standing for Europe) because we went globally. South Africa, Marocco, Russia, Chile and the Caribbean islands want to join us. Today we have as first full member, South Africa outside Europe and now more countries are applying to for membership in this umbrella organization. The idea is, not coming from Europe with a type of new imperialism and saying "Oh, we have a good idea. Join us and you have to do it in the way we are doing it." No, that is wrong. We just want to network together and bring the fruitful ideas of all countries together. You have not to invent the wheel every time new again and again. So as I heard the lecture from Vicki, I noticed a lot of ideas they are comparable to ours. Perhaps linking together with Australia must be very good. Our organization is a very democratic organization. The FEE General Assembly is held once a year and every member country sends one representative to this General Assembly. This year we had the General Assembly in Istanbul, and next year it is in Germany. All delegates are voting for the executive board. I am a member of the executive board and the treasurer. I can tell you this is not a very good job to be treasurer in this time.

We have four programs running, "Eco-schools" is one. We have in every country a national program director of eco-schools and one international coordinator. You can see it is a real border crossing organization. The international secretariat is today adopted by the "Tidy Britain Group" it is sitting in the United Kingdom near Manchester. The blue flag campaign, I tell you on another page something more about the blue flag, is for marinas, and beaches with good bathing water qualities. The international coordination of "Eco-schools" is sitting in Lisbon, "Blue flag" in Copenhagen, "Young reporters" in France and "Learning about Forest" is till the end year sitting also in Copenhagen and then changing to Germany.

The "Blue flag" campaign, run by FEE, is also an environmental education program. I would say for communities, beach management and for tourists. So, we are giving them an eco-label and this is for beaches and marinas they fulfill specific criteria. This campaign is every year at every beach with seminars for the users of the beaches, for the community and also for the owners of sailing boats and motorboats. It is the environmental management of the coastal areas, what is important for us. We are measuring the water quality, the facilities for handicapped and of course safety criteria are very important. The success you can see here, we have an amount of beaches because the communities are very interested to get the "Blue flag". If they have the flag at the beach, tourists will pay attention and say "Oh, here it must be good. It must be clean. I'm making my holidays at that beach." So tourism is very interested in this award. Last year we got

an ecological price from a big European tourism company so we are happy to run this program.

Another project is for young people: “Young reporters”, it is for students at a higher level. It is a research work in the internet, writing little articles in newspapers about environmental problems. Doing the research with internet and communicating it in the internet. It is for the secondary schools. Another program is “Learning about Forest” (Leaf). The countries we are working within the northern part of Europe, in Scandinavia, have a lot of forests and the problems are very different from those in Spain. In Spain perhaps students have to learn how to handle the fire problem in the woods, or having no water in the woods, so this program is based on twenty-five years experience in Scandinavia “to learn in the forest with the forest” and to have school lessons outdoors.

Now, to our most important program: **“The Eco-schools program”**. It is how we have also heard from other lectures, it has to have an impact on the whole school and it is a certification program. Every school gets after one year and only for one year this symbol. The school is allowed to have it on the letter heads and even gets a flag. We call it “Green flag”, this eco-school flag. About the necessity to involve the whole community according to the local agenda twenty-one it is not only having lectures or lessons about environmental education, no (!) you have to work together with the community with parents and other students. I told you FEE is an international organization and you see most of the European countries are now members. It is not exactly updated we have three countries more now in the middle of this picture we have South Africa but I must confess I couldn't manage it to bring an other flags in this presentation. Of course we are linking and informing with a website here you find the address: www.fee-international.org! It is like all the other projects I mentioned. Blue flag, Young reporters, Leaf and so on. What is the use for being in FEE for the countries, because the countries have to pay a certain sum for being organized in this umbrella organization? They get back every third month an online newsletter, there are meetings at least twice a year of all national coordinators in a host country in Europe (in future perhaps world wide) and we supply all the schools with a logos, resources, leaflet and papers for lessons. I like just to mention here the eco-schools “seven steps process”. This is really indeed the cornerstone of the program. It is as I mentioned the approach for getting involved. Every one has to take part on the community level. It is an action in the sense of a local agenda. In nineteen hundred ninety-four the project was financed through the support from the European commission, from Brussels we got money today, the financial situation is not the best so we are running the program without financial help of the European commission, but we are today supported from UNEP (United Nations Environmental Program) with his head office in Nairobi. We have also sponsors they give us a bit of money to run the program. On the national level or the local level, it is a bit easier to get money. A lot of countries get money from communities. On the scientific and pedagogical range we are working with universities together. You see here on the right side of the picture, the name of the word eco-schools. That differs from language to language. Sometimes it is called “gron flag” like in Sweden or in Denmark. The name differs but the idea is in every country the same. The eco-schools history is, as you can see, a big success. We have of course differences between participating schools and awarded schools. Here in these first years we had no symbol for an award then we created this green flag and then we needed certain efforts to have the flag. Till today in 2002, we have a lot of participating schools but give not every school which is participating the award. It

