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SUSTAINABILITY AS AN INSTITUTIONAL WAY OF LIVING

Nuestra Señora de Lourdes Schoool Barva,
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SUSTAINABILITY AS AN INSTITUTIONAL WAY OF LIVING

Ana María González Quirós
Ana Isabel Miranda Villalta
Grettel María Víquez Miranda

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Abstract: Currently, the topic of environment is a worldwide concern. Nuestra Señora de Lourdes Bilingual School, a school located in Barva, Heredia, Costa Rica; aware of environmental issues, is working hard through the implementation of pedagogical, concrete, and compatible practices with the environment to foster in the children a lifestyle based on the understanding of being part of the sustainable development. All of this will be transferred to the family as well as the community level. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to create ties with higher education institutions which will bring up professional people who will be trained in this philosophy, hence; they as educators will apply it in their labor field.

Keywords: Environment, sustainable development, sustainability

I. INTRODUCTION

The World Commission on Environment and Development defines sustainable development as “the development that meets present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs” (qtd in Vilela, M. et al., 2005). Based on this approach Nuestra Señora de Lourdes School has been working in the interest of fostering in its students a lifestyle based on the awareness of being part of the sustainable development.
The issue of sustainable development is a worldwide concern and Costa Rica has joined efforts through different governmental institutions, ministries and citizens to promote a place where its inhabitants can live in harmony with environment.

The Costa Rican educative sector encourages the care of the environment working through a teaching-learning process oriented towards the individual and collective responsibility. In addition, it reinforces the responsibility and rights human beings have as part of the planet.

Nuestra Señora de Lourdes School, an institution affiliated to the Public Education Ministry, has raised the interest of fostering this philosophy through one specific objective: to make students act in favor of the planet.

The institution conceives the sustainable development in an integral way; encompassing aspects such as values, healthy enjoyment, health, environment and spirituality among others.

A. OBJECTIVES

1. GENERAL OBJECTIVE

To demonstrate that sustainability can be a way of living at institutional level.

2. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

✓ To prove that the implementation of pedagogical and concrete practices carried out by the institution are compatible with the care of the environment.

✓ To transfer the environmental consciousness of the learners and staff to students’ home and community.

✓ To generate contacts with higher education institutions to widen the environmental project and to strengthen the feedback.
B. METHODOLOGY

Presentation of concrete experiences carried out by the institution: This proposal consists of the systematization of experiences related to sustainability since the Ecological Blue Flag Program was implemented into the institution.

II. CONTENT OF THE PROPOSAL

The first part of this paper describes briefly the country, the province, and the community where Nuestra Señora de Lourdes School is located. The last part presents information about the environmentally friendly sustainable projects carried out by the institution.

A. GEOGRAPHICAL DESCRIPTION

Costa Rica is located in Central America. It has a surface of “51 100 km²” (U.S. Department of State: Diplomacy in Action, 2012) and it is divided in seven provinces. Costa Rica is one of the countries with the highest percentage of protected land in the world, 25% of its territory corresponds to the national parks system and protected areas (Sánchez et al., 2003) which shelter a great variety of flora and fauna. Beaches, volcanoes, wetlands, rivers and swamps can be found along the territory.

Heredia is the smallest province of the country, it is part of the metropolitan area and it is formed by ten cantons. Heredia is known as the “City of the Flowers” because of the flora in this place.

Barva is one of the cantons of Heredia and it is here where Nuestra Señora de Lourdes is located. This canton is the cradle of famous people and it still preserves the memories of its colonial period. Some traditions enrich the culture of this canton, for example the baskets
making that are used in the traditional coffee harvest, masquerades, and bands called “cimarrona”. In addition, there are artists who are national and internationally well-known.

Barva has some tourist attractions such as Barva volcano, the Popular Culture Museum, Our Lady of Lourdes Grotto, among others (Rodriguez, n.d.).

Nuestra Señora de Lourdes School is located in Barva, a canton in Heredia’s province. It was founded in 1993, and currently, it has 79 pre-school students and 134 of elementary level.

