

CIEA 2006

”Effective learning for sustainable action”

Prof. Roland Stähli
Director of the CIEA
(Centre international d'études agricoles),
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Effective Learning for Sustainable Action

Introduction to the CIEA Seminar 2006

"Why do I have to go to school?" This question is the title of a small book, written by the well-known German educationalist Hartmut von Hentig. In the book, the author answers the question in the form of letters written to his grandson, who is about to start school. You all have something to do, directly or indirectly, with education and what would you answer to the question: "Why do I have to go to school"? In some of your countries, the question would probably be different, i.e. "Why can't I go to school?" Often, this question too has no simple answer. Hartmut von Hentig answers indirectly with the story of Minek (.....), among others.

It is clear and well apparent in the text of H. von Hentig, that there are many further hidden questions behind the central questions as to why one must or is not allowed to go to school; for example:

- Why do schools exist?
- What is the aim of education?
- What is a good school?
- How must good schools function?
- What is the role of teaching staff?
- etc.

I am aware that if we want to answer all these and further questions, we must stay much longer than two weeks in Grangeneuve. As a result, we will concentrate on one segment, i.e. on the topic "Effective Learning for Sustainable Action". Together with a team of experts, we selected this topic for the CIEA Seminar 2006.

"Effective Learning for Sustainable Action"

When we prepare our Seminars, we often ask ourselves as to what particularly preoccupies our participants regarding their vocational and private lives. On one hand, there are probably smaller and more significant everyday life concerns and problems that must be dealt with on a single occasion or on a more regular basis. On the other hand, there are also higher-ranking challenges in current times that also concern and affect you to a varying degree. How do we deal with this? How do we incorporate such challenges into our work? What are the ready-made solutions that allow us to deal with all these challenges?

In my opinion, one answer could be: We require educational- and consultancy services that contribute to secure, sustainable ideas with a long-term effect for the future or, to express it differently: We need "Effective Learning for Sustainable Action". As a first impression, this answer can possibly be perceived as being generalized. It can, however, be understood as being either an objective or a challenge. This answer will remain with us as the topic during the next two weeks. In the title of this year's

Seminar, two core challenges are expressed that preoccupy all of us and many more experts on a virtually daily basis.

- **Effective learning**
- **Sustainability, or even more accurately expressed, Sustainable Action**

We can describe the challenge linked to the Seminar title with the following core questions:

- Questions regarding the component "learning"
- What do we generally understand by good, effective learning?
- How can effective teaching and learning processes be described?
- What must teachers and learners do so that the lesson or consultation takes a meaningful, successful course and progresses in a satisfactory manner?

Questions regarding the component "sustainable action"

- What do we generally understand by "sustainable action?"
- What requirements must be fulfilled to enable sustainable action?
- How can you train young or older persons to enable them to act in a sustainable manner?

These are some of my questions. I feel sure that you are able supplement this list with your own. The answers should not be solely of a scientific-technological or didactical kind, but should also contain emotional, political or further aspects. I feel that it is decisive that the invited speakers do not solely provide the answers from the platform, but that all of you play an important part through contribution of knowledge, experiences and considerations. As the Seminar progresses, I hope that we will succeed in highlighting the numerous connections between sustainability and effective, sustainable learning.

Fundamental aspects

Today, I would like to bring to your attention, recollection of the following aspects:

All of you are aware that the term 'Sustainability' originates from forestry. Here, during the 18th Century, the requirements were sustainability in forest management, which meant that only woodland equal to the amount to be regenerated, could be felled. During the 1970's, as a result of the oil crisis and the discussions regarding natural energy resources and renewable raw materials, the term was expanded to embrace environmental policies and environmental research. These wider uses of the term then lead to the phrasing "Sustainable Development". This term refers to an intergenerative and internationally fair approach. Satisfaction of the material and immaterial necessities of life for people from the northern and southern hemispheres is to be secured for today and for the future. This thought pattern was at the centre of the largest Earth Summit to-date in Rio de Janeiro. Here, the global states committed themselves to compile national strategies that ensure a sustainable worldwide development. This was the onset of the broad popularization of the term "Sustainability".

At a later stage, the term sustainability was also used separately from its original context to describe aims and characteristics of good teaching and learning practices within and outside educational establishments. Good teaching leads- and is geared to sustainable learning. The transfer of the term 'Sustainable' to instruction in general is associated with simultaneous discussion taking place in educational science regarding new teaching and learning methods. These highlight the tuition principles of spontaneity, differentiation, illustration and integration. Nowadays, there are many definitions available concerning this subject.

When the requirement of the learning process is its sustainability, the effect viewed from a teaching- and learning process perspective has various consequences and in particular two requirements:

- That pupils do not solely accumulate factual knowledge, but acquire authority.
- That instructors plan and carry out the lessons in such a way that the information presented is available to pupils as knowledge and skill on a long-term basis. In addition, the information must be applicable for future situations. In this sense, the knowledge that is acquired in school is not something that is inert but is primarily a basis for specific current and future situations requiring action.

What sequence is required from teaching and learning processes to fulfil these demands? What roles do the teachers play and what role is assigned to the pupils during such processes?

What teaching-aids could be suitable to promote effective, sustainable learning?

What are the requirements regarding organisation and leadership that are essential to an educational establishment so that successful learning for sustainable action is possible?

These and further questions are to be with us during the next days.

