

open*x*schools

EDUCATION AND CULTURE FOR PEACE



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
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UNESCO
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Building a culture of peace

In 2000, within the framework of the International Year for a Culture of Peace, the UNESCO Brasilia Office launched the *Open Schools: education and culture for peace Programme*, an initiative that **opens public schools on weekends to offer artistic, cultural, leisure and sports activities**, as well as initial work training, to young people and their communities.

The *Open Schools Programme* is based on a **culture of peace and nonviolence** to promote the citizenship of adolescents, youngsters and the school community as a whole. It is an initiative in which several areas of the UNESCO mandate come together - an action for social inclusion that stimulates improvements in schools, cultural participation, increased awareness in regard to STD-AIDS prevention and care for the environment.

In addition to promoting human development, citizenship and the social inclusion of youngsters and their communities, the *Open Schools Programme* fosters an **improvement in the quality of the country's education** by increasing opportunities for access to educational, cultural, sports, leisure and income-generating activities. Activities are open to the entire community and have the additional purpose of improving the quality of relations and fostering interaction among teachers, students and family members.

Becoming a public policy

The *Open Schools Programme* is a UNESCO project that has become a **national public policy** at the municipal, state and federal levels. It was initially implemented by UNESCO in cooperation with State and Municipal Education authorities. In 2004, the Brazilian Ministry of Education adopted its methodology for the *Open Schools: education, culture, sport and work Programme*, which is implemented in partnership with UNESCO.



Photos: Milla Petrillo/UNESCO

The Open School Programme in Ceara (Northeastern Region) in Rio de Janeiro.



School in Rio de Janeiro.

One of the main features of the Programme is the simplicity with which **it can be replicated** even in other countries - Argentina was the first country to implement a pilot version of the Programme. In Central America, Honduras and El Salvador have also begun discussing how to implement it. The design of the *Open Schools Programme* **favours local management autonomy** which can adapt it according to the **social capital** that exists in the communities and the financial resources available, in order to ensure its sustainability. The average monthly per student cost of the Programme varies from 1 to 2 US dollars. The flexibility of the *Open Schools Programme* makes it possible to operate it on an ever increasing **scale** and allows UNESCO to fulfill one of its missions, **the transfer of knowledge**, which in this case is facilitated by the methodology design, by means of Programme staff training and when planning its local format.

Currently, the *Open Schools Programme* opens more than 4,000 schools every weekend in all regions of the country, to the benefit of around 4 million people.

Strengthening youth

The *Open Schools Programme* was created by a team from the Social and Human Sciences Sector of the UNESCO Brasilia Office as a response to data collected by a survey carried out by the Office which identified **young people** as being one of the **most vulnerable social groups** of the country.

Brazil's youth population, a contingent of 35 million people (20% of the total Brazilian population) shows a high school drop-out rate - this population has an average of only seven years of schooling - and the cycle that begins with low schooling levels leads to under-employment or unemployment.

Low schooling levels, however, are a reality that mainly affects **young people** in situations of **social vulnerability**. Data of the Ministry of Social Development reveal that 60% of students from poor families start dropping out of school between the ages of 15 and 16 while 80% of students in the same age group from more well-off families remain in school. The richer ones only stop studying when they are 24 to 25 years old.

Young people are also the **main protagonists of situations involving violent deaths** - they are the ones that die most and the ones that kill most. According to research carried out by the UNESCO Brasilia Office, there is an increase of 68.2% in murders involving the population of young people over the weekends. Both low schooling levels and violent incidents affect socially vulnerable young Brazilians who make up the majority of students in public schools, where the *Open Schools Programme* is being implemented.

By focusing on youngsters, the school and the community, the *Open Schools Programme* has managed to **pacify the school environment and its surroundings and strengthen young people**. Opening the school gates on Saturdays and Sundays alters the image of the traditional school which start to meet **local needs**. When the young person is recognized, his or her self-esteem is raised. Workshops on art, culture and sport favour the emergence of new expressions and strengthen identities.



Reducing violence

Evaluations of the *Open Schools Programme* carried out over the last six years by the UNESCO Brasilia Office and its partners have proved its success with relation to a **reduction in the levels of violence** registered in schools and their surroundings. The data show a reduction in crimes committed against persons - like murder and bodily harm - and against property, that is, school equipment. Those disciplinary problems that can be solved within the school environment have also shown a reduction.