Its mission is to give an integral and quality formation to those who are part of the institution. Its vision is engaged with the human values; hence it contributes to the formation of men and women who are capable of providing a valuable contribution to society.

This school has adopted the care of the planet as one of the essential values, projecting environmental practices at institutional and communal level. In 2004, the Ecological Blue Flag program was introduced into different educational centers of the Public Ministry Education (Decreto Ejecutivo N° 31648-MEP-MINAE-S-TUR, 2004).

ECOLOGICAL BLUE FLAG FOR EDUCATIVE CENTERS

In 2004, the distinction of “Blue Flag” for educative center was implemented with the purpose of encouraging these institutions to adopt environmentally friendly sustainable practices (Decreto Ejecutivo N° 31648-MEP-MINAE-S-TUR, 2004). The institutions are awarded with a blue flag which has a certain number of stars according to the obtained score. At the beginning, the program awarded the blue flag with one, two, or three stars. In 2010, a five stars Blue Flag is the highest distinction possible. Nuestra Señora de Lourdes School has participated during seven years and it has won the maximum recognition on six consecutive occasions.
a. WHAT IS A BLUE FLAG EDUCATIVE CENTER?

According to the Ecological Blue Flag program for educative centers, an educative center with Ecological Blue Flag is an environmental friendly institution that improves the hygienic and sanitary conditions of its physical structures. It promotes and executes campaigns in favor of the natural resources protection as well as the environmental education. In addition, it is attached to the community it belongs to.

To become an Ecological Blue Flag school, Nuestra Señora de Lourdes has worked on tasks that support sustainability. Some of them are outlined below.

i. Quality of Potable Water

Analysis of water is assessed by public and private institutions.

ii. Risk and Disaster Management

The Mitigation of Risk and Institutional Disaster Plan was updated. Simulations at classroom and institutional level (10 in a year) have been done. In addition, a campaign of road safety was held by the traffic officers, who explained to the children how to get to school as well as the importance of wearing of the seatbelt. Families received information given by the institution related to security on streets.

iii. Environmental Education

Environmental Education projects, such as recycling, soil recovery and saving resources emphasizing the policies of the country either at institutional or community level, have been carried out.
a. “Recycling” Project

Several activities were developed for the execution of this project:

✓ Teaching staff along with the children’s families worked on activities related to recycling and the reutilization of materials.

✓ Mother Day’s cards were made from reused materials (milk cartons, residue from coloring pencils and others).

✓ Preschool parents made piggy banks from clay containers.

✓ For children’s day, preschool students made hats and elementary students decorated socks with reused materials.

✓ Some students decided to work with environmental themes for their science fair project.

✓ Institutional campaigns were held to recycle paper, plastic and cans. There are three sets of labeled containers for material classification.

✓ Students have plastic boxes in each classroom to save paper that can be reused or recycled in the future.

b. Soil Recovery Project

For this project various activities were carried out:

✓ Members of the school’s student government donated trees to neighbors and faculty members.

✓ For the independence parade, students from preschool participated with the theme “Planet Defenders” and performed a street play focused on saving water resources, planting trees, and avoiding the use of plastic bags. Students also delivered seeds during this activity.

✓ At an institutional level, a contest for the best cultivated field was organized.
✓ Students from the first cycle participated in a hydroponics workshop where they had the opportunity to see and be part of the process of growing lettuce.

✓ Families received seeds and a bulletin with information about the type of sowing that can be done at home.

✓ Trees were by the Costa Rican Institute of Electricity and the Association for Security and Embellishment of National Roads donated to implement the program “Adopt a tree”.

c. “Saving Resources” Project

The activities carried out were:

✓ The School along with Cooperativa Autogestionaria de Servicios Integrales de Salud de Brava R.L. (COOPESIBA) and the Health Area Lead worked on different projects as the collection of old tires in the communities of Barva and surrounding areas.

