

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: LIVING AND LEARNING IN TWO *CRECHES* IN BRAZIL: UNDERSTANDING ECONOMICALLY-POOR YOUNG CHILDREN'S MEANINGS OF PEDAGOGY

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My interpretive study is about low-income Brazilian children's pedagogical experiences and the meanings the children made of their experiences in two *creches* (non-profit early childhood centers). I focused on children's own interpretations and how they exerted agency within the pedagogical constraints. By contributing to the understanding of what it means to be four- and five-years old and economically poor in two *creches*, my study offers insight into 'new understandings' of children and pedagogy. It also raises questions about the perpetuation of discriminatory pedagogies for the poor in Brazil.

My study was informed by a socio-constructivist approach centered on a view of children as rich, competent social actors, who are connected to others and who actively co-construct knowledge and self. Other significant concepts are pedagogy, Dewey's

theory of experience and the interpretative approach to children's narrative thinking. Such theoretical framework disputes views of the child reared in poverty as simply destitute, lacking, or the object of oppression, demanding multi-faceted inquiries of the pedagogical experiences of poor children. Uncovering the rich lives of children and their meanings demanded 'rich' methods. I collected various data, including conversations, stories, pretend-play and children's tours. I videotaped extensively. Data analysis continued to center on understanding and narrating experience from children's own perspectives.

In this work I describe and analyze the so-called educational activities, or *trabalhinhos*, and children's views of 'what' and 'how' they learned, particularly how they 'learned about learning.' Then I discuss children's experiences of play and of *bagunça* and *castigo* (misbehavior and punishment). Next I explore children's meanings of these conflict-ridden experiences, which they seemed to find central aspects of their lives at the *creches*. Finally, I discuss children's meanings of *mandar* or 'who is in charge.'

The children in my study were keen interpreters, offering some serious critiques of their experiences. My analysis provides understanding about (a) how the pedagogy seemed to lead to children's miseducation, 'teaching' submission, yet, how children were agents who actively and collectively created a place for themselves at the *creches*; and about (b) a complex paradox between children's active meaning-making and the passivity reflected in their accounts.

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OF PEDAGOGY

by

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

. . . Meaning is never capable of remaining unchanging, overflowing with secondary, third and fourth meanings, radiating in all directions, which keep dividing and subdividing in branches and twigs until they are lost in view, the meaning of each word appears like a star when it begins to project strong tides into space, cosmic winds, magnetic disturbances, afflictions (Saramago, 1997)

My study focuses on low-income Brazilian children's pedagogical experiences and the meanings the children made of their experiences. The passion and the hope kindling my research efforts are that children's own meanings could emerge as the star described by the Portuguese writer, Jose Saramago, projecting new 'tides' and 'afflictions' into current knowledge about young children, particularly about the pedagogical experiences of children raised in poverty in Brazil.

My study gives primary importance to the local, partial, and multiple accounts of children's experiences and meanings in the Brazilian context of poverty and social inequalities. I attempted to bridge understanding and change (Lather, 1991; Lather & Smithies; 1997; Price, 2000; Tierney, 1994), bringing the experiences and the voices of children from low-income Brazilian families into the debate on early-pedagogy. By contributing to the understanding of what it means to be four- and five-years old and economically poor in two *creches* in Belo Horizonte, my study offers insight into 'new understandings' (Moss and Petrie, 2002) of young children and their educational lives. Ultimately, it contributes to transforming pedagogical relations within the *creches*. It furthers the question Brazilian educators (Kuhlman, 1998; Rosemberg, 2000; and Vieira, 1998) have raised about the perpetuation of discriminatory pedagogies for the poor in early childhood education programs in Brazil.

My research questions about the nature of four- and five-year old children's experiences and meanings of their experiences are situated at the center of a heated

debate about *educação infantil* (the term generally used to define early childhood care and education [ECCE] in Brazil). This critical debate, prompted by the inclusion of 0 to 6 year-old children's right to education in the Brazilian constitution and consequent laws, established that early education constitutes the first level of basic education. The challenge for parents, educators, policy makers, researchers, and governments involves promoting policies and practices that actualize children's constitutional rights.

Mayan and colleagues (in James and Prout, 1997, p. xiv) argue that children "are a minority group who lack power to influence the quality of their lives" (p. 8) and that the younger the child the greater her exclusion from formal power. Considering the virtual absence of young children from definitions regarding their educational lives, my study attempted to understand the pedagogical experiences of low-income four- and five-year-olds from their own perspectives. As Siraj-Blatchford (1996) argues, interpretative research can be very powerful "in getting below the surface of general effectiveness characteristics to reveal the processes by which individuals and groups sustain, modify, shape, change, and create their environment" (p. 3). In their discussion of a new paradigm of the sociology of childhood, Prout and James argue that, "ethnography is particularly useful methodology for the study of childhood. It allows children a more direct voice and participation in the production of sociological data" (p. 8). Finally, questions about the ways children are taught and learn as well as the meanings they create as they do so are particularly important for children of poverty, and their teachers. When pedagogy promotes subservience and invalidates children's capacities, it betrays their potential. Instead, when it fosters children's agency and promotes a community of learners, pedagogy has the possibility to counteract in some significant ways the results of poverty, discrimination and alienation (Bruner, 1996).

