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**ENVIRONMENTAL PERCEPTION OF PUBLIC SCHOOL COORDINATORS IN
TRIANGULO MINEIRO REGION, BRAZIL**

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1. Abstract

Schools are facilitating agents that help on diffusion of values modifying individual and social environmental behavior; then there is a great need to develop the environmental theme in this institution, so that young people and adults become aware of the environmental problems that afflict the planet today and our role as causative agents and also solvers. The Brazilian Environmental Education Policy points out that schools are responsible for Environmental Education promotion through educational programs that they develop, thereby providing individual and collective formation of citizens who can identify, prevent and solve environmental problems. From this conception, it was emphasized the importance of knowing the level of knowledge of school managers on the environmental theme and on how their approach is carried out in schools. To obtain this data, questionnaires were developed and sent to public school managers in the Triangulo Mineiro region to analyze how Environmental Management is being treated by these public institutions and what is level of knowledge about the environmental issues of these educational managers. Through the questionnaires answered by the managers, it was inferred that the great majority of them find it fundamental and that schools should worry about the environmental issues. There are several public policies that encourage the practice of environmental issues in schools such as the National Environmental Education Policy. Even so, schools do not adhere to this theme because of deficiencies in public management such as lack of infrastructure, monetary and ideological incentive, links between institutions, knowledge about the environmental context, etc. It is concluded that schools and their managers have sought to perform environmental management in the way they can, seeking the necessary knowledge and carrying out environmental projects that are appropriate. But, unfortunately, they still run into shortcomings that make it difficult to aggregate environmental issues, which results in less generation of managers with environmental awareness in companies and who have a vision of integrated sustainability, and can act in the solution of environmental problems.

Key words: Sustainable Development, Environmental Perception, Environmental Education, Public Schools.

2. Introduction

As a result of several environmental issues that afflict the society nowadays, emerged the necessity to raise awareness about the environment and the sustainability importance in life's conservation on Earth (SANTOS and SILVA, 2011). Moreover, there are in Brazil some instruments that support the incorporation of environmental theme in the institutions such as Environmental Management (EM).

According to DIAS (2006), EM is an instrument to detect environmental problems caused by activities of organizations such as pollution and solid waste. EM is also related to the spread of sustainability, as it aims to use practices that guarantee the conservation and preservation of biodiversity, the recycling of raw materials and the reduction of the environmental impact of human activities on natural resources.

Another instrument in Brazil is Environmental Education, which according to the National Environmental Education Policy is an essential and permanent component of national education and it is the responsibility of public schools to promote environmental education in an integrated way to the educational programs they develop, thus providing individual and collective training of citizens who can identify, prevent and solve environmental problems (BRAZIL, 1999).

Despite of the innumerable benefits of the Environmental mechanisms and public policies, they are not very efficient and effective in Brazil. One of the reasons is that, currently, progress towards a sustainable society is permeated by conflicts, and the basic reasons that cause ecologically predatory activities can be attributed to social institutions and consumerist styles adopted by contemporary society. Consequently, this implies the need to stimulate a more active participation of society as a way to establish a socially identified set of problems, objectives and solutions (JACOBI, 1997).

As a result, the school is fundamental in the formation of citizens who are perpetrators of sustainable actions in society, where the development of sustainable projects and practices related to the environment within the schools generates citizens sensitized by the environmental questions, fomenting the development of an environmentally balanced country, based on the principles of sustainability, which are crucial for addressing socio-environmental challenges.

Additionally, school becomes an important spreader of knowledge, contributing for the citizen's mind changing with environmental awareness and transforming them in

protagonists in the sustainable development to become future managers of environmental organizations.

However, there are few studies in the Triangulo Mineiro region about how schools discuss environmental issues and influence the engagement of environmental managers within organizations. Therefore, the present work intends to contribute to the diagnosis of the perception of the educational managers about the GA and to show how the environmental theme is being developed in some public schools of the Triangulo Mineiro.

