



EDISCA, dance and social transformation in northeastern Brazil

Dora Andrade, General Manager, and **Cláudia Andrade**, Administrative Manager, EDISCA, link their work in dance to open up real human development through their associated educational health programmes



EDISCA is an educational organisation located in the northeastern Brazilian region known as Ceará. More precisely, in the city of Fortaleza. Its mission is to promote human development of boys, girls and adolescents living in contexts of social vulnerability. Development is achieved through an interdimensional training course.

EDISCA was founded in 1991 by Dora Andrade and a group of dancers. Dora was aware of the appalling social inequity existing in Fortaleza, which condemned kids and adolescents to a hopeless future, giving them no opportunities to expand their potential. The consolidation of the educational programme was the result of testing a methodology based on art, for its potential to develop the different dimensions of human beings. So, the first implemented programmes were art: dance, chorus and theatre. Later on, after properly addressing the outstanding delayed formal learning of kids, a Learning Strengthening Programme was designed. Simultaneously, in order to face the nourishment gap and the fragile health existing among the kids, two new nutrition and health programmes were implemented.

Throughout the last 22 years of existence, the programmes have always

been up-dated, to match the changing needs, wishes and potential of kids and adolescents. In the meantime, the artistic programmes that formed the axis of EDISCA's educational structure, matured and became the main institutional focus, because of the dance workshops and the quality of the dance performances, recognised both at national and international levels. But also, because kids training led them to become competent, ethic and committed dancers, choreographers, trainers, artistic producers and cultural managers, once they entered the productive world.

EDISCA created its own dance repertoire fostering the release of its social work as much as boosting the appreciation of the huge creative, productive and leadership potential of dancing kids and adolescents. So far, we have created a large number of productions since 1992.

Up to last April, the audience of 251,324 spectators watched 324 performances locally and internationally. In Brazil: Fortaleza, Ilheus, Brasília, Campina Grande, Recife, Sobral, José dos Campos, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. Outside Brazil: Düsseldorf, Germany; St. Pölten, Austria; Paris, France and New York, United States of America. From the very beginning, EDISCA trained 1,853 kids and adolescents for an average of 4.5 years each.

The Learning Strengthening Programme originated on the observation of low levels of learning among the participating kids. Later on, being largely checked and up-dated, it included new approaches and developed new methodologies. Lessons overflowed from classrooms into the Library – where there are more than 5,000 books – encouraging reading and research; into the stage with film exhibitions, ballets and theatre; into mapping cultural sites in the city while visiting art exhibits.

Not a single kid has abandoned school in all these years while 126 students went into college, 42 of them >

All photos (except bottom far left): Edisca. Photos: Mila Petrillo. Bottom far left: Dora Andrade

to State Universities. This means a paradigm shift, considering that their parents educational level included 13.2% of fathers and 7.7% of mothers as absolutely illiterate with an average of 6.06 and 6.88 years of school attendance, respectively.

Regarding normal school promotion, 11% of EDISCA students suffer from a distortion between their real age and the corresponding school grade, while in Brazil and Northeast, percentages rise up to 25.7% and 37.9%, respectively. EDISCA students' failure rates at formal schools hit 4.2% during 2012. In Brazil and Ceará, respectively, it rose up to 21% and 18.7%. EDISCA thinks these results derive from the quality of the implemented actions, from the learning stimulus based on a deep faith on the students' potentialities and from the differentiated methodology that places art as an innovation and creativity beam.

The Learning Strengthening Programme received the Social Technology Brazil Bank Award in

2003, acknowledging its potentiality and replicability. Health and nutrition programmes were always reformulated and up-dated. The health promotion actions focused on prevention and educational aspects, while still carrying out healing actions. Every year, several health campaigns take place and improvements in students' individual health is closely followed, thus improving resources allocation and notably reducing illnesses. Campaigns include healthier nutrition including A, B and C vitamins, ferrous sulphate and folic acid, dental check-up, blood analysis and vaccination against flu and hepatitis.

Apart from the above mentioned actions, the health programme offers a psychology space, fostering a qualified and democratic space for listening, reflecting upon, solving, deconstructing and reinventing realities. This gave place to other programmes oriented to social transformation and citizenship training, which eventually strengthened the institutional 'spirit'.

In 2003, Life is Feminine Project started. It was aimed at the student's mothers, as part of the constant revision and up-dating of the activities started in 1998. It included activities related to personal development, citizenship, formal education and basic professionalisation. Women started acquiring productive skills while participating in educational opportunities oriented to their personal and social growth. During the process, there was strong evidence that women could design and implement personal projects that incorporated changes at personal and interpersonal levels, which eventually led them to develop a working activity with economic return.

Since 2003, Life is Feminine took care of 319 mothers, aunts, grandmothers from EDISCA students, that participate in their daily training. The permanency average is two years of daily participation. Among other activities, 41 professional trainings took place, meaning 4,500 teaching lessons.

In 2009, Life is Feminine was acknowledged as Social Technology by Brazil Bank Foundation. In 2010, the same project was chosen by Itaú Social Foundation to be presented at a seminar on economic assessment of social projects and in 2012, was awarded at the 4th edition of the ODM Brazil Prize.

During these last years, EDISCA became fully aware of the impact of its combined educational approach at the service of the current social and cultural Fortaleza conjuncture, observing the presence of former EDISCA students participating as professional artists, cultural activists, social entrepreneurs, founders and managers of new dance companies, cultural managers at different public institutions, apart from those who became doctors, engineers, psychologists and so on.

As a recognition of its educational, artistic and managerial track record, EDISCA has been awarded many prizes, most recently the Ordem do Mérito Cultural 2012, given by the Presidency of Brazil.



Edisca. Photo: Mila Petrillo

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