Over a year I observed the children in two classrooms in two *creches* (non-profit, non-governmental early childhood centers), the Creche Santa Rita and the Associação Educacional Sabiá, in Belo Horizonte, the third largest city in Brazil. I paid close attention to children's experiences and their understandings of their experiences. In particular, I focused on how children exerted their agency within the pedagogical constraints they encountered. I attended to the ways they were encouraged and discouraged to "act and think for themselves" (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2000, p. 123). Through this work, I learned about the ways children actively engaged with their reality, constructed their world and their sense of self, and how pedagogy enabled or limited their thinking, feelings and creativity. Therefore, the underlying focus of my study was the understanding of the children's "processes of becoming" (Britzman, 1991, p. 8) reflected in their 'meaning-making' as they attended the *creches*. Ultimately, I have attempted to make problematic dominant views of children reared in poverty and their educational experiences, in order to contribute towards reframing some of the critical questions involving children and early childhood pedagogy, particularly for the poor in Brazil.

Because meaning, as Saramago pointed out, is elusive and ever changing, rendering meaning is inherently a limited endeavor. I did not attempt to achieve a complete or transparent understanding of children's meanings or their experiences. In agreement with Patai (1988), I argue that to aim for a total or 'true' rendering of children's meanings is not only impossible but misses the point. The point, in the context of my study, was to construct particular, situated, subjective, and partial accounts that offer insight into (a) how these particular children constructed their worlds and their sense of self, and (b) how the pedagogy they encountered acted to constrain and support their agency. In this sense, I pursued what Wolcott called "some breadth of human

understanding” (1995, p.86) of two groups of young children’s lived experiences in two early-childhood centers in Brazil. If the study has any power, it emerges from the children’s ‘humanness’ reflected in their experiences and particularly in their voicing of their own interpretations and understandings.

Given the focus of my study on children’s experiences and perspectives, and not teachers’ perspectives, an uneasy tension in the representation of pedagogy in the two centers seemed to emerge. The presentation of children’s perspectives inevitably includes a critique of pedagogical practices coordinated by the teachers. It is important to note that these critiques were critiques of experiences and not of the teachers. In the same way, my presentation of children’s perspectives is not intended to devalue the work and commitment of the two teachers. On the contrary, I developed a deep respect for both Helena and Sara. I saw them well-intentioned, caring, and hard-working teachers. On the one hand, they manifested an active desire to further learn about pedagogy. On the other, they continually argued that they needed more support in their teaching. Just as the children were part of a complex cultural and political context, so were the teachers.

In the following pages I present an overview of the context of early childhood care and education in Brazil and discuss the conceptual framework guiding the study. I then move to an overview of the various chapters in which I present my data analysis.

The Brazilian Context: The Dual Track in Early Education and ECCE as Children’s Rights

Childhood in Brazil almost equals poverty. In 1986, 43 percent of children below six years of age lived in households considered to be in needy conditions and around 20 percent lived in households characterized as absolute poverty (Rosemberg, 1993). Ten years later, in 1996, around 37% of children and adolescents, almost 23 million people,

lived in absolute poverty conditions, according to UNICEF (1996). The *Plano Nacional de Educação* (National Education Plan, 2000) states that there has been an increase in the number of families living below the poverty line in the last years in Brazil. Such reality deeply influences Brazilian educational policies and, ultimately, the picture of early childhood care and education (ECCE). Over the 20th century, we have seen the development of what Rosemberg (1988) called “parallel early-education tracks” (p. 36) and Vieira (1998), a “double trajectory” of programs serving children from 0-6 years old (p. 3). This means that historically there are two kinds of educational experiences for young children, ‘assistance’ to the poor and ‘education’ for the ‘non-poor’ or children living above the poverty line. Yet, recently, there have been significant political, legal and conceptual changes in early education in Brazil. Next, I outline this dual track of education and then, the legislation and conceptual changes in ECCE.

ECCE for the Poor and the Non-Poor: Two Traditions in Early Education

ECCE for the Poor: The Assistencialista Tradition

The practices defined as assistencialismo refer to the philanthropic, custodial, social assistance or welfare tradition aimed at caring for low-income children in *creches* and ‘maternal schools.’ Such non-governmental, non-profit institutions generally called *creches* are referred to as assistencialistas because their main objective has been to ‘assist’ low-income families and their children. Traditionally these programs offer inadequate and poor, and in many cases extremely poor, quality services. Early education in the vast majority of the *creches* historically focuses on the caretaking of children so that their mothers can go to work as well as to compensate for poverty and other socio-

economic problems. As a result of a process of expanding child-care and education through a so-called ‘alternative’ model, poor children have been segregated into low-cost/low-quality centers, with ill-prepared personnel, mostly women (Rosemberg, 1997). Oliveira and her colleagues (1992) argue that the so-called assistencial or custodial model’s overt goal is to provide young children with food, hygiene, and safety.

The *creches* still play a major role in the education and care of poor children in Brazil. For instance, in 2001 in the city of Belo Horizonte, a state capital of around 3 million people, there were approximately 200 *creches* that received public funds from the municipal government, as opposed to 11 public pre-schools. These *creches* were called *conveniadas* because they had a ‘covenant’ with the municipality.

ECCE for the Non-Poor: The Educational Tradition

In contrast to the ‘welfare’ tradition,’ an ‘educational’ tradition of ECCE persists, encompassing better quality programs for children from the middle- and upper classes, a much less numerous group. These children have historically attended kindergartens and ‘infant schools,’ later called ‘pre-schools’ (Vieira, 1998). These are mostly private programs, which typically have more qualified teachers and provide children with better environments and opportunities for learning. Early education in this case is justified both as a response to the child’s needs and development and/or as a preparation for formal education (Rosemberg and Pinto, 1997).