For the moment, this is all I am saying regarding effective, sustainable learning. However, what about sustainable action? For education and consultancy in agriculture, in addition to effective learning, there is a second challenge that is closely connected with the term sustainability. This is the task to incite people in rural areas into sustainable action, or to develop together with these people strategies for sustainable action. Only in cases where problems are comprehensively analyzed and decisions made that take into consideration various influential factors, is there a potential to improve long-term working and living conditions in rural areas. Where is the starting point in educational and consultancy processes from which sustainable action is able to develop? This question too will be taken up during the Seminar and will be discussed and answered specifically using graphic examples. Once one succeeds in the planning and the realization of effective teaching and learning processes, the pupil can potentially transform these into varied and sustainable action – this is what the Seminar organizers hope to achieve.

All these thoughts that have been expressed so far result in a very challenging outlook; it could virtually signify that the Seminar will transform us into super-humans, enabling us to better and even more comprehensively fulfill this task. Don't be concerned. I am simultaneously demanding and realistic. I am demanding in the sense that I will not be satisfied if only the smallest possible achievable learning step results. In the contrary, I hope that you will be able to profit as much as possible from this Seminar, taking into account your possibilities, your circumstances and your expectations. I am realistic in the sense that I am aware that we are only a fraction of a unit. We are ministerial employees, directors, teachers at a school or project leaders. Around us are many more people who also have to contribute to the process and success. For individual elements, however, we have the possibility to bring about changes: To propose and plan a project in our region, to reconsider our teaching and planning meetings, to review requests under new criteria in the Ministry or to communicate to our colleagues the impressions and perceptions from the Seminar in a more purposeful and conscious manner. I hope that in this spirit, the CIEA Seminar 2006 will be for you what the title promises: **A valuable step in your progression to effective learning and sustainable action.**

Regarding you, we have in particular expectations concerning two different aspects. First of all, we hope that you inform us if something is amiss, if you are in need of something or if we should make some changes. Secondly: We hope that you participate actively in the Seminar, in particular during teamwork and in plenum discussions, but also while you individually assimilate what you have learnt and during informal moments such as during meals, on excursions and in the evening at that bar. Theory expresses this to the point "learning processes are particularly successful if we participate consciously and actively". I hope that during this process you not only learn as individuals but that you will be able to form a knowledge and learning community. Romhardt (2002) vividly depicts the potential of a lively knowledge community, particularly applicable to specialists in agriculture and forestry. He says: "Knowledge communities follow the example of ecology. They are comparable to a garden, where plants must be fostered and looked after. If the basic conditions are favourable, new knowledge and perceptions grow by themselves. The interference of the (knowledge-)

gardener is unobtrusive and sparing and he trusts the strength of nature and life - or in the case of knowledge, he trusts the curiosity, creativity and resourcefulness of the members. Each garden is different, has different flowers and soil conditions. Standard solutions are unsuitable for knowledge communities".

Knowledge communities are groups of persons who are learning together and in doing so emulate the approach of ecology.

What does one learn and not learn at school?

In conclusion, I would like to return to the book by Hartmut von Hentig, which I quoted at the start. In his text, the author also describes situations that he experienced himself as a child. Again, he addresses the issue of what one learns at school and what one does not learn at school and he records: "A child does not ask itself what the school should do. But, if someone had asked me - and if I had been able to express myself in the same way as I was able to do at seventeen - I would probably have answered: "The school annotates and supplements the experience gained". With "annotate" I mean: At school, the things we experience in life are explained and classified. With "supplement" I mean: At school, the things we experience today are expanded – by what happens in the world, by what one thought and previously believed and by what one should consider with regard to the future. The school does not only annotate and supplement what an individual has seen and experienced "outside"; it is a part of life. Without the school's provision of assistance and interpretations, we only hold individual parts in our hand."

I feel that these thoughts are also valuable and important for the CIEA Seminar 2006. In addition to the official working hours – or outside school, so to speak - you will have the opportunity to observe, wander around, discuss and to listen to others. During official working hours, however – or at school, so to speak – there are broad provisions available to you. I hope that at the end of the Seminar, you too can agree: **"The Seminar annotated and supplemented my experiences. "**

Roland Staehli

Dipl. Ing. Agr. ETH
Professor for Didactics and Methodology
Schweizerische Hochschule für Landwirtschaft
CH - 3052 Zollikofen

After completing basic education, R. Staehli studied at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) in Zurich and graduated in 1988 in the faculty "Rural Economics". Initially, he worked as a scientific associate at the Institute for Rural Economy (ETH Zurich) at the Center for Rural Development in Château d'Oex (VD). In summer 1989, he took up a position at the LBBZ Ruetti, Zollikofen in a teaching and advisory capacity in the specialised area of "Business Management". In 1996, he changed to the Swiss College of Agriculture (SHL), where since January 2005 he is head of the study courses in agronomics. R. Staehli is a Professor of Didactics and Methodology in teaching and consulting for agriculture, dairy farming and forestry. In addition, he is the Director of the CIEA (International Center for Agricultural Education)Up to 1997, during work and in connection with his versatile, vocational activities, R. Staehli studied selected subjects in educational science and pedagogical psychology at the University of Freiburg.

Currently, the work of R. Staehli focuses on the subjects of methodics/didactics and further education/adult education. A versatile training/learning culture is one of the important aims that must be achieved both in class and in the different training courses. This includes regular and critical reconsideration and examination of the role played by teaching or consulting persons. The work in the CIEA also enables familiarization with- and comparison of different training and teaching models in the international framework.

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