CASE 5

Whatever It Takes: Combating Disadvantage in Rio de Janeiro Through the Schools for Tomorrow

Origins .................. page 99
Implementation .... page 101
Policy Elements .... page 103
Challenges ............ page 106
Conclusion .......... page 108
This case focuses on a large-scale school support program initiated in 2009 by the Education Secretariat of the city of Rio de Janeiro. Existing case studies provide an overview of the features and impact of Schools for Tomorrow. This case deepens the story by discussing the political challenge of introducing and maintaining the program, how a small team managed to keep the running for five years, and what can be learned from its success and its demise.

Rio de Janeiro – which is the largest city in the state that shares its name – has a population of around six million people packed into just under 500 square miles. The Secretariat is responsible for all basic education (Ensino Fundamental), while the state is responsible for most high schools. There are over 1,000 primary schools in the city that serve children from age six to 14.

The city is characterized by dramatic social inequality: alongside some of the most desirable beach fronts and shopping streets in the world, there are many square miles of favelas: communities of ill-structured housing that are home to over one million people. The favelas are known for violence. Although in recent decades there have been intermittently successful efforts to “pacify” favela areas with new police stations and lighting, many remain places that are avoided by others in the city, including public service professionals. The communities living there are underserved in terms of education, health, and social services.

### The Case for Change

In 2009, Claudia Costin came to office as Secretary of Education for the city of Rio de Janeiro. Costin came to her position with an impressive resume: a former Secretary of Culture for the state government of Sao Paulo, home to Brazil’s capital; holder of several university positions in public policy; and Vice President of one of Brazil’s largest foundations focused on education, Fundação Victor Civita. Costin had experience, therefore, not only in leading large government departments, but also in school innovation.

During her first months in office, Costin and her team in the Secretariat carried out an evaluation of schools in the city. They drew on the data from the Brazilian Education Quality Index (IDEB) – the standardized tests that had been introduced across Brazil in 2007 – and broke down results by area in a way previous administrators had not. The findings were not good: 30,000 4th - 6th grade students were practically illiterate, and these students were mostly concentrated together in schools in the favelas. In one part of the neighborhood of Ipanema, they saw that a school with an average score of 1.8 was just half a kilometer from another school where the average score was 5.4. The difference between them was that one was just inside the favela, while the other was just outside.

It was clear that there was some relationship between school outcomes and being situated within violence- and conflict-affected areas. The Secretariat team knew anecdotally that the environment impacted the attendance of teachers and students in those areas. Moreover, everything they knew about child development suggested that the environment must be having a major impact on students’ social and emotional – as well as academic – development. Therefore, for the first time, the Secretariat decided that those schools...
needed special attention, and that a typical school improvement approach was not going to work. Consequently, with the unofficial slogan “a different look at education,” Costin and her team began seeking out ways to provide students, teachers, and parents in violence-affected areas with different types of support.

Fortunately, they were not the only ones who recognised the need for extra support. There were hundreds of NGOs working across Rio, many with an interest in serving the most disadvantaged communities. The Secretariat began to pull these organizations together as partners. In December 2010, what had started as a set of sporadic efforts from within the Secretariat became an official program, with additional funding and oversight from UNESCO. Thus “Schools for Tomorrow” was born.

**GETTING UP AND RUNNING**

The central structure of *Programa Escolas do Amanhã* (Schools for Tomorrow) was simply the name: once a school was designated a School for Tomorrow, it received access to a range of programs and offerings from partners resourced by the Secretariat. The lion’s share of the funds for programs came from a budget that had been allocated from the federal government to provide afterschool programs. This was designed to provide for around 150 schools, and thus it was decided that there would be 150 Schools for Tomorrow (later increased to 155), and in the place of generic afterschool activities, they would focus on providing services most impactful for the identified communities.

The Secretariat knew which schools they wanted to target — those that were low performing on the IDEB and in areas affected by violence and disadvantage — but they did not initially have formal criteria as to how schools should be selected. From the beginning, there were more schools that might fit the bill than could be funded. Initially this was not a problem: schools that were eligible did not leap at the chance to be part of a program that labeled them as failing and violence-ridden. As the advantages attached to the designation became clear — including, in particular, the new science labs and health workers — many more schools wanted to join.