For the purpose of analysis it is important to distinguish between these two traditions. It is noteworthy, however, that both traditions need to be understood as a form of education. It is a false dichotomy to argue that the pre-schools are educational and the *creches* merely philanthropic or social-assistance. Cerisara (1998) claims that there has

been confusion between “institutional differences and educational conceptualization differences” (p. 13). In short, we learned from Kuhlman’s (1998) historic study of ECCE in Brazil how the custodial approach to the care and education of poor young children has always had educational intention. As a consequence, these dual tracks in early-education have resulted in the construction of a different pedagogy for the poor, compared to the pedagogy of middle-class pre-schools. Kuhlman (1998), Rosemberg (2000), and Vieira (1998) argue that the outcome of such custodial model of ECCE has been discriminatory and segregated pedagogies for the poor. Rosemberg (1988) claims that the *creches* of the poor have traditionally socialized poor and black children “into inferiority” (p. 36). Furthermore, as Cerisara (1998) argues, they are ‘taught’ through rigid, inappropriate, and authoritarian practices that fragment their lives robbing them of their rights to learn and grow as the young children that they are. Therefore, one way the brutal social inequalities have affected the lives of Brazilian children has been through the creation of “profound social segregation in the use of social institutions” (Rosemberg, 1997, p. 18). As a result, poor young children have been historically steered towards low quality/low cost *creches* where they have been subjected to disempowering educational practices.

Legislation and Conceptual changes: ECCE as Children’s Rights

During the past twenty years, Brazil has lived through significant transformations that suggest the potential to alter this image of education for poor children sketched above. Influenced by a strong social movement for young children’s rights, and “an obsessive fight in defense of education” (Romão, 1994, p. 65), the cause of ECCE has advanced greatly.

Crucial political, legal, and conceptual changes were introduced over the twenty years. First, an array of progressive new legislation has been passed. In 1988, early education became a constitutional right, a family's choice and the state's obligation. For the first time, both *creches* and pre-schools, were recognized in the Brazilian constitution as educational institutions that must be integrated into the national educational system. Following the Federal Constitution (1988), came the Statute on Childhood and Adolescence (*Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente*—ECA, 1991) and the Law of Guidelines and Basis for National Education (*Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional*—LDBEN, 1996). Finally, in 2000, the Congress approved the *Plano Nacional de Educação* (National Education Plan). Second, there have been important related changes in the conceptualization of what it means to care for and educate children from birth until six (Vieira, 1998). Parallel to the constitution, a new concept of *educação infantil* (early childhood education) has been defined in the LDBEN: together with elementary and high school education, ECCE is defined as a means to grant children the necessary qualification to exert their rights to citizenship and to allow them to progress in their professional work as well as later studies. The LDBEN determines that *creches* will serve children between zero and three years, and that, children between four and six years will attend pre-schools. It also determines that the *creches* “adopt educational objectives, transforming into institutions of education, according to the national curricular instructions (*diretrizes curriculares nacionais*) ruled by the Conselho Nacional de Educação (National Education Council) (Plano Nacional de Educação, 2000).

The distortions of the ‘dual track’ of early-childhood education and the consequent segregation of poor children into ‘poor programs’ have started to be addressed. The *Plano Nacional de Educação* states clearly that “it is necessary to avoid a

poor education for the poor children and the loss of quality (in early childhood programs) as access (to such programs) is made more democratic” (2000, p. 4).

In Belo Horizonte, since 1993, a succession of like-minded municipal governments have contributed to a certain consistency in complying with the new requirements of the *Lei de Diretrizes Básicas* (LBD) that early education be integrated into the municipal educational system. The municipality established *Centros de Educação Infantil* (CEIs—Early Education Centers) in each of its five administrative areas. In 2000 the CEIs supervised two hundred ‘*creches conveniadas*,’ centers that received some municipal funding. It is noteworthy that these centers were not solely funded by the municipality, but with the new legislation became under the direct supervision and rule of the municipal government. At the beginning of 1999, the *Conselho Municipal de Educação* (CME—Municipal Educational Council) was created with the goal of regulating the process of educational and institutional changes dictated by the LBD. For instance, the CME objectives included decisions on matters such as the qualification of ECCE teachers; accreditation norms (i.e., type of pedagogical plan that the *creches* have to develop in order to receive public funding); and the more specific roles of the CEIs. Several important initiatives had been undertaken, among them, a system of direct pedagogical supervision of the *creches* and the development of quality criteria. In 2000 the municipality adopted a progressive legislation (*Lei Orgânica do Município, Resolução CME-BH 01/2000*), which “reflects advanced concepts about education, children’s rights, and organization of the *Sistema Municipal de Ensino* (Municipal Educational System) (I. R. Silva, personal communication, April 16, 2004). At the time I conducted my fieldwork, the public policies and the initiatives being

developed in Belo Horizonte had earned national recognition in the actualization of the concept of early childhood care and education as children's rights.

Seven years ago, Rosemberg and Pinto (1997) argued that the urgent and important challenge was to translate the political and conceptual advances in ECCE into palpable educational policies that improve the quality of services and strengthen the new concept of *educação infantil*. It is beyond the scope of my study to discuss issues of policy implementation. However, it is important to know that while early education has been supported in the policy arena, there has been little financial support to ensure that the policies take root.

Conceptual Framework Guiding my Study of Children's Experiences and Meanings of Early-Education in Two *Creches* in Brazil

My conceptual framework consists of a discussion of theoretical ideas that have influenced my thinking about my study and my attempts at "sense-making" (Wolcott, 1995, p.185). It is a discussion of the literature that was meaningful to my research process. Here, I discuss how my study was informed by a socio-constructivist approach (Bruner, 1996, 1990, 1986; Corsaro and Miller, 1992; Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2000; Malaguzzi, 1993; and Rogoff and Chavajav, 1995). I start by discussing the views of the child and childhood underlying my study. Such views focus on children as "co-constructors of knowledge, identity, and culture" (Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence, 2000, p. 48). I then explore concepts of pedagogy and educational experience. Finally, I review the interpretative approach to children's narrative thinking.

