

PBRC Research Grant: Report

Akiko Toya c/o 2014

Learning Outcomes

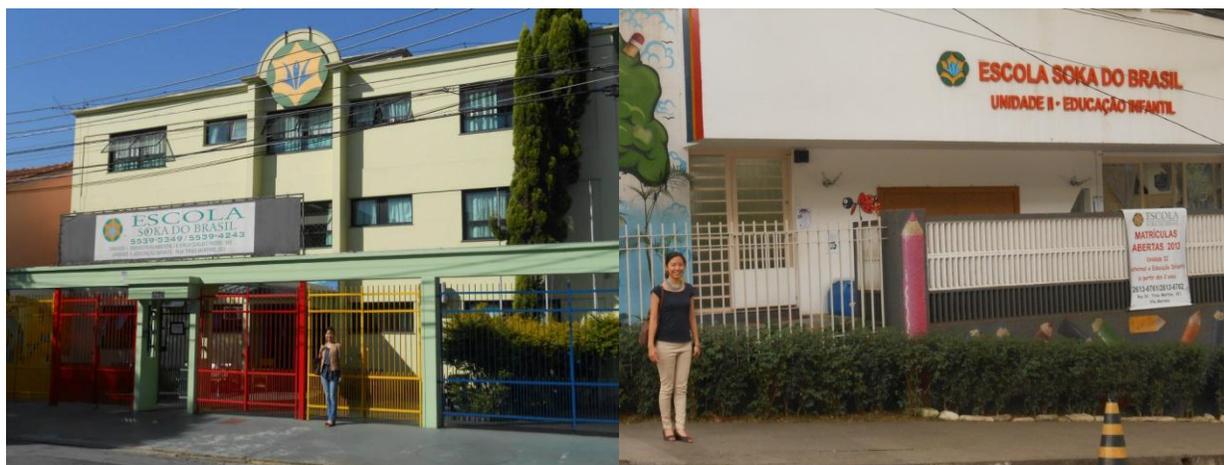
A general awareness of current Soka Education Movement in Brazil

In 1984, when Ikeda Daisaku, the former president of Soka Gakkai International (SGI), visited Sao Paulo, he created Educational Department of Brazil SGI (BSGI). This occasion became a great momentum for BSI members to expand the vision of BSGI through social action works, especially Soka Education Movement.

<Brazil Soka School>

History of Brazil Soka School and its Trend

In 2001, Brazil Soka School opened in Sao Paulo, Brazil. This school is a non-religious school aiming at providing education based on the idea of Soka Education. Although in first few years, almost 100 % of students have backgrounds of SGI, in past 3 years, more people are interested in and as a result, currently, about 50% of students come from non-SGI families. Soka school consists of two buildings; one is for kindergarteners and the other is for elementary school students and junior high school students. Based on the interviews with the principle, teachers, students, and parents, I analyze the background factors behind the success of Brazil Soka school.



: People's demand for humanistic education

In past few years, Brazil has been experiencing rapid economic developments and this phenomenon has influenced Brazilian educational systems and its quality of education as well. Brazilian government has been funding to open up more technical schools such as engineering, law, and business but entering schools is very competitive. Children have to go to cram schools

from their early age to survive in this competitive Brazilian society. For most of Brazilian people, the purpose of receiving higher education is to obtain skills to get stable income. While more people tend to receive higher education, some people question true value of education and become attracted to the idea of humanistic education. Most of the parent, I interviewed with, mentioned that humanistic education which Soka schools provide is their reason to select Soka schools.

: The quality of education

Compared with other public school I visited, Brazil Soka School has strong supports for students in terms of leaning environment, quality of teachers, and quality of education. Since I have opportunities to visit Brazil Soka School and Brazil Public School, I would like to make some comparisons.

-leaning environment

Each class room of Brazil Soka School is very clean and filled with decoration such as pictures and guiding principle (pictures below). My first impression was that teachers are trying to make classrooms positive environment for students. Also, by decorating pictures, classrooms show the unity of students. On the other hand, the public school I visited in Brazil is disorganized and teachers seem to be careless about their class room. While public schools in Brazil have been suffering from chronical violence, crime and students' family issues, Soka School gave me positive impressions such as safe, protective, and healthy leaning environment. Small size of student body and stable finance may explain these characteristics but at the same time, I think the culture of Soka School is very unique.



-quality of teachers

Before hiring new teachers, Brazil Soka School conducts evaluation to see their personality and their abilities. After hiring process, teachers are required to participate in teachers' training and read multiple books about the philosophy of Soka Education. All teachers have mandatory study/training meetings twice in a month.

