

Environmental Education in Greek Schools: The Viewpoint of the Local Coordinators

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Summary. *Although Environmental Education has been introduced into Greek Schools for more than 25 years, it seems that many obstacles still remain including scepticism on the objectives imposed by the state. In this work we present the viewpoints of the local (regional) coordinators for Environmental education in the Greek schools. The data were collected through a Pan-Hellenic survey with a written questionnaire.*

Keywords: *environmental education, institutional frame.*

1. Introduction

The institution of optional Environmental Education activities in Greek schools covers almost three decades. There are worries however in relation to the existence of the necessary structures, the institutional and legislative frame, and the conditions for its further its development and proliferation.

The realization of Environmental Education projects in schools faces many organizational and institutional problems. The rather low percentage of participation of students indicates that the majority of them, the future citizens, have not profited from the advantages of Environmental Education. Moreover the small percentage of teachers that voluntarily undertake to carry out Environmental Education projects (Michaelides, Kimionis, 2000a) indicate that favourable conditions or motives attracting them to participate in such projects are rather missing.

Many constitutional and legislative regulations refer to the environment, its protection and its conservation. In the National Educational Law anyone may distinguish that the acquisition of knowledge and the development of positive attitudes towards the environment is quoted as an essential objective of Greek education (Micha-

elides, 1993). To what extent this is really occurring has not been investigated thoroughly.

According to recent surveys important steps towards the promotion of Environmental Education have been made. Mainly during the last decade (institution of local Coordinators for the Environmental Education in each regional Directorate of Education, integration of Environmental Education in the Curriculum, foundation of Environmental Education Centres). Still important problems remain and they generally function as an obstacle to the spread and application of the Environmental Education in schools.

In general the integration of Environmental Education in the educational systems of European countries is realized step by step, and small percentages of students develop an awareness which Environmental Education would provide with (Spyropoulou 2001).

The undefined content and the lack of limitation on the subjects of the Environmental Education projects are quoted among the most important problems as far as the application of Environmental Education is concerned. Furthermore the obscurity concerning the sense of Environmental Education, the lack or the insufficient training of teachers, the lack of motives and the lack of teacher's free time. (Papanaooum, 1997, Giannakaki 2000, Papadimitriou, 1995).

2. Methodology

The current research was conducted through a questionnaire, which was sent to all the 64 Environmental Education Coordinators in Secondary Education Directorates of Greece, by e-mail or fax, from December 2004 until April 2005. Only 41 answered, many after repeated

phone calls and inquiries. This is by itself remarkable and needs further investigation.

3. Results

From the 41 returned questionnaires 26 (63.4%) were from men and 15 (36.6%) from women.

The higher percentage (51.2%) of Coordinators who answered, are working as teachers for 20-30 years, while 41.5% have 10-20 years of service. The 2.4% are working 5-10 years and the 4.9% are working 30 years and above.

The duration of service in the position of Environmental Education Coordinators is presented in table 1. As it appears in that table, there is a high percentage of Coordinators with 2 or more periods of service in this position (every period is for a term of 3 years). There is also a percentage continuing to have this position (14 years of service) from the introduction of the institution of the above responsibility. Consequently, it can be considered that the sample of the people participating the research posses enough experience on the subjects concerning the course and application of Environmental Education.

Table 1: Years of responsibility as Environmental Education Coordinators

| years | Frequency | Percent |
|-------|-----------|---------|
| 1 | 2 | 4.9 |
| 2 | 12 | 29.3 |
| 3 | 3 | 7.3 |
| 4 | 2 | 4.9 |
| 6 | 2 | 4.9 |
| 7 | 3 | 7.3 |
| 8 | 2 | 4.9 |
| 9 | 2 | 4.9 |
| 10 | 3 | 7.3 |
| 11 | 4 | 9.8 |
| 14 | 6 | 14.6 |
| Total | 41 | 100.0 |

In any case despite the experience they have acquired in this position and the fact that most of them consider that they have sufficient, even satisfactory training (Table 2), still many of them feel that they need further training (Table 3), acknowledging the need for further knowledge concerning this position.

The questionnaire included specific questions on how the coordinators judged their competency and the degree of their satisfaction from the operation of Environmental education,

prominent problems, etc. The results are summarized in Tables 2 to 10.

Table 2: Training concerning the position of Coordinators

| Question: How do you consider your training concerning your position? | | |
|---|-----------|---------|
| | Frequency | Percent |
| Sufficient | 16 | 39.0 |
| Satisfactory | 23 | 56.1 |
| Not satisfactory | 2 | 4.9 |
| Insufficient | 0 | 0.0 |
| Total | 41 | 100.0 |

Table 3: Need of further training of Coordinators

| Question: Do you believe that you need more training? | | |
|---|-----------|---------|
| | Frequency | Percent |
| Yes | 37 | 90.2 |
| No | 4 | 9.8 |
| Total | 41 | 100.0 |

Table 4: Satisfaction with the number of Environmental Education projects

| | Frequency | Percent |
|-------------|-----------|---------|
| Very | 22 | 53.7 |
| Mediocre | 18 | 43.9 |
| By no means | 1 | 2.4 |
| Total | 41 | 100.0 |

Table 5: The level of the application of Environmental Education

| | Frequency | Percent |
|-----------|-----------|---------|
| Very good | 3 | 7.3 |
| good | 29 | 70.7 |
| Mediocre | 9 | 22.0 |
| Poor | 0 | 0.0 |
| Total | 41 | 100.0 |

Table 6: Satisfaction for the existing situation of Environmental Education in our country

| | Frequency | Percent |
|-------------|-----------|---------|
| Very much | 0 | 0.0 |
| Very | 10 | 24.4 |
| A Little | 28 | 68.3 |
| Very little | 2 | 4.9 |
| By no means | 1 | 2.4 |
| Total | 41 | 100.0 |

It appears from the answers of Coordinators that, when they refer to their area of responsibility, where their personal contribution is strong, they seem to be satisfied with the number of projects which are carried out (table 4) and they consider the application of Environmental Education as satisfactory (table 5).

