

Title of Project: "Navigating Discourses of Sexuality: Resistance to Homophobia in Brazil"

City and Country where project took place: Sao Paulo, Brazil

Sponsoring College: Earlham College

Students: Marcos Ramos Junior (Brazil, Earlham College, UWC-Waterford Kamhlaba) and Kavi Ramburn (Mauritius, Earlham College, UWC-Mahindra College)

Davis Projects for Peace (Summer 2014) – Final Report

Section 1

Summary of project goals

The project sought to address the problem of homophobia in Brazil, by administering workshops targeted at 15-20 year olds in the city of Sao Paulo. By targeting the youth, the project aimed to help the generation of future policy-makers to better understand LGBTQ issues, helping to reduce the spread of homophobic attacks and bullying.

Other fund-raising efforts' contribution to the project

We were able to use certain facilities (classrooms, soccer field, dining area) at the "Creche Menino Jesus," free of charge. By waiving part of the utility costs, the managers at the "Creche Menino Jesus" enabled us to use money from our budget for other purposes, such as buying a sound-system, which was used when projecting videos during the workshops. Our guest-speaker also waived her honorarium and travelling fees, once again allowing us to channel the extra funds to other areas of the project.

Details about the project

From conversations held with participants and evaluations completed by the youth at the end of the workshops, it seems that the project was successful. The large majority of participants mentioned that they greatly benefitted from the discussions and activities held during the workshops. Most participants were grateful for having been provided with a safe space to discuss taboo issues, explaining that the workshops helped them overcome numerous misconceptions they had about LGBTQ issues.

The discussions led by Marcos were highly animated, with him pushing the youth to challenge their pre-held beliefs about LGBTQ issues, helping the participants understand the notion of "privilege," and aiding the youngsters discover how they can respect and support people marginalized because of their sexual orientation.

Because of the undivided attention to the soccer World Cup which took place in June-July, and the extended holidays given to youngsters, one of the main difficulties that we encountered was to have regular attendance at the workshops. Nevertheless, by collaborating with youth groups from the Freguesia do O neighborhood, we were able to regroup a total of 70 participants across different workshop sessions, with each of the participants coming from different socio-economic and racial backgrounds. Around half of the participants came from an organization regrouping youth before and after school hours, aiming to keep them off the streets in the Freguesia do O neighborhood. The other half was part of a catechism group from a church in the same neighborhood.

Thankfully, we did not encounter any budget constraints. By being able to use certain facilities at the "Creche Menino Jesus" free of charge, and by paying less than initially anticipated for workshop materials and food for the participants, we were able to reallocate extra funds to other areas of the project.

Given that Marcos is from the Freguesia do O neighborhood, he did not experience any language or cultural barrier. Kavi, on the other hand, somewhat struggled with contributing to/leading discussions, due to his limited knowledge of Portuguese. While Marcos took charge of leading discussions, Kavi therefore focused on the logistical aspects of the workshops.

We seek to make this project sustainable in two main ways. Firstly, we hope that a few of the participants are able to reproduce the workshops for other youth in Sao Paulo. While we have regrouped a few youngsters interested in further raising awareness among other youth, most of them feel inexperienced and unsure about leading their own workshops, given that they are only 15-16. Nevertheless, we are still working with these individuals, hoping that they will be able to deliver their own workshops in the near future. Secondly, we have made donations to the two youth groups we collaborated with, as they expressed interest in bringing in other speakers to address other critical issues. For example, the catechism group has expressed interest in bringing in a speaker to talk about the problem of racism in Brazil. We think that by fostering such discussions, we will perpetuate our initial objective of raising awareness about critical issues among the younger generation in Brazil.

Section 2

Peace can be defined as a state where no violence exists, and where, if disagreements arise between different people or groups, those divergences can be discussed, reflected upon, and addressed in a civilized and productive manner.

In the short-term, we hope that our project will contribute to peace by helping reduce bullying against LGBTQ people in schools in the Freguesia do O neighborhood. By having gained a better understanding of LGBTQ issues, we believe that these youngsters are now equipped to stand up for themselves or friends facing violence because of their sexual orientation, as well as themselves now being unlikely perpetrators of such violent acts.

In the long-term, we hope that the participants will be able to meaningfully impact those around them. We hope that these youngsters will be able to push family members, friends, and others around them to reflect upon their pre-held notions about LGBTQ people. Furthermore, we hope that these youngsters can grow up to become leaders of youth groups in the region, or even turn out to be future policy-makers positively influencing decisions made about LGBTQ issues.

This project has truly been a transformative experience for both of us. Seeing how challenging it was to encourage teenagers to talk about taboo issues has pushed us to develop various techniques to invite the participants to engage in productive discussions and be critical about their pre-conceived ideas. This project has also served in reinforcing our belief that discussions taking place in a safe environment can push participants to put aside their pre-held notions and come out of such debates with a more respectful and tolerant outlook for others' differences. Seeing the young participants go through such changes has given us further hope that the simple process of being critical of one's own set of pre-conceived notions can help foster valuable change across the world.

- Quotation: "The workshops provided the youngsters with a safe space to discuss taboo issues, transforming their views about LGBTQ issues, and thereby reinforced our belief that the simple process of critically challenging one's own set of pre-conceived notions can help foster valuable change across the world."

