

Business Training to Decrease Violence in Sao Paulo, Brazil
Brazil
University of Virginia
Robin Kendall and Sarah Munford, USA

Section I

Our goal was to teach rudimentary business skills through the means of vocabulary lessons, computer classes, and career services to students at a youth trade school in Brazil. Such training would help provide the resources and skills needed to prepare students to enter the job market, promoting stability and prosperity in the neighborhood.

Since our project was largely educational and costs were low, we did not seek additional funding apart from the generous Davis Projects for Peace grant.

Implementing the Project

Upon arriving in Sao Paulo, Brazil, we met our first challenge: the student demographic we were expecting, and had planned our project around, differed from the reality at the Seeds of Hope Trade School. Initially, the school was designed to serve as a transition medium for orphans who had grown too old for the partnering orphanage. It was to be a place for them to live, learn trades, prepare for the workforce, and begin earning an income. Due to transportation issues from the orphanage and the lack of students who had actually turned 18 since the trade school opened, only one student, Raphael, was living at the school and fulfilling its intended purpose.

Not wanting to sacrifice the potential of the school, Seeds of Hope founder, Roberto Pena, opened it up to children in the surrounding low-income neighborhood of Guarulhos. Roberto's focus has shifted to providing English and other skill-based technical classes. Public school English courses are particularly weak and often the cause of students' failures on the English section of university entrance exams. Roberto, a Brazilian, stressed that English language skills are a crucial element to securing a higher paying job and benefits. Unfortunately, the interns that had been teaching English for the previous year had just departed a month prior, leaving a void in the trade school's curriculum.

Realizing that it was more important to help the largest number of students and the organization, rather than attempt to follow our stricter initial plan, we decided to be flexible and focus our business training efforts on English language skills. Every day, we taught beginner, intermediate, and advanced level classes, each 75 minutes long. The total enrollment was 56 students. Our students' ages ranged from 10-18 years old. While both of these factors provided their own challenging elements, the most variable and difficult issue was the English language skill level.

In the classroom, we focused on what we could best provide as native English speakers: listening and speaking skills. While every lesson also included vocabulary and grammar, we decided that proper pronunciation would be particularly helpful in the job market. We found that using American songs, children's books, and poetry made for especially interesting and engaging lessons. Our most enjoyable and worthwhile classes took place when we sat with the students in the class and practiced speaking or telling stories with one another; we even Skyped with classes in the United States. The cultural exchanges that took place were extremely fulfilling and rewarding on both sides.

Preparing for the Future

To supplement our daily lessons and teaching, we began to increase the business resources for Seeds of Hope for future orphans and classes when they start functioning as envisioned. This entailed bringing English language and business vocabulary books from the US, beginning an English curriculum to be taught after we left, and providing a classroom set of textbooks for students to follow at their own pace and allow for differentiated instruction. We saw the lack of English textbooks at the school, due to affordability, as an impediment to the sustainability and continuity of the classroom instruction, so we used the remaining funds in our budget to purchase a large set for the school. Similarly, as an ongoing business experience, we brought lotions for the older girls to sell at a high price, due to the premium placed on American goods in Brazil.

Lastly, we also sought to help recruit future teachers for the school. We helped set up an apartment in the school where future teacher-interns can live, making the position a more attractive one. It is our hope that our provision of textbooks and a curriculum will aid such future teachers in their English instruction. We also greatly desire the chance to implement personally, or through future interns, our originally planned business lessons. There is a growing waitlist each semester for the classes offered

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at Seeds of Hope. The 56 students and their families that we were able to benefit are just the beginning of the potential impact such a school can have.

Section II

Peace is a state in which people coexist in a community with the freedom to choose, and the resources to pursue, non-violent paths to prosperity. Peace is inherently social, existing between individuals and groups. This social contract grows stronger when there is a feeling of equality and trust. Many elements, such as economic inequality, education disparities and high unemployment, particularly weaken this sense of community and security between individuals. Education is crucial for enabling people to seek out employment opportunities and thus provide income to their households. It is also a means of gaining a broader perspective of the world and the others with whom it is shared. Therefore, education is vital to the peace process.

Seeds of Hope Trade School directly impacts both short-term and long-term peace in the Guarulhos neighborhood. Most directly, the school is a safe haven off the streets for both the orphans who move to the school and for the children in the neighborhood. Many of the houses in the area are too small for groups to hang out in, thus children are forced to gather and play in the streets, where they are tempted to become more involved in drugs or gangs, or become the victim of such groups. The trade school allows the children to have a place to relax, learn, and engage with older mentors in a safe and fun environment, directly contributing to the peace of the neighborhood.

Long-term, the graduates of Seeds of Hope Trade School will gain the skills and the resources to pursue higher education or employment. The English classes, skill instruction, and business training, now and in the future, will provide a lasting impact on the students' lives, educationally and professionally. The extra English instruction will, we hope, help students pass the university entrance exams. For those who do not make it into university, business training and English will help them secure jobs that employ the skills that they have also learned at the school. Such opportunities will likely lead to higher income for themselves and their families, ultimately improving the conditions of the Guarulhos neighborhood itself.

The successful trade school graduates will be far less likely to turn to drugs and violence as a means of monetary sustenance or entertainment, creating more trust and security within the area. Though the process to peace can be a long one, education helps move towards restoring a non-violent social environment and economic prosperity to an area.

Reflections

The Seeds of Hope Trade School defies any notion that people in many of Brazil's slums are apathetic about education. The trade school is a free, voluntary program that students attend above and beyond the regular public school hours. Not only the continual attendance and the long waitlist to get into classes, but also the sheer excitement of the beginner class when we finally finished reading *Zack's Alligator*, overwhelmingly proved that the students are enthusiastic, engaged, and eager for knowledge. Their excitement for learning was a contagious reminder that education systems around the world cannot let their children down by insufficiently providing them with the resources and opportunities for success.

"I am currently working for Teach For America and my experience with this Davis Projects for Peace has only furthered my insistence that all people everywhere, no matter their race, ethnicity, zip code and income level, deserve access to life's great opportunities. From our students, Sarah, and Roberto, I was reminded daily that with a fervent belief, miraculous visions can come into fruition. Seeds of Hope is an example of that tremendous vision to further peace in Sao Paulo." -Robin Kendall

"This project allowed Robin and me to lend our skills and time to the Seeds of Hope Trade School, in return for unforgettable lessons about the importance of education as a building block for peace, as well as the struggles associated with providing excellent instruction. More importantly, this Davis Projects for Peace experience instilled in me a renewed hope in the potential of the younger generation of rising students, eager to learn, grow, and change their communities." -Sarah Munford

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