“ConCiencia Activa” An Environmental Education Program: a holistic and integrating approach

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Abstract: ConCiencia Activa is an educational program of Fundación Temaikèn, that promotes the design and implementation of hands-on projects related to the protection and conservation of the environment. Throughout the year, it comprises three moments: training workshops for educators, coaching the project implementation, and a two-day National Meeting where children and young leaders presented their experiences through a variety of interpretations.

“The Earth is not ours, we belong to the Earth”

Native Patagonian Mapuche Community proverb, quoted by Ricardo, 16 years old, Secondary School

Introduction

ConCiencia Activa is a branch at Fundación Temaikèn (FT), an Argentinean Non-Profit Organization that has been working for 13 years protecting Nature: educating, researching and preserving species and ecosystems, giving priority to native ones, together with other institutions and involving the whole society. Also FT manages the Temaikèn Biopark, a Species Reproduction Center in Buenos Aires; and Osununú Natural Reserve, in Misiones. Among other activities, FT carries out Conservation Programs, Research Projects and Educational Programs.

FT’s Education Department is convinced that learning networks and collaborative processes strengthen efforts to protect the environment and encourage nature conservation actions. In this way, civil society organizations have the ability to incorporate the latest advances in the field and to rapidly translate them into action programs, which is what Fundación Temaikèn aims for.

Today, the main aim is to move from the anthropocentric position from which we currently view the world, to having a more biocentric attitude. This experience cultivates in us a more humble, respectful attitude towards the complexity and beauty of the living things, thus promoting feelings of veneration, love and care of life and its diversity.

Environmental Education promotes mainly relational ways of thinking, i.e. thoughts that are able to establish bonds with others. Instead of classifying on the basis of difference, emphasis is given to interrelation and interdependence. We value that thing that is not evident, that thing that is in “between”, that thing that allows us to claim that nothing exists in isolation and that neither nothing
nor nobody is something in itself, but in connection with the context it belongs to (Priotto, 2013). Interdisciplinarity becomes almost a condition for knowledge on this field. A systemic perspective and interdisciplinarity seem to be derived logic in this proposal. The conservation of species and natural ecosystems will be one of the many consequences of an approach focused on the promotion of what J.G. Gaudiano called “environmental literacy”. We want citizens capable of performing complex, critical thinking of each scenario, articulating social-cultural-political-economic fields among others; citizens able to understand the main roots of problems and ready to work with others in the transformation of their local environment.

Understanding the environment from this perspective entails deep changes in the way we construct knowledge, as it helps to overcome disciplinary fragmentation in order to approach a study field that has to be interdisciplinary like the environment. Besides, it implies an ethical valuation by recognizing that we are part of the environment. Therefore, what one does, impacts upon the other and in turn, on all other forms of life. This social perspective of the environmental field stresses our approach, inviting us to imagine, design and build respect of all life forms.

One of the most recent education programs is “ConCiencia Activa” (a wordplay meaning both active conscience and active science) it’s an annual environmental education program for students, teachers and educational leaders from schools, NGOs and community members. Our program guides educators as they work with students to create and present participatory projects, whose goal is to increase conservation awareness and encourage commitment to preserving the local environment. “ConCiencia Activa” ultimately strengthens our institutional mission: Protecting nature together. (Look at 2014 video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yJToCV6_8h8 www.edufundaciontemaiken.org)

**Methodology**

ConCiencia Activa was constituted as a program aligned to the ministerial guidelines, seeking in their design and implementation a collaboration to overcome the weaknesses identified in the diagnosis. It is a free environmental education program, intended for public and private, and social organizations. The program includes resources and tools specialized in the environment developing knowledge, critical in the relationship between human beings and the environment, with the creation and construction of solutions to specific problems. It contributes to the integral development of the students and teachers, by integrating components and processes that impact on the improvement of the quality of education inside and outside of the institution.

**General Goals:**

a. Sensitize local education leaders about environment care and conservation.

b. Promote the design, implementation and presentation of participatory projects related to environment care and conservation.

c. Facilitate the sharing of knowledge on these issues among local civil society actors.

d. Increase and enhance conservation awareness.

**Measurable Objectives:**

a. Increase the participation of educators in trainings.

b. Improve the quality of the submitted projects.

Using a multidisciplinary approach incorporating critical pedagogy, multiple intelligences, ethics education, information and communication technologies, and art (as an expression of environmental complexity), ConCiencia Activa promotes an integrated-phased process: enhance and increase awareness; collective construction of knowledge; commitment to action; networking; motivating inspiration; and replication. With these bases, ConCiencia Activa educational program is annual and encompasses five clear-cut stages:

1) Online enrollment: Open and free.

2) Training Workshops: Educators are invited to participate in training workshops and meetings to exchange knowledge. Four free days of activities are carried out in Temaiken Biopark, addressed...
to educators and educational leaders. We host workshops sessions which are carried on by renowned experts in educational and environmental aspects.

Environmental Topics:
- Environmental education
- Sustainable Energies
- Integral solid urban waste management
- Healthy Food
- Biodiversity
- Environmental communication

3) Project design and development: Participants are encouraged to identify an actual local social-environmental problem with the aim of designing and implementing annual strategies that provide contributions to its resolution. These issues will be discussed among the school, the neighborhood or the local community. Each group will develop an environmental project selecting one of the following themes: Biodiversity conservation, sustainable use of natural resources or integral waste management. In order to help in each stage of this process, a “Guide for designing projects” is provided.

4) Coaching and follow up Reports: Throughout the program participants are required to submit two reports: a design report and an advance report, for the educational team to assess.

5) ConCiencia Activa National Meeting: This is an event for participative and inclusive exchange, in which kids, teens and educators share experiences related to environmental care and conservation through a variety of interpretations: plays, comedies, storytelling, films, blogs, radio programs, science fair-type booths and posters, folklore songs and dances, board games, and murals.

The two day meeting offers the ideal space and setting where experiences are shared and discussed within a framework full of creativity, diversity and fun.

Results
The success of “ConCiencia Activa” is fostered by empowered participants replicating the educational products and processes in their communities, thus spreading the seeds of awareness and the critical message of environmental preservation.

In 2013 pilot experience, more than 5,000 attendants, students, educators, and families participated in the National Meeting. Also nearly 100 teachers attended our workshops. In 2014 there were more than 6,000 attendants, students, educators, and families in the National Meeting and 200 teachers in our workshops.

We assess teachers training workshops and environmental projects.
- Information is processed every day and general assessment is carried out at the end of the process.
- Training sessions are designed according to the needs shown by the teachers and the results of the projects submitted the previous year.

Environmental projects:
A detailed analysis of the project implementation and methodology is performed. Each project is supported by a tutor who carries out the follow up with the teachers through phone calls or email. At the end of the year there is an overall quality assessment in order to improve future program.
Conclusions
The program presents:
> a holistic view of environmental issues and biodiversity including the political and social aspects.
> environmental literacy and critical citizenship-oriented vision.
> social inclusion: the activity is integrated and adapted to people with disabilities.
> technological innovation: new languages, IT tools, social networks and art expressions.

Our educational platform: edufundaciontemaiken.org where participants can find content on environmental education, share experiences and exchange knowledge and expertise. This tool is complemented with social networks, such as Facebook and You tube.

> Students projects:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9G36ZwEC-2o
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9bN6AzDwLL0
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N1cTHT4RZJ4
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q0b-6Svnez0

This program is an opportunity for any teacher or educational leader, who is interested in designing and developing project in environmental education, to join this learning community and to participate in a collective construction of environmental knowledge.

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