During this start-up phase, the program was managed by whomever Costin could find time from in the Secretariat. They relied heavily on the Secretariat’s regional coordinators. These ten (later 11) coordinators, each leading a small office, were responsible for administering all the Secretariat’s policy, not just Schools for Tomorrow. Each regional coordinator oversaw 100-150 schools, so the division created manageable units. It also created variation: regional coordinators developed relationships with certain schools that resulted in some favoritism in the allocation of opportunities. In the case of Schools for Tomorrow, which schools ended up amongst the lucky 155 emerged partly from those relationships. There were upsides and downsides to this: on the one hand, it meant that the program did not waste time on schools that were not prepared to engage properly with the Secretariat. On the other, the lack of transparency in selection caused some disgruntlement that would trouble the program in later years.
In hindsight, it is a considerable regret of later program coordinators that the selection of schools was rushed, particularly in regard to later possibilities of evaluation. The over-supply of eligible schools could have allowed for the creation of matched control groups or even randomized allocation, but at the time the sense of urgency had taken over. Samantha Barthelemys, who joined the program team later as a secondee from UNESCO, explained: there was such concern for the dramatic disparities and terrible conditions in some of their targets schools that the overriding idea was, “We have to do something now.” Thus, just six months after Costin entered office, full implementation began.

IMPLEMENTATION

COLLABORATION WITH SCHOOLS

Initially, the elements of Schools for Tomorrow were implemented on a somewhat ad-hoc basis, with the Secretariat team and regional coordinators trying their best to match programs to needs. Nevertheless, the program had had impact: by 2011, Schools for Tomorrow were catching up with higher performing schools in the city, with an average 33% improvement in performance on the IDEB, compared to a city average improvement of 22%.\(^2\) The schools also saw a 38% reduction in dropout rates. Reports from the ground were extremely positive, but efforts at more thorough evaluation repeatedly stalled.

In 2011, new staff came to the Secretariat, seconded from UNESCO. They found a project that was well underway, but messy. No one seemed sure if programs were being deployed efficiently or which ones were working best.

In December of that year, the team embarked on two months of collective planning to create a more coherent shape for Schools for Tomorrow. They brought together all regional coordinators and principals of program schools, listened to everything they had to say, and then together came up with short-, mid-, and long-term plans for the Schools for Tomorrow based on the collective priorities. This was the first time the central team had really engaged with all of the schools; before then, they tended to focus on those with the most urgent needs. As a result, this process – during which each school conducted a “SWOT” (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis – revealed some striking shared interests between schools:

- We had schools that were 80 km apart, in completely different worlds. But getting these schools to meet for the first time [they saw that] that “my problem is their problem.”

Moreover, they found that many of the schools had been grappling with the same problems for years, and between them they also had a lot of solutions:

- We were bringing in all these things from outside but we didn’t need to… the best teachers were there, they just needed help to put their ideas together for someone else… It was really interesting to see that the [schools within the] program [are] the richest thing we have.

Out of this process came not only a plan for the following two years of work, but also a new way of working. Subsequently, programs were not allocated but rather introduced to schools as opportunities that they could opt into. The central team
consulted with schools on decisions wherever possible and worked to maximize the exchange of ideas between schools.

Barthelemy reflects that the process really shifted how many of them thought about the design and purpose of the program:

*We don’t know half of what we think we knew. We did know these schools were faring worse than other schools, and the socioeconomic situation is really important and the violence is a reality, but we didn’t have the solutions and we didn’t know – we couldn’t know – what would work best for each school.*

In the future, Barthelemy would take the knowledge already existing within the schools much more seriously: “Obviously today people say you have to work together, but it wasn’t obvious then.” The reflection is a reminder of how easily other priorities can take over in government, and make collaborative work between government, schools, and partners difficult.

**TOWARDS SCHOOLS FOR TOMORROW 2.0**

By 2013, the partnership with UNESCO was in its third year, and the team was eager to ensure that Schools for Tomorrow was being fully embedded into schools. An unpublished update for a case study report, prepared in 2013, reflects that:

*There is still limited knowledge of the Program, its pillars and main objectives by the students and their families… a strategy could be developed in schools in order to make clear the impact of the aims and intention of the Program.*

There were signs that Schools for Tomorrow did not have a firm position within the school system, in terms of parental recognition and support. The team already foresaw that it might not survive without Costin and UNESCO’s support.

