



"Educar Forestando" Program: The formation of human values through environmental education

The Educar Forestando Program, run by the ACUDE Foundation, is Argentina's largest training program on environmental education. **The idea is simple: children learn to respect the environment by producing and planting trees.** Teachers trained by ACUDE act as partners in the formation of environmental values for thousands of children. Since the program was launched in 1990 (**23 years ago**); 200,000 children; 4,200 teachers; 1,000 institutions and 500 communities have grown half a million and planted 200,000 trees.

What do we want to achieve?

The Educar Forestando Program aims to build an attitude of respect toward the environment and toward other human beings through the children, teachers and families who participate in the program. In order to counteract the rapid depletion of natural resources, the decreasing biodiversity and global warming, Educar Forestando works to modify harmful cultural trends on a large scale in the shortest amount of time possible.

The main goals of Educar Forestando are:

- I. To raise awareness** about human being's nearly endless capacity to bring about change.
- II. To strengthen the values** of respect for nature, citizen participation, tolerance, solidarity and vision for the future to respect the rights of generations to come.
- III. To achieve sustainable local development** through education and by encouraging joint work between schools and communities.

How do we aim to achieve it?

The project's main idea is very simple and easy to spread. The project relies on the training of teachers in order for them, together with their students, to successfully create a small tree nursery of 1X2 meters in the school grounds. The teaching strategy aims both to inform and to sensitize students. By using a living being, a tree, as a teaching tool, the sensitivity of children is heightened as they become more aware of their environment through the relationship they create with the trees. In addition, the students learn about the ecological, economic and social benefits of forests and trees in a fun and interesting way.

ACUDE has created a training course for teachers consisting of six meetings and two technical assistance visits to each school. The course has been developed together with professional biologists and teachers, and adapted through the feedback gathered over the years. In addition to the training, the teachers are equipped with a comprehensive handbook and constant support by ACUDE through Internet and phone calls. They are encouraged to replicate the program with other teachers, and **each year hundreds of teachers collaborate to spread the program further.** The program provides the students with inspiring learning material, designed particularly for young children between five (5) and twelve (12) years. These children's booklets encourage learning through stories, pictures and participatory exercises that involve also the parents and relatives in the learning process.

The innovative aspect of the project lies in the production and planting of trees as a medium to encourage joint work between different groups of the community in order to promote environmental protection and local sustainable development. Parents and family members help with the tasks of tree nursery construction and tree production, and the study material encourages them to explore the topic further with their children. Educational institutions, local governments and organizations work with families and children to plant and take care of trees in the public green areas. The project thus

generates a high level of interaction between different generations and members of the community. It creates cooperation that is a basic requirement in developing an environmentally sustainable society.

Where do we work?

The Educar Forestando Program has been widely distributed in five provinces of Argentina. It has proven to be highly transferrable to different socio-economic levels, both urban and rural environments and to distinct geographic areas. The program started in 1990 in the **Province of Córdoba** and, due to its success, the experience was later replicated in four other Argentinean provinces. In 1999 the Educar Forestando was implemented in the **Province of Jujuy**, which is located 1,500km north from Córdoba and known for its Andean culture. In 2000, the program was replicated in the **Province of Mendoza**, situated 700km west from Córdoba in an arid environment, and in the **Province of Rio Negro**, located 2,500km southwest from Córdoba, in a very cold, Patagonian climate. In 2005, the Educar Forestando was successfully expanded to the **Province of Santiago del Estero**. In every province ACUDE works in cooperation with a local partner organization. In addition, in 2003 representatives from Peru and Paraguay took part in a short training session to initiate the program in their respective countries. Currently, the program continues to be distributed to new areas and institutions.

How do we know that the project works?

In order to measure the results and to develop the program further, **ACUDE compiles and analyzes annually the anecdotes, evaluations and experiences of teachers, students and parents involved in the Educar Forestando Program.** At the end of the first year of program implementation in each school, ACUDE collects systematic first-hand data of the trees that were seeded, produced and planted during the year, as well as commentaries from all the participants. Subsequent assessment of the progress is conducted through the Educar Forestando Network, launched in 2004. The network serves as a platform of mutual support between the teachers and ACUDE, to exchange know how, good practices and feedback. **In 2012, the Educar Forestando Network involved on daily basis 718 teachers, 14,013 children, 252 educative institutions in 132 towns and rural communities.** The program has been consolidated in 70% of these institutions, and is in the process of consolidation in the rest.