is not enough to plan in a concrete school environment two or three roses in a school garden. That is not enough for our idea of environmental education as you all know. If you look of our internet page of eco-schools you find all these flags, and if you click just the country perhaps you find the link of the national situation of eco-schools behind that, how many schools took part in special events and special problems and so on. This page is perhaps most important for the sense of our eco-schools program. I will just explain it very short because of the time I will not explain it too long. The situation is the following in this idea:

- 1) You start with an **environmental review**. That can be in the school. It can be outside in the school in the community, you go out with students and look at your nearest environment and then you list all damages and the dirt and you make a review about the local environment.
- 2) Then you sit together in the so called "**Eco-schools comity**": teacher, parents, students, and you discuss together the problems you have seen.
- 3) You have reviewed, and then you decide to make an **action plan** for the solution of the whole situation.
- 4) Then when you have made an action plan you will go to **working groups** with students for solving the problems. And if you can't solve it, you work at this problem.
- 5) The next step is to make an **evaluation** of the working and the decisions what is the best way to solve the problems.
- 6) Last but not least you have to inform the other students, they have not worked with you, you have to inform all the parents, the community and all who are involved, and then as a result you make an **eco-code** for your whole school about the behavior, about the action, and the result you want to have.

Here you see photos from practical examples: here is just an eco-school committee it is perhaps a bit too big, but sometimes it is a whole class sometimes it is only a group of five or ten persons. If you have very active students they want to take part all, because they feel important.

This is an example just for a review. You are going with your students just across your school and just in a corner or outside you find rubbish and you say "How can it be solved?" Perhaps this is easy, take it and bring it away. But how can you bring the rubbish away where have you to put it, what is the reason that you have found that dirty corner. The action plan as I told you is not only to clean the dirty corner. That is not enough. To think it over what is perhaps the reason for it and how you could prevent it in the future.

You have found for instance a water tap in students toilet is dripping. What can we do and what is a reason for saving water or going by bicycle to school.

Of course we have scientific research possibilities. As you have all said it is necessary to do research in

all the subjects. Here you can see a picture of a science lesson.

What is very important, to celebrate, if you have won this green flag you have to make a celebration or a party because the whole school has to identify the aims of the “green-flag”. Look, it is a very different. Sometimes it is only a small group getting that for the whole school. Sometimes it is a very big group, so don't forget celebrating.

One of the ideas of my lecture is to invite you all to work with us together. If you want to become a member of FEE don't hesitate. It is very good and interesting to work together. It is just the possibility to build up an international network. You give your students the possibility to have another school as a partner, fill out this application for linking. Ask other eco-schools what they are working in environmental affairs, and as a result you get an answer from another school, so you have the chance to work together with schools from Iceland to Morocco from the Caribbean to South Africa on the same program. It is best education, and a work for understanding each other not only in Europe but for different parts of the world.

Thank you.