

Brazil's Portuguese Language Olympics

Brazil's Portuguese Language Olympics: Writing the Future program began in 2002 as a private initiative aimed at developing reading and writing skills among public school students. It was adopted in 2008 by the Brazilian Ministry of Education as an important teacher's training strategy and national education policy that has been integrated into the National Education Development Plan. By promoting a national writing competition for children from all over Brazil and offering well-structured, dynamic educational materials and lesson plans, the program encourages teachers to submit their students' work in the Olympics, while improving their teaching methods. Banco Itaú has developed the program through Itaú Social Foundation in partnership with Cenpec (Center for Studies and Research in Education, Culture and Community Action), a social organization focused on improving public education. The program alternates one year of competition with one year that is dedicated exclusively to teachers' training, leadership development, mobilization and networking. The writing competition takes place in even-numbered years. The first stage of the Olympics takes place locally (by school, city and state), and is followed by the selection of 500 semifinalists who come, along with their teachers, from the main capitals of Brazil. They participate in workshops on reading, critical analysis, rewriting of the texts submitted and other didactic and cultural activities, allowing for an exchange of experiences between teachers and students throughout the country. The second phase involves the regional selection of 152 finalists from different states who are able to participate at the final stage of the competition. At the end a total of 20 top winners are selected, five for each category: poetry, memories and Op-Ed article and short essay.

During odd-numbered years, there are training activities for the enrolled teachers. Teachers who are enrolled in the program receive continuously updated teaching materials, information and lesson plans that are applicable to their daily class routine. These lesson plans were created to be aligned with curriculum standards and become part of teachers' regular Portuguese language classes. Thus, all public students benefit from the program, not just those enrolled and selected in the competition. Teachers can also enroll in on-site training workshops, virtual courses and orientation forums on the internet.

Brazil's Portuguese Language Olympics improves instructional skills among Portuguese teachers so that they can effectively help their students experience the transforming power of writing, as a tool for exercising citizenship. By creating a virtual community to train teachers, the program prepares multipliers/peer leaders to work directly with children and also with other educators in the upcoming Olympic seasons. These multipliers are already involved in the program's next season, starting a new training cycle.

Brazil's Portuguese Language Olympics: Writing the Future has increasingly mobilized teachers in the search for educational improvement: its reach has more than tripled between 2002 and 2006, and its growth took off impressively after it became a national public policy in 2008, when it began to reach 99% of Brazilian cities. The impact of the initiative was evaluated in a national application test in 2006: the average Portuguese language grade for students from schools that participated in the program were 1.9 times higher than those of students from non-participating schools (a statistically significant difference). This difference rose to 2.69 points among the more diligent schools that participated in all the seasons up to 2006. An economic analysis has shown that participating students

can have up to a 24% economic return (impact of the study on expected salary valuation).

The Olympics' growing level of community mobilization is also a reflection of the theme chosen for the compositions every year at the Olympics: "the place where I live." The program involves representatives from civil society (through the Cenpec, Itaú Social Foundation organizations) and the community (teachers, students and parents, Undime – National Union of Municipal Secretaries of Education, Consed – National Council of Secretaries of Education and the television channel Futura) and the government. Mobilization is growing and allows for adjustments to be continually revised during the on-site meetings at the teachers' training workshops as well as in the virtual community on the internet to discuss cases: www.escrevendoofuturo.org.br. The mediators of these forums are teachers who completed the program's teachers' workshops.

Some factors contribute to the program's sustainability: the main one is certainly the adoption of the program by the Ministry of Education, which broadens its application goals to all state and municipal school systems, considering each student as a potential beneficiary. A relationship was created with all city and state departments of education so they would engage in and support the program. Another basis for sustaining the program is the participating community: gathered at the workshops and in-site and virtual forums, teachers form a cohesive group of people sharing experiences, opinions, success and non-success stories and tools. The program trains teachers and multipliers/peer leaders, school officials and discussion mediators whose mission is to replicate the experience in more and more locations, engaging more teachers. Finally, the technical coordination by Cenpec and Itaú Social, as well as shared financing commitment from Banco Itaú and the Ministry of Education guarantee the sustainability of the program.

The program was conceived to be implemented in all Brazilian cities (it has already reached 99% of them). It can be replicated in any country where the Portuguese language is spoken. Finally, its originality is in being a teacher training project that also includes a powerful mobilization tool. Brazil's *Portuguese Language Olympics: Writing the Future* program truly represents an opportunity to strengthen and/or create closer relationships between teachers and students, since it is through the teacher that students write, submit their text and re-write it. By building teachers' instructional capacity, and offering them hands-on, high-quality educational materials, the Olympics is much more than a competition. It's a national strategy for teachers training and leadership development.

	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010
Escolas	4.657	10.544	15.461	55.750	60.123
Inscrições de professores	7.858	25.377	33.449	202.280	239.435
Alunos envolvidos	368.344	1,5 milhão	1,6 milhão	6 milhões	7 milhões
Municípios	1.466	2.402	2.757	5.445	5.488

Costs associated with the development and implementation of the activity Competition year: R\$ 20 Million Teachers Training and Mobilization year: R\$ 12 Million

Contact information: Camila Feldberg Macedo Pinto (camila.pinto@itau-unibanco.com.br)