In order to build sustainability, for 2013 there was an extensive set of plans to provide more training for schools and Secretariat staff in methods relevant to the program, and to form stronger partnerships with other government departments. Additionally, there was a plan to develop a full monitoring and evaluation strategy to gain more information about what was working well and what was not. When Fabio Campos was appointed manager of the Schools for Tomorrow project in May 2013, he recalls the feeling that they were building “Schools for Tomorrow 2.0,” streamlining aspects of the program and embedding others, to make it sustainable for the future.

The timing of this new wave of activity could not have been worse. On May 12, teachers in Rio went on strike. The strike lasted on and off for the following three months, with intermittent bursts of violent protest that left relationships between teachers and the public very frayed. It was now very difficult for anyone from the Secretariat to engage with schools as teachers would not talk to managers. Principals became the only channel of information, and many of them were understandably distracted with the effort to simply keep their school doors open.

There were additional strikes in October 2013, increasingly linked and merging with waves of protest related to wider discontent in Rio. Brazil was due to host the FIFA World Cup in 2014, a huge event for the country as a titan of soccer, but one that was causing a lot of unrest as communities were displaced to build stadiums, as public spending spiraled, and as timelines for construction extended.
In December 2013, just as the strikes were finally coming to an end, so did the term of the agreement with UNESCO. The small team in the Secretariat – who were still officially UNESCO employees – had to leave. For the next six months, Campos kept the program going as best as possible on his own. He left the Secretariat in June 2014, when it was clear that the program would not survive Costin’s departure. The current mayor of Rio, Eduardo Paes, came to the end of his term in October 2016, and it is uncertain if there will be any new major initiative to carry forward the learning from Schools for Tomorrow.

Despite its inability to fight off external circumstances, some important pieces came out of the efforts to rethink the strategy of Schools for Tomorrow. For the monitoring and evaluation strategy, Campos worked with a team of statisticians to devise a method to cluster Schools for Tomorrow into different groups. They used IDEB results and tested the effect of 32 factors related to a school’s area and student body, such as levels of violence or student demographics. Nine of the factors were consistently related to results across all schools, and they saw that all of these factors had to do with a school’s location as opposed to student grades. The most important two factors were whether a school was within a 500 meter radius of a favela, and the average socioeconomic status measure of the student body (a measure known in Brazil as the NSE). With these findings, they were able to establish a set of firmer criteria needed to qualify as a School for Tomorrow. At the time, they thought it might be necessary to use these criteria to phase out a portion of the schools, in order to keep working with others. As it was, the whole program came to an end before they could apply them, but Campos hopes the criteria could still be useful at a later date.

**POLICY ELEMENTS**

The basic features of Schools for Tomorrow were aimed directly at keeping students safe and at engaging with the reality of their difficult environments. This involved training teachers in peace-keeping methods, and in how trauma can impede cognitive development. The second key approach was to introduce a longer school day, in order to keep students safe for as long as possible. Using the funds from “More Education,” Schools for Tomorrow opened earlier and closed later than other schools, filling the time with arts and sports programs as well as remedial classes.

Beyond these basic features, Schools for Tomorrow engaged with partner programs to provide additional supports for its schools. Many of these were not provided universally, but were allocated on the basis of need. A conflict prevention program, for example, was implemented in 15 schools in the most violent areas. Some were restricted by what schools would accept: Ensina, the Brazilian arm of Teach for All, offered teachers to 30 Schools for Tomorrow, but only 14 were willing to receive them.

The more universal programs became known as the “pillars” of Schools for Tomorrow. Among these, three are seen as having been particularly important: Saúde nas Escolas (Health in Schools), Bairro Educador (the Educating Neighborhood), and a new approach to teaching science
referred to as “Scientists for Tomorrow.” In order to make implementation viable, each of these projects was introduced to one group of schools at a time in a gradual rollout that took place throughout 2009-2011.