Concepts of the Child and Childhood

Concepts of child and childhood shape the educational experiences provided for children (Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence, 2000; Malaguzzi, 1993; and Bruner, 1999). Such concepts or ‘visions of the child’ are key to all pedagogies, successful or not, because they are ‘productive’ of the type of institutions, and more specifically, the types of experiences are created for children (Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence, 2000, p. 43). Bruner (1999) argues that “a key aspect of successful pedagogy is treating those in your charge as if they were already on the way to being what you would like them to become—not just butchers and bakers and candlestick makers, not even painters, physicists, and CEOs, but also members of the culture trying to use their minds and their words appropriately” (p.12). Views of the economically poor child as a destitute being in function of her/his poverty stand in stark contrast with Bruner’s active vision of the child above.

Just as conceptions of the child are productive of pedagogy, they are also productive of inquiries on children’s experiences. In other words, different research questions as well as the different methods one chooses to answer them reflect different views of the child. Here, I discuss two concepts underlying my research: (a) a socially constructed concept of the child and childhood, and (b) a view of children as ‘rich’ co-constructors of knowledge and self.

A Socially Constructed Concept of the Child and Childhood

A socio-constructivist framework claims that childhood is a “social construction,” that is, “always contextualized in relation to time, place, and culture” (Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence, 2000, p. 49). In this sense, childhood is not a universal or “free-standing” (Bruner, 1996, p. 108) reality, but one that is situated in and changed by conditions and experiences of race, gender and socio-economic status. Ethnographic studies (Briggs,

1992; Corsaro and Rosier, 1992; Tobin, Wu, and Davidson, 1989; and Heath, 1983) highlight these ideas. Heath's study (1983) is a classic example to illustrate the socio-constructivist argument that "it is not possible to extract a separate model of the child from the world or culture in which he or she is situated" (Corsaro and Miller, 1992, p. 9). Heath (1983) studied how children learned to use language in very distinct ways in two communities separated from each other by only a few miles. Children's language development seemed to reflect profound cultural differences between 'Trackton,' an African-American neighborhood of former rural workers presently working at textile mills, and 'Roadville,' a white working-class town of generations of textile mills workers.

Notions of child development are inseparable from constructs of culture. Hence, it is important to examine how different societies and cultures have particular views of development, particular goals for their children, and particular socialization processes. In this sense, they raise "the issue of cultural variation as a central developmental question" (Corsaro and Miller, 1992, p. 9). Tobin, Wu and Davidson's (1989) study of three pre-schools in Japan, China and the United States examined the particular and varied roles of pre-schools in different cultures. Their study suggests that just as views of the child differ among the three countries, so do pre-schools in the sense that they are situated in their particular context of local communities, nations and cultures, and reflect culturally significant views of child development as well as societal and familial needs.

The points raised above underscore the approach to childhood and the child as interacting with and shaped by culture. Such an approach has generated important new questions and debates in the field of early childhood. For instance, dominant views of child development based on experimental psychology research on primarily Western,

middle-class children can no longer be generalized to other social groups of children. Cahan and colleagues (1993) suggest an evolution in the study of the child. From seeing the child as a 'natural child' (a view resultant from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) and a 'human constant' (a view developed in the twentieth century), they imply that there has been a growing inclination in the academic circles to view the child as a "social subject, situated in history" (p. 192). Kessel and Siegel argue that both psychology and history may be converging upon the concept of the 'invented child' (1983, in Cahan et. all, 1993), or the socially constructed child. Fostering the reconceptualization of notions of the child and childhood, Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2000) suggest that "from our postmodern perspective, there is no such thing as 'the child' or 'childhood', an essential being and state waiting to be discovered, defined and realized, so that we can say to ourselves and others 'that is how children are, that is what childhood is'" (p. 43). Instead, they argue for multiple views of the child and childhood, which are multiply constructed because culturally and historically situated.

A significant outcome of seeing children as actively embedded in their social world is a focus on children's social relationships and cultural context. My efforts to examine what it means for economically poor children to learn and live in two centers in Brazil revolved around the dynamic and dialectical processes of how children constructed meanings and experienced pedagogy with others in their particular, situated context.

Young Children as Rich, Co-constructors of Knowledge and Self

Our image of the child is rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent and most of all, connected to adults and other children (Malaguzzi, 1993, in Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence, 2000, p. 48).

In my study I have adopted Malaguzzi's view above. On the one hand, such an approach stands in contrast with views of the child reared in poverty as destitute, lacking, or the object of oppression. On the other hand, the rich-child approach demands multifaceted inquiries of the pedagogical experiences of poor children that go beyond the simplistic description of impoverished educational practices. The young children in my study are active social actors who actively shape their experiences. As Price (1998) argues, children "make choices, albeit constrained choices, and may act in ways that redefine the constraints and potential they encounter" (p.468). Moreover, as Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence (2000) further discuss, the rich child is a "co-constructor" or an active participant in the social construction of her world and sense of self (p. 50). The socio-constructivist view claims that the child's self is constructed in transactions with others and the world (Bruner, 1996). Children, like adults, live their lives immersed in a rich, chaotic web of social relations and human interactions. In relationships with others, the child is actively trying to understand and construct this ambiguous, messy, context-sensitive social world and its reality. In this process, children are constructing their sense of self as well.

Finally, remaining an active participant in the social construction of her world and her sense of self, the child is rich in human agency: What children learn, all their knowledge, emerges in the process of self and social construction (since) children do not passively endure their experiences, but become active agents in their socialization, co-constructed with peers (Rinaldi, 1993, p. 105).

