



LEARNING *for Life*



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The past six years – since the June 5, 2003 World Environment Day – have witnessed an astounding force of mobilization and passion permeating environmental education in Brazilian schools. On that day, the National Children and Youth Conference for the Environment was implemented in secondary schools throughout Brazil, and has proven to be a landmark in the country's public environmental education policy management.

The conference's success is reflected in the figures: the first one, in 2003, involved 15,452 schools and mobilized 5,658,877 people throughout the country. The second, in 2005-2006, reached 11,475 schools and communities and 3,801,055 persons, and witnessed our youth delivering a charter to President Lula. This *Charter of Responsibilities, "Let's Take Care of Brazil"*, commits to constructing "fair, happy and sustainable societies with responsibilities and actions that fulfil dreams and needs".

The Third National Conference process was held during 2008-09 in 11,670 schools involving over 4 million people in the school and state-level debates, culminating in a national event in April 2009. As the conference occurred in the midst of a global environmental/ economic crisis, our environmental education system has been confronted by a triple challenge:

- **the psychological:** building significant knowledge without creating fear of the catastrophe that is revealed or paralysis in face of potential destruction;
- **the educational:** proposing a contemporary education solution, which may rescue the social function of the school as a creative and transformative learning environment. My ministry's Education Development Plan enables integral education in an initiative that seeks quality in the teaching-learning process and student retention; and
- **the planetary:** engaging in a high level debate so as to be able to address global environmental change through sustainable societies.

The task of the Ministry of Education is to involve students, teachers, youth and the school community in building a sustainable Brazil, with equity, diversity and justice. This is accomplished in conjunction with the Ministry of the Environment through the "Managing Commission" formed ten years ago by the National Environmental Education Policy Law, which establishes environmental education principles, objectives and directives to be incorporated into public agencies, educational institutions, communications media, companies and society.

An educational element was also included in the 2008 National Plan on Climate Change, making the ministry responsible for "Implementing

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sustainable educational spaces through re-adapting buildings (school and university) and management, and through teacher education and inserting the subject of climate change into the curricula and teaching material.”

But how to incorporate all of this in formal education inside the classroom? How could we create a school community with a responsible and committed attitude towards local and global socio-environmental issues?

According to the 2001 School Census undertaken by the Anísio Teixeira National Institute of Educational Studies and Research, only 61 per cent of the secondary schools declared to have implemented environmental education schemes. In the 2005 census, environmental education was almost universal, as declared in 97 per cent of schools. The Children and Youth Conference could be seen almost as a “pedagogical pretext” to include and update the debate so urgently needed in society, from a critical and participative environmental education perspective.

The third National Conference incorporated the topic *Global Environmental Changes: think + act in the school and in the community*. Quality didactic material was distributed to all secondary teaching networks in the country (58,000 schools) with the objectives of: contributing to improving school performance based on the results of the Basic Education Development Index; encouraging

the inclusion of sustainability and the socio-environmental challenge in the school Political-Pedagogical Plan; and strengthening the role of the school in constructing public education and environmental policies.

The material provides tools for traversing environmental issues and interdisciplinarity in the classroom, while respecting the complexity of the subject and not oversimplifying. Socio-environmental changes beyond climate change are treated systematically and integrated into the sciences, history, geography and languages.

The topics involve the four elements

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– earth, water, fire and air – with the contemporary problems affecting people and natural systems throughout the planet. Each topic includes debate on sustainable actions for mitigative, adaptive, preventive, and transformative measures. The material proposes changes to the world-view, that rescue values that improve quality of life, and that rethink human responsibilities for the present and future of life on earth.

Far from being just an event, the Conference offers continuity, since it is part of a larger programme, which encompasses continuous education of teachers and the creation of school “Commissions of

the Environment and Life Quality”. Each commission promotes Agenda 21 projects through interaction between the school and the community, so as to integrate environmental education in the teaching system. Throughout the country, Youth Collectives and the Youth Network for the Environment and Sustainability are partners in facilitation, mobilization and training based on the principles: ‘youth educates youth, youth chooses youth and one generation learns from the other.’

We passionately fulfil our *Magna Carta*, the Federal Constitution of 1988, which explicates the rights of present and future generations to quality education and to a healthy and ecologically balanced environment. This can be achieved with bold and modern policies, the democratic participation of society, the integration of school disciplines with traditional knowledge, and school communities that consider all aspects of the quality of life – environmental, economic, political, social, cultural and ethical.

The 3rd National Conference received 70 international Observers from 43 countries, in preparation for the International Children and Youth Conference – *Let’s Take Care of the Planet* – which will be held in Brasilia from June 5 – 10 of 2010. The International Conference has been incorporated into UNESCO’s Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, and will help to further the debate on UNDP’s *Eight Goals of the Millennium*. We also reaffirm values and actions proposed by civil society, such as the Treaty on Environmental Education for Sustainable Societies and Global Responsibility, the Earth Charter, the Agenda 21 and the Charter of Human Responsibilities.