**SÁUDE NAS ESCOLAS (HEALTH IN SCHOOLS)**

Health in Schools involved placing a health technician – a specially trained nurse – in each of the Schools for Tomorrow to provide primary care. They carried out regular routine checks on the children – on their sight, hearing, and diet – and were linked to the public health system, allowing them to refer problems to a hospital where necessary.

Fabio Campos, who worked with Schools for Tomorrow as a partner (as CEO of Ensina) before he became manager of the program, believes that this was the most important aspect of the project. The quality of healthcare in the favelas was very poor, with many children having no access at all to doctors who were based too far from their homes. Often, it was basic health information that was lacking as much as treatment. Campos recalls seeing young students on a school visit whose faces had been nibbled by rats while they slept, and had gone untreated. The children did not know that just ensuring that their faces and beds were clear of remnants of food before sleeping would reduce that risk. In such contexts, the co-location of nurses in schools had a major impact on preventative approaches.

The presence of the additional staff members also reduced distractions for teachers and school leaders. Barthelemy recalls cases where, prior to the program, if a child hurt themselves or fell sick during school, a principal would drive them in their own car to the nearest hospital, which could often be some distance. The location of the health practitioners within schools also meant that they could notice and work on problems specific to a school, allowing for more tailored services. This was especially relevant in containing context-specific outbreaks, such as tuberculosis or particular STDs, that otherwise had gone unchecked.

In the informal evaluations of Schools for Tomorrow carried out by the Secretariat team, school principals agree that this component was the most important. As Barthelemy describes it, the program was so popular because:

*You’re talking about very tangible things – if my kid is in pain, they can solve it, if my kid can’t see, they can solve it.*

The health practitioners could eliminate the most straightforward barriers to learning, and the ones most obviously outside the remit of teachers and principals.

Although the Secretariat felt very confident in the value of the project, there remained open questions as to whether it was the responsibility of the Education Secretariat to be providing this service. The Health in Schools program was co-managed with the Department of Health, but the funding was provided by the Secretariat through Schools for Tomorrow. In retrospect, it was perhaps never sustainable for education budgets to be funding something that was the responsibility of another department.

In 2015, the city of Rio carried out a major expansion of the health system to try to increase healthcare coverage in favelas. Although it does not stretch to the extent of providing a healthcare worker in every school, it may be that this will fill in some of the gaps left by the termination of Schools for Tomorrow.
**SCIENTISTS FOR TOMORROW**

Scientists for Tomorrow was the project that involved the most substantial change to in-school time. Lab facilities were built in each of the 155 Schools for Tomorrow so that teachers could conduct science lessons involving experiments and lots of hand-on activities.

As previously noted, the mini-labs had been a major draw for schools asking to become Schools for Tomorrow, but they were also a major source of contention. Schools outside the favelas may be less troubled by their environment, but they are by no means lavishly equipped. Such a tangible sign of the differences of provision in Schools for Tomorrow and other schools sparked opposition among groups in the Secretariat who saw this as a different form of inequality.

Along with these new facilities and materials, teachers received dedicated pedagogical training to facilitate learning-by-doing. Ultimately this was not as impactful in the Schools for Tomorrow as had been hoped, as the pedagogy was challenged by overcrowded classrooms. The lessons were planned for students to be in groups of four or five, but with classes of 40 students rather than 25 or 30, teachers had to create larger groups and then adapt the plans on the go. With students and teachers both getting to know these new ways of working, it was a struggle to get through all of the planned activities, and content coverage suffered as a result.

Scientists for Tomorrow was phased out prior to the end of Schools for Tomorrow. The official reasoning was that better science facilities needed to be provided in all schools across Rio. It is unclear whether any other schools will receive the support for project-based pedagogy.

**BAIRRO EDUCADOR (THE EDUCATING NEIGHBORHOOD)**

The central idea of the Educating Neighborhood is that learning can happen everywhere, and that both students and adults outside of schools benefit when they have greater contact with each other. The program was provided in a partnership between the Secretariat and an NGO called the Center for Integrated Studies and Sustainable Development (CIEDS), which runs projects across Brazil. It was based on a UNESCO methodology that advocates building on resources within communities.