A final, and noteworthy aspect integrating the vision of the child as a rich, co-creator of knowledge, and self with others is the child as a citizen in formation (Cerisara, 1998). Earlier I mentioned a significant conceptual shift in Brazil, when, after much struggle, children from birth to 6 years of age were recognized in the 1989 Constitution as citizens with a right to public education. The immense gap between

reality and what the Constitution dictates does not invalidate the potential for advancement represented by this step. Cerisara (1998) argues for a holistic and comprehensive view of the citizen child who “learns and make history” as complex, full, and rich human beings and who has a right to education, care and happiness. (ibid., p. 11). Dahlbergh and her colleagues (2000) argue that to look at the child as a citizen is to place her existence “not only in the family home, but also in the wider world outside. (...) It also means that the young child is not only included, but in active relationship with that society and that world” (p. 50).

The ideas outlined in my framework of the child attempt to understand how children actively engaged with their reality, constructed their world and developed a sense of self, in spite of the limitations of poverty. In other words, children are always make-meaning and in the process actively developing their identity. Hence, it becomes significant to understand the ways pre-school, and in particular pedagogies, dynamically shapes young children’s lives. This approach has also inspired me to look at children in interactions with others under the lens of broader notions of pedagogy.

Concepts of Pedagogy

Etymologically, as pointed by Gore (1993), pedagogy is defined as “the science of teaching children” (p.93). In its most familiar usage pedagogy has been synonymous to different concepts such as “a teaching style, a matter of personality and temperament, the mechanics of securing classroom control to engage learning, a cosmetic bandage on the hard body of classroom contact” (Lusted, 1986, p.2).

In reviewing the literature I have encountered a growing interest in the construct of pedagogy. The work of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire has posed significant

questions that have contributed towards the reframing of ‘pedagogy.’ He has used the term pedagogy for over thirty years, since first adopting it during the pre-military dictatorship period in Brazil. In Europe, most specifically Italy and Sweden, authors in the field of early education have preferred using the concept of pedagogy over teaching or ECCE (Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence, 2000; Moss and Petrie, 2002; Malaguzzi, 1993). In the United States, the National Academy of Sciences Committee on Early Childhood Pedagogy promoted a discussion of the conceptual significance of pedagogy. Critical feminists (Lather, 1991; Gore, 1993) also seem to prefer the concept of pedagogy.

“Why Pedagogy?”

In her book, “Getting Smart” (1991), Patti Lather dedicates a section to the question of why pedagogy is a useful concept. Both Lather and Gore (1993) refer to David Lusted’s (1986) much-cited article also entitled “Why Pedagogy.” This critical question seems the right one to start my discussion of pedagogy.

The first reason I chose to use pedagogy as a framework to investigate children’s lives is because I wanted to avoid a “too narrow understanding” of early education, care and learning (Paulo Freire, 1998, p.47). In this sense, pedagogy indicates a concern with more than mere instruction or knowledge transference from teacher to child. Such a concept of pedagogy “denies the teacher as neutral transmitter, the student as passive and knowledge as immutable material to impart” (Lather, 1991, p.15).

Thus, pedagogy is conceptually significant because it allows for bringing into focus the process of co-construction of knowledge by children and teachers. Understood this way, pedagogy addresses the “transformation of consciousness that takes place in the interaction of three agencies--the teacher, the learner and the knowledge they together

produce” (Lusted, 1986, p.3). If one insists on viewing knowledge as co-constructed, “produced in the process of interaction,” pedagogy becomes inseparable from relationships, from active exchanges among engaged learners (Lusted, 1986, p. 4). Pedagogy then becomes a “pedagogy of relationships” centered around the “human encounter”: that is, the relationships of children with other children and with teachers around knowledge (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 1999, p. 58).

In this sense pedagogy is coherent or can be constructed to be coherent with the view of the rich child I have embraced. The “transactional model of pedagogy” (Lusted, 1986, p.3) based on relationships implies that children and adults participating in the pedagogical encounter are active producers of knowledge. Pedagogy then insists that I look beyond instruction as technique or skill as well as beyond a too common custodial approach to early childhood education of the poor to focus instead on the rich meaning-making process of children in the two centers. Finally, pedagogy encompasses a broader definition of children’s educational experiences to include their lived experiences in these centers: their readings of the world, self and the word (Freire, 1998).

Consequently, in my study, children’s interactions with other children, adults and the curriculum were examined as “act(s) of pedagogy” (Bruner, 1996, p.12). Hence, my analysis of children’s experiences focused on how children constructed and understood educational practices in the two centers. Another reason why pedagogy is an important concept is because it can address the relationship among children’s lives, power and knowledge in the classroom. In essence, studying children’s experiences of pedagogy becomes a study of children’s agency.

Pedagogy of Freedom and Pedagogy as an Exercise of Freedom

The Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire (1998) has been a main proponent of a “pedagogy of freedom,” also called liberatory or critical pedagogy. His approach highlights the fundamental importance of the dynamic nature of the classroom’s social relationships (Giroux, 1988). For Freire, a truly transactional pedagogy can only be practiced in a democratic context.

Such pedagogy of freedom entails the struggle for “a true dialogue in which subjects in dialogue learn and grow by confronting their differences” (Freire, 1998, p. 59). In other words, it requires the struggle for transforming learning institutions, and particularly early childhood institutions, into places where “everyone claims knowledge as a field in which we all labor” (hooks, 1994, p. 15), or where students’ autonomy and construction of knowledge is honored and supported.

Respecting children’s ways of knowing denies “domestication” of the child by the teacher in what Freire (1998) called a “banking system” of education (p.58). The banking system of education is better illustrated by traditional or teacher-centered classrooms where students are “objects,” recipients of knowledge transmitted from teachers rather than “subjects” who construct knowledge in interaction with others (ibid., p.4).

