

Bavarian Secondary Modern Schools

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INTRODUCTION

Since the late 1990s, commercial use of the Internet has increased. Many schools have started to use this new technology for presentations and have been sponsored by several initiatives like “Schulen ans Netz.”

The eight ministerial service centres (Ministerialbeauftragte, MB) for the Bavarian secondary modern schools started to think about the use of the Internet, too. To get the best profit out of the Internet it was decided to combine the existing homepages of the MBs together on one platform for the Realschulen. The Bavarian Realschulen have a long tradition on IT as a subject, so a team of 24 teachers with special knowledge in creating websites and open source technologies (php, MySQL) was formed in 1999 to work out a concept for the Internet platform. In September 2000 the Bayerisches Realschulnetz (BRN) (www.realschule.bayer.de) went online for the first time. During the following 5 years, the project has developed into a one-stop-shop for all parties concerning the Bavarian Realschule.

BACKGROUND

School Development—A New Challenge to Improve Education

Thinking about the use of ICT at schools, the first thing that comes to one’s mind is e-learning. E-government doesn’t seem to be relevant for work at schools. But situations at schools have changed during the last seven to ten years and there are new challenges to deal with.

In 1999, Bavarian Ministry of Education started a project called “school-development with the aim to give all school types new challenges and to guarantee the highest standard of educational quality.

School development comprises three branches: organisational development, personnel development and educational development (Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Unterricht und Kultus, 2004).

Organisational development means to open schools to the public in two ways: to win over local institutions, enterprises and educational institutions in the neighbourhood to use their resources and to enlist parents and pupils for cooperation.

Gaining public interest in schools and involving and engaging parents and the community into the learning process blurs the boundaries between school, home and community (Brooks & Brady, 2004). Students will get a feeling for what is meant by the term *lifelong learning*.

Educational development means new forms of instruction by using new media and ICT, training students in social and methodical skills and teamwork.

To be successful, teachers have to be able to use the new skills (e.g., the use of ICT in class) and to act as coaches in the classroom instead of being traditional teachers.

To support the school development an unfiltered flow of information is necessary. Every member of the school community has to get the information he needs for his work. This means providing information about the different types of schools, their school policies, their curricula and the possibilities of further training (e.g., continuative schooling, vocational training). Parents and pupils need a solid database to make the right choice for their school type. Information about relevant laws and decrees and their actual changes belonging to the type of school and information for teachers about further training offers and educational material have to be available, too.

School development causes big efforts for everyone, especially for teachers and principals who need additional time to realize the project. However, administrative work increases and therefore a simplification of administrative work will save money and time for educational objects. Change management at schools at all levels is necessary to achieve this aim.

Taking the two points—open information for everybody and an organisational changing—together the result is e-government at schools.

Paul Timmers (2004), head of Unit eGovernment at the Directorate General Information Society at the European Commission, defined e-government as the “use of ICT together with organisational change and the acquisition of new skills in public administrations, in order to improve public services and democratic processes”.

Giving free information to everyone, raising the possibility for all participants at school to transact and interact with others and to participate in decisions will strengthen democratic processes at schools. Especially parents and pupils can influence their school’s development and hence their schooling. In the end the public can

carry out the most important role of democracy: the control of governmental duties which means in this case the quality of education.

CHANGING THE WAY OF LEARNING

To reach high quality in education it is not enough to change the schools' organisation and to give parents and pupils the right to participate in their school's development. Besides it is necessary, to change the way of learning. Learning is an active process, so it is not the teacher who can teach someone something. Learning is the pupils' responsibility and teachers should act more as coaches who help them to organise their learning. Therefore it must be kept in mind that learning is something very individual. Everyone learns in different ways and at a different speed and has different kinds of interests. The consequence is that learning has to be personalised and individualised, which means it has to be tailored to "meet the needs of each student, taking account of learning styles and learning preferences allowing students to pursue their studies with a range of resources tailored to their individual needs and interests" (Selinger, 2004, p. 8). This sounds like isolated work, but in fact it is not because pupils can decide how long they want to work on a subject.

Knowledge is actually constructed in collaborations among learners (Brown & Duguid, 2002). The usual places for learning are the schools, but if the individual learning should be respected, a possibility to abolish the restriction to one place is needed (schools will not be obsolete in the future but there will be different places where learning will take place). ICT provides the tools to tailor learning and to bring together all participants in learning even away from school.

It is a precondition to have an appropriate ICT equipment at the schools, an affordable broadband connection for everyone and useful e-content to use the advantages of e-learning.

Because teachers tend to teach as they were taught, a constant training and retraining of teachers is necessary to achieve progress or change in classroom (English, 2004).

BRN: SERVICE AND INFORMATION PROVIDED FOR THE REALSCHULEN

To meet these challenges and to support the Bavarian secondary modern schools the Bayerisches Realschulnetz went online in 2000. The three main targets the project

stands for are reduction of administrative work at all levels, support of the teachers' work and more transparency of the Realschulen to the public. The following objectives of the BRN were set out to reach these targets:

1. Availability of general information for parents, pupils and partners and obtainability of basic information about every *Realschule* in Bavaria (headmaster, number of pupils, classes, contact details)
2. Availability of information for everyone interested, including all laws and decrees relevant to the Realschule
3. Quick posting of official publications
4. Presentation of offers for further education (regional and supraregional)
5. Provision of teaching and advisory materials
6. Simplification of administrative work
7. Strict focus of the BRN on its customers' needs

Customer orientation became the main principle of the team's work. Several portals have been designed for the different target groups (pupils, parents, teachers, principals, students, probationary teachers) where specific information is offered.

To achieve a barrier free flow of information, a database-driven news system, the MB-Nachrichten, was created. News and information can be provided in real time by the board of control without any restriction of accessibility. The MB-Nachrichten replaced a newsletter which was sent periodically every 4 to 6 weeks. To get the best benefit of the system, each piece of new information can be forwarded by mail, dates can be transferred into an electronic scheduler and the news can carry several addendums (documents, forms, URLs) which can be followed up electronically to reduce changes in format.

The implementation of the MB-Nachrichten has had a bearing on back office processes on the level of MBs and principals. One result was the unification of the communication channels, which lead to savings in terms of costs and time in the school administration. With MB-Nachrichten BRN established a backbone for an IT-based knowledge management at schools.

To take advantage of synergy effects in order to help teachers to save time in their preparation for lessons a database with teaching and educational material was installed. Teachers can search for and spread their own teaching material to the benefit of all. New concepts for teaching can be exchanged for the benefit of educational development.

A database with all regional and links to all supraregional further training offers as well as an extended job service complete the administrative service for schools. Especially the support of Ministry of Education with the open transfer procedure via BRN enables princi-

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