What have we already achieved?

The biggest effect of the program is the increased environmental awareness of the participants, which leads to more environmental friendly behavior in everyday life. The program has notably changed the behavior of the participants towards more environmentally conscious consumption of natural resources. Littering, rural fires and wasting water and energy have decreased and recycling has increased. In the participating communities the program has enhanced the survival of trees and led to improved tree-pruning methods. It has also increased the green areas in the participating cities, contributing to healthier and more pleasant living surroundings. Additionally, for many children living in urban areas, the program has provided a unique chance to build a relationship with the nature.

The communities participating in the program have benefitted in many ways. Tree planting has improved the state of the environment by decreasing eolic and hydric erosion and by improving air quality. The trees filter pollution and impurities from air and water, buffer climate extremes and winds, provide shelter, reduce noise and provide recreational value, thus contributing to healthier and more pleasant living conditions. Besides greening the urban and rural environments, the program is also mitigating global warming and its effects as the trees sequester carbon and create shade, therefore diminishing the need of cooling.

The positive impact of the Educar Forestando has been acknowledged by public authorities, media and international organizations. In 2007, the program was chosen as one of the 3 nominees for the Energy Globe World Award for Sustainability. The achievements of the program have also been recognized by UNESCO, by the Senate of Argentina and by the National Ministry of Education, which has collaborated

in distributing the Teachers' Handbook to be used in rural schools. The program has strongly affected the local policies and improved the ways several municipalities plant and take care of the trees. The policy work continues, and while many of the teachers have integrated the program into their curriculum, ACUDE aims to formalize the status of the program into the educational curriculum at large.

Quantitative Results Achieved:

- **4,200** teachers trained
- **200,000** children involved
- **204,200** relatives and neighbors involved
- More than **1,000** institutions involved in more than **500** towns and rural communities in **five** provinces
- **513,345*** trees produced in school nurseries
- **202,941*** trees planted communally
- **85%** survival rate of the planted trees

*These two exact figures are from 2010 and include only the trees produced and planted during the first year of action in each school

And what does this all cost?

The program has been able to generate cultural and environmental change at low cost. **For the participants, the program is entirely free of charge.** The tree nurseries can be built using materials recycled from the domestic waste or collected from the nature. Therefore the program can be implemented in all schools regardless of their economic resources or technological infrastructure. The chosen approach also promotes innovative thinking as the participants begin to see the waste as a potential resource. The program has been implemented in different socio-economic settings – 60% low, 35 % middle and 5 % upper-middle class – and the results have been equally promising in all cases. Additionally, the joint-implementation between ordinary schools and the institutions for disabled children has shown great results.

For ACUDE the main expenditures of the project lay in the printing of study material. We are offering the schools normally with four different booklets for four different phases of the environmental and forestry education. The first booklet, *"How to plant a tree?"*, demonstrates how to plant trees in a technically correct way; the second one, *"Working at the school's tree nursery!"*, shows how to produce trees from seeds; the third booklet, *"Trees, our friends!"*, talks about the importance of trees in urban as well as rural environment; and the fourth one, *"We don't burn our future!"*, speaks about wildfires, their causes and prevention. The booklets come with a sticker that the children can put to their notebook or pencil case to show that they are part of our project! Every booklet includes a part where the parents are asked to read the booklet together with their children and to give their opinion about the theme, booklets and the project in general. This encourages a mutual learning process at home and at the same time provides us with important feedback. Due to a shortage of resources, we haven't been able to offer the fourth booklet for the schools already for a while and are running out of the other three soon too.

So here's where we would need your help; to ensure the continuation of the project by helping us with the printing costs of children's booklets for all the new participating kids next year! We are aiming to educate 20,000 new little foresters, meaning a need of 80,000 booklets. The booklets are an essential part of the education, as they are a great tool for reflections after the practical learning at the tree nursery and offer deeper knowledge about the environmental theme in a fun way.



YOU can help us to educate more children in Argentina for environmental awareness! Support us with the printing costs of children's booklets for the new participating pupils. Any help means a lot to us!!