Views of Power and Pedagogy

Power is fundamental to critical or liberatory pedagogy, which centers around pedagogy as shaped by and shaping power relations (Gore, 1993). Social change is the inherent outcome of a pedagogy of liberation. Teacher and student engage in a process of “reading critically their reality” (Shor and Freire, 1986, p. 36) in order to struggle for the transformation of society. Hence, Freire’s critical pedagogy is a pedagogy of

empowerment (Brady, 1995). Together with democratic relationships in the classroom, another crucial aspect of this pedagogy is raising students' consciousness, or disclosing the historical, dialectical and complex mechanisms through which education is used to reproduce domination (Shor and Freire, 1988). In the democratic classroom, teacher and students, under the guidance of the teacher as a transformative intellectual (Giroux, 1988), strive to unveil how ideology and wider relations of power affect knowledge-production. In her book 'Schooling Young Children: A Feminist Pedagogy for Liberatory Learning,' Brady (1995) discusses critiques of Freire "not in an attempt to reject or discredit his work but, rather, to extend and build upon what he has done in order to enrich and deepen its most emancipatory possibilities" (p.23). I also see the 'problematization' of Freire's theory as expansions to his contributions to the field of education.

Foucault (1977) has significantly contributed to understanding power and power relations. He has a view of power as relational, circulating, pervasive and complex. This form of power functions through disciplinary mechanisms in which individuals come to embody control, thus, governing themselves. Multiple and complex, power dynamics "involve each of us as vehicles of power, as well as the effects of power" (Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence, 2000, p. 32). A view of individuals or the self as constituted by pervasive and circulating power also leads to a rejection of monolithic views of self, suggesting that we are all are "multiply situated" and thus "stuffed with social contradictions" (Fine, 1994, p. 21) This perspective of power, as Gore (1993) has argued, challenges articulations of power (Gore, 1993) as property and dualistic, either oppressive or productive (liberatory).

Feminist authors among others have strongly argued that it is necessary to embrace the challenge of questioning standard notions of power. Furthermore, as Gore (1993) has suggested, “we are all implicated in relations of power” (p. 135). Dahlberg and her colleagues (1999) have dedicated their book to the exploration of the implications of a Foucauldian perspective to the field of early pedagogy. They introduced the concept of ‘pedagogy as an exercise of freedom.’

Pedagogy as an Exercise of Freedom

Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2000) claim that a pedagogy centered on the human encounter, first and foremost, demands the “exercise of freedom” in the places of learning (p. 79). They suggest that the pre-schools in Reggio Emilia, Italy exemplify the purpose of such early pedagogy of “enabling children to have the courage to think and act for themselves” (p. 123). Young children, with the partnership of teachers and families, practice thinking critically, they create new discourses, new realities, and by doing so take control of their lives and their learning. They do so with the support of a ‘community of learners,’ which makes learning truly a joint venture. Such pedagogy entails that teachers do not retain the monopoly of teaching, but help to orchestrate a “subcommunity of learners in interaction” or a “subcommunity of mutual learners” (Bruner, 1996, p. 21). In sum, at Reggio schools children are provided with a wide range of opportunities to make and express meaning while they engage actively in knowledge-construction. Dahlberg and colleagues (2000) argue that the Reggio Emilia pedagogical practice is so inspiring to educators around the world because it reflects a profound understanding of how children relate to their world. Bruner (1999) describes what he observed at one of his visits to the flagship Diana pre-school:

After my second or third day of sitting there in one of those Reggio pre-schools for the first time some years ago, just observing how they went about their business, I had one of those shocks of recognition: I realized I was beholding a small miracle. A particular teacher was working with a group of kids. Every time she asked a kid something, she *waited* until he answered. And if there was any hesitation in his replying, she rephrased or elaborated the query, taking the burden of discourse on herself, waiting for a response. If she didn't understand the answer the kid might offer, she said right out, still bearing the burden, what it was about the answer that still puzzled her, inviting the kid to help her a little more in understanding what he had meant. If there were any uncertainties left, she might then ask the other kids to help clarify what the first kid might have meant, always checking with the kid who'd been asked the questions whether that's what he had indeed meant (p.10).

The Reggio 'miracle,' for Bruner (1990), is to teach and foster children's learning to "[take] discourse seriously, in treating knowledge and the effort after knowledge as human and real and effortful" (p.10). The miracle also lies in holding children's meaning-making processes at the heart of the pedagogical effort. For at the heart of 'pedagogy as an exercise of freedom' is valuing and supporting of children's construction of meaning.

The Reggio experience has been widely recognized for its stimulus to children's symbolic representation—young children are encouraged to use a "hundred languages" in their process of make-meaning of themselves and their world. Through spoken and written words, movement, drawing, sculpture, shadow play, painting, and "all graphic languages" (Katz, 1993, p.20) children express ideas, thoughts, feelings, impressions and desires. Another important element of the Reggio pedagogy is the project approach to inquiry and learning. Working in small groups, young children undertake in-depth studies of meaningful (to them) questions. For example, a group of five and six-year-olds explored dinosaurs over four months. After exploring various ideas, the children and their adult partners worked to build a life-size diplodocus in the school's courtyard. Rankin's (1993) reflections on the dinosaur project clarify how the Reggio pedagogy practices a view of the child making-meaning and constructing knowledge with others:

Emphasis is placed on learning as a group and developing a sense of “we.” Reggio Emilia educators use the phrase, “Io chi siamo” (“the I who we are”) to express the idea that is within this shared space of “we” that each child can offer his or her best thinking, leading to a rich and fertile group exchange and stimulating something new and unexpected, impossible for any one person to create alone. The teacher’s role in this process is to galvanize each child to participate and to grow, as much as he or she can, within the context of the group investigation...In this sense, the actual theme or content of the project is not as important as the process of children thinking, feeling, working, and progressing together with others (p.193/194).