-quality of education/ the uniqueness of Brazil Soka School

Based on Brazil School Federal Evaluation, the level of Soka School is 8-10, especially math and Portuguese while national average level is 3. Due to good reputations, even Sao Paulo city would recommend Soka School such that applicants have been increasing in past few years. Soka School also provides unique curriculum and create culture.

: Japanese class

As a language education, leaning Japanese is mandatory in Soka School. According to the principle, leaning Japanese can help students to understand different culture and most

importantly, it can help students to learn about the Founder of school, Daisaku Ikeda. Since Soka school is based on the idea of Soka Education, which are proposed by Japanese scholars, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, Josei Toda, and Daisaku Ikeda, school believes that learning Japanese can enable students to make connections to Japan where these three philosophers lived.

: Moment of Founder

Students who have background of SGI enter school with some ideas of philosophy of Soka education, Ikeda Daisaku, and mission of their education while non-SGI students often enter school without that knowledge. Although Brazil Soka School is a non-religious school, the principle and teachers still believe that learning about the philosophy of Soka Education and Ikeda Daisaku is very important for their education. As a result, in the class room, there are books about Soka Education and Founder, Daisaku Ikeda. Furthermore, students created the tradition called “Moment of Founder.” A group of students give a presentation and talk about Daisaku Ikeda and Soka Education in front of all students in once a week. For instance, a group of students reads a poem written by Daisaku Ikeda, and they share what they feel and how that poem affects their life. By having moment of founder, students equally have opportunities to learn about Daisaku Ikeda and Soka Education.

: Student Guide

Brazil Soka School provides unique student guides, which student can grade their academics and behaviors in every week. This is similar to “exchange diary” between students and teachers. Students can write their positive and negative aspects so that they can reflect upon themselves and identify what they are able to do. Also teachers can understand what students are struggling with such that they can take actions to solve problems immediately. Based on the interviews I conducted in public schools in Brazil, most teachers are struggling with the distance between teachers and students. They feel that they are incapable to understand students’ situations and also they feel students do not trust or respect teachers. Compared with public schools, the connection between teachers and students in Brazil Soka School is strong and they trust each other.



: Teachers' efforts

Teachers who learn the idea of Soka Education through books and trainings often try to implement the idea of Soka education into their classrooms or teaching methods. For instance, the math teacher I interviewed with told me that she is always trying to evaluate students' efforts rather than test-based education system. She often relates math to problems in reality so that students can identify the purpose of studying math. I observed many teachers are trying their best to make students be interested in subjects and encourage students when they are discouraged.



The Problems of Brazil Soka School

Since its opening, Brazil Soka School has established good reputations and developed school systems. However, school has been facing multiple obstacles,

>Although Brazil Soka School is a non-religious school, BSGI has been contributing to school financially. Since in the beginning, students who have SGI background were majority of student body, school staffs and teachers had tried to create a comfortable space for non-SGI students and their parents. One of the board members of school told me that it took 10 years to establish

separation between BSGI and Brazil Soka School. Currently, BSGI has not been involved in school developments as much as they used to do.

>Teachers face the critical question, “what are qualified Soka Educators?” This obstacle seems to be a common problem for those who are interested in implementing the idea of Soka Education in educational settings. Although many teachers at Brazil Soka School admit that they do not have confidence in their teaching methods as Soka Educators, they believe that the ideas of Soka Education always inspire them and are great resource for teachers.

>Although the size of student body is getting bigger, only two buildings are currently available. Thus, students need to have enough space to play and study.

The Future of Brazil Soka School

In the summer of 2011, the representatives of the board members of Brazil Soka School were able to visit Soka University of America for the first time. According to Mr. China who is the director of Brazil Soka School, “having dialogues with Mr.Habuki and leaning about SUA were eye-opening. I would say that it was a life-changing experience and it inspired the beginning of the second stage of Brazil Soka School. ” Mr. China believes that SUA is the ideal soka school so that in the next 50 years, the board members are aiming at establishing Soka University of Brazil. As a first step, in 2015, they are opening up a new campus for Brazil Soka School. This new campus will have capacity for kindergarten, junior high school, and high school. The board members strongly believe that this new campus will enable students to develop themselves fully and in the future, alumni can help creating Soka University of Brazil. They are also planning to have exchange programs which enable students to study at Soka university of America.