3. Methodology

In order to understand how Environmental Management and sustainability issues are handled in public schools of Triangulo Mineiro region, a questionnaire containing 18 questions was formulated and sent via e-mail to public schools coordination. It was obtained 68 answers, the data was grouped and analyzed by the methodology of descriptive statistics, aiming to summarize, describe or present data.

4. Results and implications

This study showed different visions about what each school performs in its school environment to propagate environmental management. A total of 68 responses were obtained and after collection, the data were tabulated and the results are discussed below.

After the data analysis, it was revealed that the majority of public schools coordinators have a good perception about what is Environmental Management (EM) and its importance into schools, besides knowing the fundamental relationship that exists between Environmental Education and Environmental Management. According to the study, 51 coordinators agreed about the statement that schools play a relevant role in EM and most of them acquired knowledge about EM from Lectures and Courses (30.9%) and Internet (29.4%). This shows that, in some schools, courses related to environmental issues are developed for the guidance of managers, which is an important mechanism for the correct implementation of environmental management in the institution. In addition, among the 68 managers who answered the questionnaire, 51

managers agreed on the affirmation that the school plays a relevant role in environmental management.

When asked if schools should wait government help to take environmental initiatives, 39 of 68 disagreed about this statement, only 5 coordinators affirmed that the government must take the initiative. Therefore, the majority of coordinators believe that schools do not need to be linked to government, recognizing the importance of discussion about environment inside the schools.

Another topic discussed was the possible advantages for the school when engaging in environmental projects and whether managers would be willing to invest financially in environmental improvements in schools. Among the 68 managers who answered the questionnaire, 43 managers recognize that there would be advantages to the school and 27 managers would be willing to invest financially in environmental projects at the school.

Regarding the financial return on investments in environmental projects, 31 managers assumed that there would be a financial return mainly through water and energy savings. Knowing the important role of the students on the environmental theme, 36 managers recognize that students would perceive improvements in school due to the practice of environmental actions. In addition, an average of 39% of schools disagreed that environmental actions would increase the workload of their employees.

Regarding the disposal of oil used in schools, 31 managers reported that they recycle the oil to produce soap in most cases, and only one school reported dumping the waste into the sink.

Concerning about the management of solid waste, it was verified that about 60% of schools do not separate solid waste between recyclable and non-recyclable. With respect to awareness campaigns, 11 managers reported that they do not carry out Environmental Education campaigns within schools.

When questioned about the importance of initiatives focused on environmental issues within schools, managers showed knowledge about the need for actions aimed at raising awareness and promoting measures related to environmental education and preservation of the environment within the school environment, in order to stimulate the raise up people who intends to spread sustainable actions worldwide.

Thus, despite the positive perception about environment, the actions of school's management do not coincide with the discourse, since they have little engagement, failing in carry out the discourse into practice. Moreover, school coordinators state that

there are some difficulties to promote sustainable practices such as lack of adequate management infrastructure, specialized courses on environmental issues and public politics, support from public agencies, shortcomings in financial incentives and investment to promote sustainable practices, and lack of support from public universities to assist in this discussion. Thus, this study emphasizes how Environmental Management is being treated by public school coordinators and highlights the need of developing the environmental theme within the schools environment.

5. Conclusion

This study shows up that school managers, for the most part, have a positive perception of the importance of GA in schools and they are aware of the crucial role of schools in shaping citizens' environmental awareness. However, the actions analyzed are not in line with the managers' discourse, since managers have little engagement and initiatives. That said, the managers pointed out several shortcomings and difficulties for the realization of sustainable projects, such as the lack of adequate management infrastructure, support from public agencies, financial incentives and external links such as the support of public schools. It can be concluded that there is little support for sustainable practices in schools and would be crucial the existence of more incentives and initiatives in the future on the part of public agencies, school administrators and societies to environmental issues do not be left in the school environment. Thus, schools are a key factor about mind changing of children and youngers for protection and conservation of environment, influencing in the construction of sustainable cities and communities. Further studies are recommended on how school influences the environmental awareness of its students and involved, and how this awareness brings about a more sustainable society. In this sense, this present study was aimed at analyzing the environmental perception of public school coordinators of Triangulo Mineiro, Brazil.

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