Pedagogical practices in these Italian pre-schools are consequently contextualized, that is dynamic experiences relevant to the specific context where they are happening. There is not such a thing as a Reggio curriculum, but specific groups of children and adults engaging in very specific pedagogical encounters. Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2000) argue that “encountering the work in Reggio is more like encountering a series of projects or events, which range over a wide spectrum of contents. By respecting the singularity of these events, it becomes clear that there is not only one possible answer or way of working” (p.3). Hence, for these authors, the Reggio pre-schools can be viewed as lived or practical manifestations of an early childhood pedagogy that is open to multiple questions and multiple, singular ways of knowing and also ‘doing.’

The concept of pedagogy brings into focus the processes of children’s co-construction of knowledge or the question of how children learn (Lusted, 1987).

Concepts of Pedagogical Experiences: A Deweyan Perspective

Another significant concept to my study is Dewey’s theory of experience, which I discuss next. Dewey (1938) argues for the need of a theory of experience. He claims that “all genuine education comes about through experience” and that experiences can be

educative or mis-educative, depending on their quality (p. 25). He wrote: “the central problem of an education based upon experience is to select the kind of present experiences that live fruitfully and creatively in the subsequent experiences” (p. 28). Therefore, the key aspect of the quality of experience is its “connection with further experience” (ibid. p. 27). An educative experience promotes growth of further experience, while a mis-educative one hinders or distorts it. Dewey (1938) recognizes the challenge represented by actualizing a pedagogy that stems from this concept of educative experience: “it is, accordingly, a much more difficult task to work out the kinds of materials, of methods, and of social relationships that are appropriate to the new education than is the case with traditional education” (p. 29).

Erickson and Schultz (1991, p. 465) have looked at Dewey’s work in their own efforts of conceptualizing students’ experience. They highlight that students’ educational experiences involve a two-fold process, an interaction between the learner and the learning environment. Therefore, educational experiences are comprised of the objective conditions of the classroom as well as by student’s subjectivity. More exactly, experiences include how the student engages or interacts with the objective conditions that surround her/him (Erickson and Schultz, 1991). Dewey (1938) argues:

The word “interaction”. . . expresses [one of the] chief principles for interpreting an experience in its educational function and force. It assigns equal rights to both factors in experience—objective and internal conditions. Any normal experience is an interplay of these two sets of conditions. Taken together, or in their interaction, they form what we call a *situation*. (...) The statement that individuals live in a world means, in the concrete, that they live in a series of situations. And when it is said that they live *in* these situations, the meaning of the word “in” is (...) that interaction is going on between and individual and objects and other persons (p. 43-44)

Dewey (1938) suggested that the educator’s main concern is with the educational situation, particularly with the objective conditions of the learning environment:

The individual, who enters as a factor into it (the situation), is what he is at a given time. It is the other factor, that of objective conditions, which lies to some extent within the possibility of regulations by the educator. (...) (The notion of) “objective conditions” covers a wide range. It includes what is done by the educator and the way in which is done, not only words spoken but also the tone of voice in which they are spoken. It includes equipment, books, apparatus, toys, games played. It includes the materials with which an individual interacts, and, most important of all, the total social set-up of the situations in which a person is engaged (p. 45).

In her/his consideration of the educational situation, Dewey (1938) calls attention to the importance of the consideration of the “powers and purpose of those taught”(p.45). Therefore, Erickson and Schultz (1991) observe that to understand educational experiences requires the contemplation of the subjective meanings students give to their experiences as well as their learning conditions. They suggest that “it would be necessary to pay close attention, first to the needs, purposes, personality disposition, and intellectual capacities brought by the student to the scene of immediate curricular engagement and, second, to what is present in that scene to be engaged by the student, as she sees, hears, speaks, and otherwise acts among the persons, artifacts, and social relations in and through which ‘curriculum’ is being encountered” (p. 466). Hence, Dewey’s conception of educational experience, requires that the educator considers the transaction between subjective experience and environment in the social context of learning with others.

Thus far I have highlighted the significance of pedagogy and the influence of experience as children make sense of their world. Narrative ways of knowing are significant to understanding young children, how they approach their world, and how they make sense of their experiences.

Young Children's Narrative Thinking

The study of narrative in my conceptual framework presupposes the interpretative and sociocultural approach advocated by Nicolopoulou (1997, 1996) and Bruner (1996, 1992, 1990). Such an approach focuses on narrative as “vehicle of meaning” (Nicolopoulou, 1997, p. 208). On one hand, an interpretive model of narrative suggests that children make meanings, construct knowledge of themselves, the social world and culture as storytellers (Bruner, 1990). On the other hand, this model views children's stories as key to the meanings children give to their pedagogical experiences, in particular, and the events of their lives, in general.

Here, narrative is used interchangeably with story. Nicolopoulou (1996) argued that story or narrative include “narratives written for children, told to children, constructed by adults with children, and composed and told by children. . . . It also properly includes narratives enacted by children in fantasy play” (p. 179).

Next, I explore the theoretical model inspiring the approach to narrative as vehicle of meaning. I review the following concepts: (a) narrative as model of language and thought, and (b) what prompts narrative. I then address the multiple ways the concept of narrative lends itself as a crucial element of children's pedagogical experience and as a means to children's interpretations of their experiences.