<Conclusion>

Since its opening in 2001, Brazil Soka School has been developing rapidly while facing many obstacles. Especially from 2001 to 2010, school was in the first stage of defining the meaning of Soka Education in Brazil. Visiting SUA in 2011 became a crucial moment to lead Brazil Soka School to the second stage of redefining the role of Soka Education by having a role model, SUA. For the opening of new campus in 2015, Brazil Soka School has a momentum to develop its own tradition and teaching methods. They are planning to come to 10th Soka Education Conference in the next February such that I hope that we can create strong bonds between SUA and Brazil Soka School.

<Soka Education Movement, Makiguchi In Action (MIA)>

Since 1984, Educational Department of BSGI had sought how they can contribute to Brazilian society and Brazilian Educational system with a Buddhist philosophy. MIA aims at improving the quality of education and teachers at public schools in Brazil. The idea for the project originated in 1994 among the BSGI members who were inspired by Makiguchi's *The System of*

Value-Creating Pedagogy. In the 1990s, fewer than half of schoolchildren in Brazil were able to complete compulsory education due to poverty, inadequate training of teachers and other reasons. Educational Department of BSGI and volunteers (SGI members, especially women) visit public schools and give workshops for teachers and schools. These workshops can be music, arts, and play that teachers can implement in classrooms to improve their relationships with students and enrich students' learning experiences. The project was initiated at Cateano de Campos (a public elementary and junior high school) as part of the spring program in September 1994. The program has been described as a process of liberation from the overemphasis on rote learning that has afflicted the Brazilian education system. Remarkable progress was seen just a few months after its implementation, and it didn't take long before other schools followed suit and implemented the project. Since then, it has been incorporated in 270 schools as of 2008 and is being practiced by one million students. Rather than focusing on the competitive aspects of knowledge-based learning, MIA is based on fostering a sense of value creation in the students by working together with teachers, parents and communities.

The factors behind the success of MIA

- Efficient training and organized workshops: In order to achieve an objective which is to keep students being interested in school and to make students happy while learning, MIA activities are followed by these activities below.
 - volunteers receive manuals about workshops and training before they go to school
 - teachers take evaluations so that volunteers can identify teachers' problems before they do workshops
 - volunteers conduct 4 meetings with students' parents, 8 workshops with teachers
 - provide workshops for maximum 2 years to avoid schools become dependent
 - 500 volunteers for each school in 2 years (all SGI members)
 - evaluate impacts of workshops based on evaluations done by schools, teachers, students and their parents.

Interesting notes

-Sometimes, schools and teachers become nervous to accept BSGI volunteers' workshops by knowing BSGI is a Buddhist organization. In order to solve misunderstanding, BSGI volunteers always explain the purpose of their workshops and clarify that they do not have interests in money, politics and persuading their religious beliefs. Also, BSGI volunteers are trained not to use Buddhist terms when they have workshops but they often donate books about Soka Education and Daisaku Ikeda if schools and teachers want.

-90% of volunteers are women and 10% is men who retired from job. Although they do not receive any financial supports, they travel to schools by spending their time and money, and do workshops. Many volunteers say that they do these volunteering with their pure devotions aiming at creating peaceful Brazilian society as BSGI members and good citizens.



Positive effects of MIA

- Many schools, teachers, students and parents report that through MIA workshops, they observe positive changes and improvements. For instance, based on interviews, many teachers are able to have confidence in their teaching methods and actively engage in knowing students individually. Also, students are able to come to schools and enjoying school activities.
- Through workshops, the connection among schools, teachers, students, and parents become stronger.
- The teachers in different schools are able to be connected through MIA so that teachers can exchange their ideas and share their problems
- BSGI volunteers are also able to have more confidence in themselves. This is because some of BSGI members who could not receive education and believed they are incapable could change their views by teaching others and contributing to Brazilian Educational reform.

Problems of MIA and the background factors behind declination of MIA

From 1994 to 2009, MIA experienced a great success of programs. However, since 2009, MIA has been losing its momentum and the size of the projects is getting small.

- BSGI needed to BSGI members for other sections so that the number of volunteers decreased
- Many women started working so that the number of volunteers decreased
- Since 2000, Brazilian government imitated MIA program and provides similar workshops with financial supports so that many schools started to accept government's workshops rather than BSGI Educational Department's workshops

<Conclusion>

From 1994 to 2009, MIA experienced a great success of programs. BSGI members' sincere volunteering influenced the culture of public schools and teachers positively by having personal connections. Although since 2009, MIA has been losing its momentum and the size of the projects is getting small, MIA activities are still continuing and it has been contributing to make positive changes in Brazilian Educational systems. In order to achieve further development of MIA, I believe that new generations have to be in charge of MIA activities and develop new workshops which can be more attractive than the programs Brazilian government offers.