However, when they refer to the situation nationally they describe a more unpleasant situation (Table 6) and they declare that they are "a little" satisfied in a percentage of 68.3%. In the question: what is, according to your opinion, the most important problem that the Environmental Education face, a high percentage (53.7%) reports "the institutional". A percentage of 22.0% reports "the economic" while a percentage of 17.1% reports "the organizational" problem. Moreover, some (a percentage of 7.3%), report as the most intense problem, according to their opinion, that of "evaluation" or "teacher's training", even the "pedagogic -instructive". Coordinators consider also that the existing institutional framework is from "a little" as "by no means" sufficient, so that they cannot complete the objectives of their mission based on such a frame (Table 7). Only 7.3% consider that is "very sufficient" and 2.4% that it is "Very much sufficient", while 2 individuals did not answer.

Roughly the same perceptions prevail also in the answers to the question *if the existing institutional framework facilitates the work of the teacher for the completion of the Environmental Education projects* (table 8). A high percentage of 68.3% consider that it facilitates "A little" the teachers and a percentage of 22.0% consider that it facilitates "Very little".

We should mention that the current institutional framework was put into practice with the Ministerial Decision 57905/G2/4-6-2002, fifteen years after the official introduction of Environmental Education. Until then, the institutional framework illustrating the application of Environmental Education was derived mainly from the governmental law 1892FEK101/31-7-1990 and the Ministerial Decision F16/102/G1-308/3-4-91 and G2/4867/28-8-92. Someone would expect that the new framework would take under consideration the experience of past years of application of Environmental Education and would fulfil the expectations and needs of the Coordinators of Environmental Education and the teachers who are involved in Environmental Education. It seems though that nothing of the above is occurring, according to the answers of Coordinators, as they were illustrated in the questionnaire of the research.

The Environmental Education Coordinators consider as problematic factors, undermining the participation of teachers, the lack of motives (73.2%), the absence of further training (65.9%)

and the lack of free time (70.7%). They also note that teachers are in desperate need specialized training (table 9).

Table 7: Institutional framework with regard to the Environmental Education Coordinators

| | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent |
|----------------|-----------|---------|---------------|
| Very much | 1 | 2.4 | 2.6 |
| Very | 3 | 7.3 | 7.7 |
| A Little | 25 | 61.0 | 64.1 |
| Very little | 7 | 17.1 | 17.9 |
| By no means | 3 | 7.3 | 7.7 |
| Total | 39 | 95.1 | 100.0 |
| Missing System | 2 | 4.9 | |
| Total | 41 | 100.0 | |

Table 8: Institutional framework with regard to the teachers

| | Frequency | Percent |
|-------------|-----------|---------|
| Very much | 0 | 0.0 |
| Very | 2 | 4.9 |
| A Little | 28 | 68.3 |
| Very little | 9 | 22.0 |
| By no means | 2 | 4.9 |
| Total | 41 | 100.0 |

Table 9: Teachers need of further training

| Question: Do you consider that the teachers need further training? | | |
|--|-----------|---------|
| | Frequency | Percent |
| Very much | 19 | 46.3 |
| Very | 22 | 53.7 |
| A Little | 0 | 0.0 |
| Very little | 0 | 0.0 |
| By no means | 0 | 0.0 |
| Total | 41 | 100.0 |

Table 10: The intention of the state

| Do you consider that the state... | Frequency | Percent |
|--|-----------|---------|
| encourages the application of I.E. | 16 | 39.0 |
| is indifferent for as the application of Environmental Education | 18 | 43.9 |
| impends the application of Environmental Education | 7 | 17.1 |
| Total | 41 | 100.0 |

The desperation and disappointment of Coordinators is reflected intensely in their answers to the question regarding the contribu-

tion of the state towards the application of Environmental Education. A percentage of 43.9% considers that the state is “indifferent” and a percentage of 17.1% that the state “impends” the application of Environmental Education. Only 39.0% supports that the state encourage the application of Environmental Education in Greece (table 10).

Conclusions

The answers of the Local (regional) Coordinators responsible for the Environmental Education show a disappointment and a sense of lack of support from the state concerning Environmental Education. The institutional framework does not seem sufficient neither to the teachers, nor to the Coordinators of Environmental Education. The impression they have is that the state in fact is indifferent or even impends the application of Environmental Education in schools since there are not, according their opinion, the essential and favourable conditions that would motivate the teachers, support the Coordinators and encouraged really the application of Environmental Education. Therefore, the reform of the Institutional Framework to take into account the past experiences of the operation of the Environmental Education and the viewpoints of the teachers and of the local Coordinators, as well as that of the staff of the Centres for Environmental Education seems necessary. Further training is of the most important factors to support the Environmental Education. Its importance is pointed out from everybody and many of researches (Flogaeti, 1993, Kimionis 1995, Michaelides-Kimionis 2000b, Michaelides et al, 2002) refer to its necessity. The continuous and sufficient training of teachers in the Environmental Education will give impulse and will contribute positively in the application of Environmental Education. The state should create the necessary conditions that are essential for the support of teachers and those who actively participate the Environmental Education by promoting and encouraging legislatively and institutionally the Environmental Education without promoting activities which remain on the surface.

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