In São Paulo, where the *Open Schools Programme*, known locally as the *Family School*, was implemented in 5,306 schools between 2003 and 2006, **breaches of discipline were reduced by 46.5%** over the period and criminal acts by 45.5%.

Research carried out in 2001 with a school community in Rio de Janeiro on the *Open Schools Programme*, known as *Schools of Peace*, showed that **82% of educators and 70% of the students believed that opening the school gates** had helped to pacify the school. The same research demonstrated that the first schools that joined the Programme in 2000 showed, one year later, levels of violence 31% lower than in those schools that had not yet been opened to the community. In Recife this level decreased as much as 54% between 2000 and 2002.

The reduction in levels of violence shows that the *Open Schools Programme* has contributed to pacifying the school environment. By stimulating the coming together of people from different social backgrounds, the Programme helps to transform **schoolyards and patios** into places suitable for constructing citizenship and a culture of peace.



School brings the community together

The Open School Programme in Manaus (Amazon Region).

Anyone living in the outlying neighbourhoods of São Paulo learns to live side by side with poverty and violence from an early age. Brasilândia, where the Professor Crispim de Oliveira school is located, was once the Federal District's vice-champion in terms of homicides. Up until 2003, shootouts were common events in the streets near the school taking place as often as once a week. "Children who stay out in the street only see people selling drugs and handling weapons" states one of the community's mothers. For almost 23 years the school kept its gates locked with chains and padlocks during school hours. The idea was to protect students, teachers and staff from the violence in the neighbourhood.

Tension was a part of the routine. "It was common for gangs to walk on the roof during classes. They broke roofing and made a lot of noise scaring the teachers and students, but nobody had the courage to react" says Albino Sardinha, deputy principal and the person responsible for opening the school on weekends. Night was the time for invasions, vandalism and stealing.



The beginning of the school year in 2004 was a kind of landmark: at daybreak on the first day of school the gates were wide open. It had been almost two years since the school joined the state programme for opening on weekends. The neighbourhood is still a hostile area, but opening the gates has changed the relationship between school and community.

In August of 2003, when the government of São Paulo, in partnership with UNESCO, decided to open schools on weekends, many teachers and principals of schools located in the city's outlying neighbourhoods were concerned about the physical integrity of buildings and equipment and above all about the safety of those who stayed in school on Saturdays and Sundays. The Professor Crispim School was no exception. "The teachers were scared to death that the school would be blown apart on the opening day", remembers Albino.

The challenge facing this school was to establish itself as a kind of cultural centre and a refuge for the community, where in the midst of the general violence, there would be a space for talking a little about peace - peace among neighbours, acquaintances, and colleagues.

School in Manaus (Amazon Region).



School in Manaus (Amazon Region).

The protagonists of a great number of the homicides registered in the city of São Paulo, both victims and aggressors, come from the same community. To make it easier for parents to have contact with the school, in addition to unlocking the gates, the authorities extended the working hours of the school secretary's office (where information on attendance and grades can be obtained) which included lunch-time opening as well. In a neighbourhood where there are no leisure options and very few public spaces like squares and sports facilities, the community immediately began to use the school. The schoolyard has already served as an altar for weddings, a space for religious services and for collective birthday parties. The only restriction is that no alcoholic beverages can be served. "A school that cannot count on the presence of parents and the community is like a party with no guests: it's no fun and meaningless" is how 34 year-old teacher Eliane Ferreira's puts it.*

* Excerpt from the book *Dias de Paz* published by the UNESCO Brasilia Office in 2006. The publication is a book-report which describes the strengthening between eight public schools and their respective communities in the State of São Paulo.



TO OPEN SCHOOLS ON WEEKENDS MEANS:

- Bringing the community and its youngsters together in the school spaces
- Constructing spaces for dialogue and living together
- Opening public schools on Saturdays and Sundays
- Offering sports, cultural, arts and leisure activities and initial work training for youngsters
- Mapping the talents that exist in the community
- Inviting those with talents to coordinate workshops in the school
- Encouraging the transfer of knowledge existing in the community
- Reducing the cycle of violence in the community and in the school environment
- Broadening the horizons of the community and its young people
- Strengthening the school so that it can become an agglutinating centre and a centre for the diffusion of knowledge
- Building a culture of peace

