

“SCHOOL AGENDA 21” Towards a Sustainable Development*

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1. PROGRAM RATIONALE

An environmental education program focused on the solutions of specific problems in our social and environmental reality means not only learning about ecology, appreciation and respect for technical advancements, but also engaging in a community-based program that takes place within our own surroundings. This community-based program means becoming more involved in the changes that need to take place in the community itself, giving greater importance to the social aspects of issues regarding the environment, developing negotiation skills among the students, participation in forums, in decision-making and promoting an ethics of co-responsibility regarding all who live in the community and in solidarity with the economically and socially disadvantaged. The entire society, as well as the educational system, must double their efforts in making progress toward the ideals of peace, social justice and sustainable development. In this sense, “The School Agenda 21” is a good vehicle for increasing the participation and the knowledge of our youth of today, who are the adults of tomorrow.

Individual practices should also be changed, although their effects seem insignificant compared to those of large corporations. Like small grains of sand the contribution of individual citizens forms public opinion which then influences the direction taken by the economic powers. Thus, the art of negotiation and citizen action seem to be the most appropriate ways to address this critical situation in which political decisions, international agreements and local and individual initiatives can contribute to improving the ecological and social conditions of our world. To bring this about, we try to foster personal involvement in social-environmental problems, instilling habits of respect and care.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE EXPERIENCE

- **General objective**

School Agenda 21 is a program which prepares students to be citizens who work for a more just and ecologically sustainable society by giving them the opportunity to know and to do research on the environmental problems of their proximate surroundings.

- **Target Groups:**

It is intended for the entire school community, including the non-teaching personnel and families, also involving the socio-political entities of the school locale.

* **Sustainable** development is defined as balancing the fulfillment of human needs with the protection of the natural environment so that these needs can be met.

- **Specific Objectives to be accomplished:**

The following objectives will be implemented in the different stages of the educational process: learn to be, learn to know, learn to do and learn to interrelate. With all these they will learn:

- To be: responsible, just, austere, caring, tolerant, critical, trustworthy, respectful.
- To know: eco/social-systems and their interrelationship and complexity.
- To do: sustainable use of all resources, draw proposals, make decisions, solve problems and work with others.
- To respectfully interrelate with one another, democratically, actively taking part, and not remaining passive.

As a result of the work accomplished through this experience, they will also learn that:

- Things that don't last through their expected time of usage are not sustainable
- The sun rises every day and renewable resources and energy are a priority
- Selectivity should take place right from the beginning, using products that can easily and quickly be separated
- Recycling begins the moment the product is made. This should be kept in mind in its very design.
- We must save resources, time and space. Saving lengthens the life of the resources that are diminishing.
- Things should not be harmful: a clean product made of healthy material will free us from toxics.
- More is not always better. When we know what is necessary, this stops the consumption of that which is not necessary.
- We must enjoy and appreciate simple things.
- Sharing is always more enjoyable and improves efficiency. No one can take advantage of what has been lost. When things are shared there is a feeling of joy that one experiences with the other.
- There should be a just market, and a responsible consumption of goods. Equitability must be the objective of sustainability.
- Low cost and high service must be promoted.

- **Methodology**

It is the responsibility of the educational community to work in favor of the quality and the sustainability of its surroundings using democratic practices and credible methods of organization. This is the way to integrate a culture of change, that is, everyone having the possibility and the right to make decisions through negotiations, expressing interests, values and wishes, emphatically understanding, arriving at agreements through discussions and debate. This commitment implies interest in knowing the means, wanting to change injustices and the desire to work for the present and the future by making a firm commitment to do so.

This is a slow process, but an adequate one because those who take part in the process own the decisions that are made.

It is an educational process in which all contents and educational modes are in agreement with the objectives.

The values which we wish to emphasize should not be contradictory to the values taught in school everyday. For this reason, an evaluation of our way of educating is

necessary; changing and improving it in order to have it coincide with the ideals of the natural systems, cooperative work and social justice.