✓ Bulletins were sent out to the students and their families with tips for saving water in their homes.

✓ Students and their families participated in the Turn the Lights Off activity. The activity was set at a certain day and time. Students wrote an essay in English about the experience.

✓ Information was sent out to the families with tips to avoid the Dengue virus during vacation time. Games were used to learn prevention measures on how to eliminate mosquito’s breeding sites.

✓ A dramatization related with the prevention of Dengue virus was presented by the community health personal.

✓ The preschool group promoted a healthy meals campaign. A chat with a nutritionist that oriented parents on the issue was held.
A vaccination campaign was carried out by COOPESIBA for the children against rubella and measles.

iv. “Maintaining Order and Cleanliness in the Institution” Project

In this case:

- Students’ mothers cared for the school grotto and incorporated orchids for its embellishment.
- Cleanliness committees, integrated by students, were formed in each classroom.

v. “Values and Customs Recovery” Project

For the implementation of the project:

- The institution realized a Stations of the Cross where students, faculty and families participated.
- A Rosary was held in commemoration of Virgin Mary in May.
- Students from fifth and sixth grade gave a flute presentation at the school to celebrate the “Music Day”.
- School personnel and students danced to the rhythm of a band to celebrate the closing of student elections.
- During the “Civic Week”, a topic related to Barva Canton was developed in each civic act.
- The preschool level represented the traditional “posadas” in November.

vi. Information and Publication

In 2010, Nuestra Señora de Lourdes School signed an agreement with West Chester University. Its president, professors and students have visited the institution. Several activities to
welcome them were carried out (welcome signs with recycled materials, civic events featuring the most important celebrations of the school year).

✓ The “Environmental Week” was celebrated through ecological plays, ecological chorus, and videos. Mr. Shyan S. Nandwani from the Physics Faculty of the Universidad Nacional gave a speech about energy saving and solar ovens.

✓ The school participated on the “Ecological Festival” organized by the Municipality of Barva. The students presented ecological murals and the institution won the first place award.

✓ Students from the University of Costa Rica visited the school and gave a speech about environmental topics. They presented some videos which illustrated the care and deterioration of nature. They raffled notebooks, bracelets and pocket wallets made with reused material among the students.

✓ The preprimary students made a search about endangered animals in Costa Rica and they presented it to their classmates.

✓ An “Ecological Corner” to inform children about topics related with ecology and health was created in each room.

✓ Sixth grade students engaged in the I Water Resources Fair which emphasized the sustainable preservation of the hydric resource.

✓ Members of the student government attended the Ecological Flue Flag Awards 2010 at the Costa Rican Electricity Institute installations.

✓ A civic act to hoist the “Ecological Blue Flag” was organized. Some students explained the main functions of the different ecological projects to their partners. They presented a show about the animals.
On September 15, 2011 the preprimary level brought the slogan “Dare to Adventure” to promote tours to Barva Volcano to make people know the flora and fauna of this place.

The fifth and sixth grade students engaged in a “Short Stories Contest” which topic was “My Community in Harmony with the Environment”. This contest was declared of educative interest by the Ministry of Education.

The Fourth grade students visited the Pedro Murillo School to present the “Ecological Blue Flag” project in English.

The Fourth grade students proposed an Environmental Decalogue to the institution to reaffirm their concern for the environment.

CONCLUSIONS

a. The achievements in a short period term demonstrate that sustainability can be an institutional way of living. The solid waste has been reduced, benefiting organizations like community collection centers and consequently the country.

b. There is evidence that children are capable of working for the environment if they are encouraged. The opening to an environmental culture should begin since childhood (home-school), stage where the agents of change should be formed with a vision of responsibility and environmental engagement.

c. The higher education institutions become a support to strengthen sustainable programs. Universities can train educators by promoting workshops that help the environment as well as human beings. These institutions can provide resources that allow the educative centers to participate in ecological tasks. In addition, graduating teachers must be educated in this line to foster their future pupils’ caring for the earth.
III. BIBLIOGRAPHY