CIEDS provided a link between the schools and the Secretariat: they employed local people in each of the areas, but reported to the team at the Secretariat. They worked closely with schools and with the regional coordinators. Every week, someone from the NGO would be in a school, working with them to develop ideas and opportunities specific to that school and its location. As Barthelemey puts it, “The idea was always to get students out [of the school building]”:

*How could students learn from the local breadmaker, could they visit with the math teacher and talk about how measurement relates to making bread?*

With these kinds of activities, the aim was to promote community responsibility for student learning. They wanted to make real the mantra that “it takes a village” to raise a child. That philosophy was already present to an extent in the favelas, but now they were uncovering hitherto underutilized educational resources. The coordinators worked with teachers to come up with ideas that aligned to the curriculum, planning trips to match up with learning for topics such as water cycles or business. As well as arranging field trips for students, they would arrange for people such as local entrepreneurs to come into the schools.
Some excursions involved taking students further afield, and here the CIEDS were invaluable in working directly with the schools to overcome logistical challenges – primarily around transport. They were particularly effective at securing additional resources to supplement the funding provided by the Secretariat. They would lobby businesses, civic organizations, or other government branches, and secure anything from hundreds of free metro tickets and bus rides to tickets for the circus. Barthelemy estimates they were able to save a couple of million dollars in donations over the course of the project, and most importantly perhaps, were able to avoid excessive red tape about what could be funded with government money.

The program was designed both to create responsibility in a neighborhood for the outcomes of children, and also to empower members of a disadvantaged neighborhood to make the most of their surroundings. Barthelemy believes that this second aspect was central for the children in Schools for Tomorrow:

*How can these kids see that they have a right to access the city?*…[this program says] “you are a citizen of Rio, you should go to the beach, you should go to the galleries, it is your city”

Even so, children from favelas face discrimination in a city that has stark economic inequality, and where the poor and rich are sharply segregated between neighborhoods.

In 2013, the Educating Neighborhood was phased out as part of the preliminary redesign of Schools for Tomorrow. Barthelemy is torn about the decision:

…[I]t is easy to cut something not in the classroom. Even though we know it is important - citizenship is not just through math and Portuguese - we knew the importance of this type of project. But it was a really tough time for everyone, and you couldn’t cut in math right?

Of all the three projects, it is the one she would fight to have re-implemented.

**CHALLENGES**

Schools for Tomorrow had many elements of a very strong and worthwhile program: it targeted particularly vulnerable schools, it took seriously the cultural and social context of schools, it focused on removing barriers for learning and providing for students’ holistic needs, and maintained a core focus on academic outcomes, catch-up learning, and teacher capacity. Why, therefore, was it not sufficiently popular or well-regarded to be sustained?

“The second key approach was to introduce a longer school day, in order to keep students safe for as long as possible.”
DISORGANIZATION

It seems petty in a program with so many strong elements to focus on a lack of rationalization, but those inside would be the first to admit that the program’s haphazardness played a part in its downfall. In its effort to do as much as possible with limited funds, it neglected the kind of processes that give large-scale programs the veneer of being high-functioning, and in turn, grant them the legitimacy necessary to keep going.

The lack of clear processes was perhaps a necessary result of running and initiating a large-scale project without designated project funding. Throughout its duration, Schools for Tomorrow was run by a team of five at most, and by its final year, only one. With division in the Secretariat, it was impossible to put together a larger team.

With so few people, a lot of implementation quality depended on the regional coordinators, who varied dramatically in their level of communication with the Secretariat and with their schools. While most of the coordinators knew the Schools for Tomorrow in their area well – with some even visiting them on a weekly basis and conducting planning with them – a small minority were much less communicative, were hard to reach from the Secretariat, and did not even know the names of the relevant principals.

SELECTIVITY

It was fundamental to the design of the program that not every school in Rio could be a School for Tomorrow: some selection was inevitable. Yet the size of the discrepancy in resources allocated to those inside versus out, and the similarity of some marginal schools in each group, made selection a constant difficulty.

These issues also contributed to the internal opposition to the program. Throughout its lifespan, Schools for Tomorrow suffered from split support within the Secretariat. There were many who felt that it was an unnecessary program, which drew resources and attention away from other schools. Barthelemy explains that it’s easy to see how this view got traction. The Secretariat was responsible for almost 1,500 schools and pre-schools, and the Schools for Tomorrow represented hardly 10% of all schools in their care. Yet thanks to the UNESCO funding, there was a specific team of four or five people looking out for those schools. Even apart from the specific provisions that came with being part of the program, the Schools for Tomorrow were more likely to have additional requests or queries addressed quickly, or receive information about additional opportunities.