Three main lines of work:

- A management of sustainability in the school and its surroundings will lead to
 - the creation of an environmental committee
 - sustainable, diligent and responsible management of the school residues and resources
 - maintenance of bio-diversity
- Curriculum renewal
 - environmental education
 - democratic ways of participation
 - didactic use of the environment in conceptual content, as well as in procedures and in attitudes
- Participation in the local Community:
 - participation of Agenda 21 in sessions of City Hall, expressing their suggestions for improvement.
 - strengthening the relationship among students, families and teachers by participating in the Environment Committee, and in inter-scholastic forums
 - implication in the daily life of the town by diagnosing its situation with regards to the topic studied for that school year.

Activities that helped carry out these objectives:

- Firstly, the Creation of the Environment School Board; formed by 8 teachers who represent the entire school. This establishment of this Board is still in its early stages because it will eventually incorporate parents, students, and teachers. We already have the commitment and involvement of the maintenance staff. The group is coordinated by Arantza Aginaga.
- Once the Board was established we met every 15 days to design our action plan, to prepare the analysis of the diagnostic and the evaluation of the same.
- Besides the project, “School Agenda 21,” there are three other ongoing projects in the School. The school personnel is distributed among these projects and we try to interrelate them: The Solidarity Fund FISC (Company of Mary: International Solidarity Fund); the project on Interrelationship which this year addresses the topic of student involvement in the life of the school and conflict resolution; the learning and use of the Basque language in all of our activities. With these four programs we wish to add our small grain of sand to Sustainable Development.
- We also have optional classes on Health, an Ecological Garden, Mathematics for life, Theater, Free Time and a Workshop on journalism which complement the projects mentioned above.

- Summing up the accomplishments of the School Agenda 21, in the school year 2005-2006 we worked on the topic of Consumerism, this year, 2006-2007 the topic was Solid Residues and the topic chosen for the following year 2007-2008 is Water.
- As for the specific activities carried out by the Environment Commission see the chart below:

	CURRICULUM	IKASTOLA (Basque) - SCHOOL	PARTICIPATION
DIAGNOSTIC	Analysis of the curriculum	(ESO/grammar school) Questionnaires (ESO/grammar school) Analysis of the situation	(Primary/ESO teaching Modules) Analysis of situations within in the town (ESO/Primary) Analysis of the students' participation in school activities.
PLANS FOR IMPROVEMENT	Environment Committee	Environment Committee	Environment Committee
ACTION PLANS	Reading Stories (Early childhood) Comprehension of simple concepts: justice, equal sharing, balance-imbalance... all levels Creation of the Green Corner (ESO/Primary) (ESO/ grammar level) Communication to the whole school community by means of the magazine "Beti Kontu". (ESO) A play representation for the pre-school (ESO) Field trips related to the topic. (ESO)	Creation of the Green Corner. (ESO/primary) Communication to the whole school community through the bulletin "Beti Kontu" (ESO) Field trips related to the topic. (ESO)	Inter-scholastic forums: (all levels) Participation in sessions of city hall. (all levels) Field trips related to the topic. (ESO)
EVALUATION	Environment Committee	Environment Committee	Environment Committee

- **Coordination with other groups and entities:**

The project is coordinated by the Basque government, Diputacion de Guipuzcoa, Aula Medioambiental CEIDA, Centers for Pedagogical Innovation, Mancomunidad del Alto Deba, Ayuntamiento de Bergara, Escuela de Consumo y Escuela de la Naturaleza de Onate.

Financial Support:

Financial aid for the Agenda 21 Project is provided by a Mandate from the Department of Education, Universities and Research, and the Environment and Territorial Ordination. These regulate the concession of financial aid to schools which are not universities. Through this mandate activities of School Agenda 21 Global Plan are encouraged. Through this same financial aid funds are provided for a teacher to take two hours a week from her teaching time to coordinate the project. The center is responsible for paying the teacher her complete salary.

3. ANALYSIS OF THIS EXPERIENCE

- With the School Agenda 21 underway and the different structures it requires for its development we can see that relationships among teacher-student, teacher-teacher, school-community and even inter-scholastic relationships have improved, thanks to the exchange of experiences, to the methodology and learning that has served to mutually enrich each other.
- The fact of merely taking part in this project has had an immediate consequence: the need to make an internal analysis in favor of an ongoing improvement in the cooperative and democratic participation in society.
- Through the various activities the educational community and all its surroundings contribute from the different points of view information on the world situation, the topics developed, and increased awareness. All of this is primordial when implementing decisions, even though they be on a smaller scale, but that can help us face the real problems of our society.