The improved results in Schools for Tomorrow only lent more fire to the feeling that the supports they received should be going to more schools – after all, there were others who were in difficult areas or had low results. Ultimately, it was impossible to respond to these voices without some reallocation. Hence the decision to end central pillars of Schools for Tomorrow, such as the science and health programs, in order to try to roll out versions across the city.
TIMING AND POLITICS

The legacy of Schools for Tomorrow might look very different if it hadn’t been for the teachers’ strikes which brought Rio to a halt in 2013. For the most part, this was an exogenous event unrelated to the program. The strikes were not solely about teachers’ conditions. It was unfortunate that they became focal points for more general anger about public service provision and policy brutality, and got caught up in protests from an anarchist group known as Black Block.

There were, however, aspects to the grievances that related more directly to Schools for Tomorrow and similar partner-based initiatives in which the Secretariat was involved. Teachers groups were concerned about “neoliberal reform,” and some protested the notion of Rio’s schools being “privatized by stealth.”

DEMONSTRATING IMPACT

Because each of the programs was rolled out in an uneven way, it was hard for the Secretariat to work out “what was working better and why.” This lack of information was problematic both from the perspective of internal learning – for making decisions about which aspects of the program to roll out further and which to discontinue – and for those interested in learning from the program. As Barthelemy puts it:

There is a lot of very rich information and lessons, but we don’t have anything to share that other people can learn from.

Those who were part of the project are pained by this fact; they feel that there were many valuable elements to the program that they would like to share – and would like to see continued in Rio – but do not have the right kind of evidence to back them up. The calculation of criteria carried out by Campos and his team allowed for the creation of a control group: a set of 150 roughly comparable schools who were not part of the Schools for Tomorrow program. In time, researchers may be able to conduct post-hoc quantitative evaluations using this group.

UNESCO is currently conducting a larger evaluation of the project, which hopefully will be able to draw additional conclusions.

CONCLUSION

Many of the challenges that ultimately brought down Schools for Tomorrow are interconnected. Had there been wider support for the program in the Secretariat, it may have been possible to commit a larger team to running the program. A larger team could in turn have focused more on monitoring and evaluation, ensuring that the program and its impact was well understood internally and externally. With greater public understanding, the program might have been better placed to withstand the buffets of contingent events like the teacher strikes.
On the other hand, there is a distinct possibility that greater transparency and wider understanding may have only increased the opposition the program attracted for its inevitable Achilles’ heel: singling out a tenth of the city’s schools for special treatment. While there was every good reason to provide these schools extra support, the contention around this issue is a reminder that in public education, it is extremely difficult to defend these decisions at the margin. Perhaps there would be no complaints if just a few schools in the Cidade de Deus (City of God) neighborhood – the most violent in the city – received additional supports, but as the designated schools get more and more like those who are not designated schools, it leads to difficult questions.

Reducing educational inequality is fundamentally about shifting resources to those who need them most. Schools for Tomorrow is a reminder that, for this to be sustained long term, it needs to be carried out strategically, subtly, and with the ability to reframe initiatives in response to changing conditions.
Claudia Costin takes office as Secretary of Education for the city of Rio de Janeiro. Among her first actions is to carry out an analysis of IDEB (Brazilian Education Quality Index) data by school and local area.

Teachers are trained in violence reduction and technology-based teaching.

Key aspects of the program begin to roll out, including a science program, health visitors program, and the first “Educating Neighborhoods” site.

The Secretariat enters into a three-year partnership with UNESCO.

In Schools for Tomorrow, basic education scores have risen and absenteeism has fallen at rates significantly faster than in other schools. Educating Neighborhoods is rolled out to many more schools.

The Secretariat signs an agreement with UNESCO to provide additional funding, management, and monitoring of Schools for Tomorrow.
“The health practitioners could eliminate the most straightforward barriers to learning, and the ones most obviously outside the remit of teachers and principals.”

References