Narrative Thinking

The interpretative framework of narrative claims that story is both language as well as a mode of knowing (Carter, 1993). In the past twenty years a number of writers have concerned themselves with the study of the relationship between different modes of thought and discourse (Olson, 1990). This debate has developed from the view initially

introduced by Vygotsky that “cultural products, like language and other symbolic systems, mediate thought and place their stamp on our representations of reality” (Bruner, 1992, p. 231). Vygotsky’s concluded, that “different forms of speaking are related to different forms of thinking” (Werstch, 1991, p. 30), in Nicolopoulou, 1997, p. 192).

Bruner (1990) has suggested a distinction between paradigmatic and narrative thought. Paradigmatic thought is the domain of mathematical thought, fact and logical proposition. It searches for the scientific truth and is concerned with consistency, verification, observation and proof. Narrative thought is the domain of arts, story, and drama. It is the mode of thought we use to understand and construct the messy, rich, chaotic world of social relations and human interaction. Through stories we make meanings, we construct the social world and its reality (Bruner, 1996). Narrative is the language of psychic realities, dealing with emotions, beliefs, desires and intentions. It is also the language of common sense, of everyday life, of believable (though not necessarily true) historical descriptions (Bruner, 1990).

In this sense, narrative is a symbolic form, which allows us to give meaning to our experiences and understand our reality (Nicolopoulou, 1996). As so, narrative goes beyond mere description of human behavior to include both human actions and intentions (Astington, 1990). We use narrative to attach subjective meanings to our actions. For example, it is through narrative that we differentiate meanings of the same human behavior of closing the eyelids, in Ryle’s famous example (Geertz, 1973). Closing one’s eyelids can signify the mere twitching of one’s eyes, playfully or nervously winking at someone, or parodying someone else. Thus, the meaning of the act of closing one’s eyes depends on how we interpret the situation. Story provides the means to deal with the dilemma, inconsistency, contradiction and multiple meanings embedded in human action.

Another crucial aspect of the study of narrative is to understand what prompts or generates it. Bruner (1990) suggests that narrative explains the extraordinary, the breach of the canonical, e.g., a person waving an American flag in the post-office. The ordinary is interpreted as canonical (we ‘act post-office’ in the post-office), and is, consequently, self-explanatory. Going in the post-office to mail a letter does not involve ‘drama’ or does not require dramatic quality of story. Story searches to explain the breach of the ordinary (waving a flag in the post-office) by looking at intentions behind the action (the guy is crazy) or cultural explanations (today is a national holiday). For Bruner (1990), the narrative function “is to find an intentional state that mitigates or at least makes comprehensible a deviation from a canonical cultural pattern” (p.50).

Next, I discuss narrative as a vehicle of meaning or as a means to children’s interpretations of their experiences. Nicolopoulou (1996) suggested three main features of narrative: narrative as symbolic form, as symbolic action, and situated in culture.

Narrative as Symbolic Form, Symbolic Action and Socio-Cultural Activity

The interpretive approach to narrative holds that narrative is the language children use to ‘make-meaning.’ As Paley (1990) argues “[children] do not pretend to be storytellers, they are storytellers. It is their intuitive approach to all occasions. It is the way they think” (p. 17). Therefore, children’s stories are a symbolic form, and as such, vehicles of meaning. Stories indicate how children make sense of their lives and experiences, of self and others in the world.

Children’s stories are also a form of symbolic action. In this sense, the important question is how children engage stories in the classrooms or “what children do with narrative,” both as individuals and as group members (Nicolopoulou, 1996, p. 208).

Nicolopoulou (*ibid.*) suggests, that children use narrative to make sense of their experiences, to explore and express their feelings, and also to situate themselves (“find their place”) in their world. Vivian Paley’s (1995, 1992, 1990, 1981) accounts of children’s stories and how children use stories in her classroom provide insightful examples of narrative as symbolic action. Through careful and caring observation and description of children’s stories, Paley has been able to capture instances of young children’s meaning-making processes while they encounter self and other in the world of a pre-school room. The children in her books use stories in varied ways: to gain entrance into groups, to deal with social exclusion, to distinguish right from wrong, fair from unfair, work from play, and to work out issues of gender roles and identity. Paley’s accounts also show how children engage narratives to sort out and act out their emotions and the existential issues that confront them.

Paley’s books also indicate the potential of studying and engaging narrative as symbolic action in the classroom. Besides dealing with what children do with stories in her classroom, Paley’s most recent writing (1995, 1992) suggests a slightly different question: what teachers together with children can do with stories. In other words, she explores the pedagogical possibilities of stories. Paley’s (1992) engagement of stories to deal with issues of democracy in the classrooms in the book “You can’t say you can’t play” is one example of what Bruner (1996) has called a ‘narrative curriculum.’ Such curriculum deals with the joint construction between teacher and students of a classroom culture that fosters a community of learners, and thus, a joint construction of knowledge. The point of this ‘other curriculum’ (Paley, 1995), other in relation to the manifest curriculum, deals not so much with subject matter, but with practicing living in a mutual culture. Therefore, Paley’s ‘other curriculum’ can be seen as another example of

pedagogy as an exercise of freedom. Her narrative curriculum is centered on relationships and on communication, stimulating children to think critically, to ask questions, to find their own responses with others, and to encounter multiple alternatives (Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence, 2000).

Finally, narrative is also a socio-cultural activity: (a) it is dynamically situated in context, both being shaped by and shaping culture, and (b) it is a social activity, undertaken with others. Children do not simply absorb cultural messages, but actively interact with culture in their search for meaning. Stories result from an active interaction between the child and her cultural world (Nicolopoulou, 1997). Bruner (1996) argues that narratives as ‘interpretations of meanings reflect not only the idiosyncratic histories of individuals, but also the culture’s canonical ways of constructing reality’ (p. 14). Nicolopoulou (1997) similarly claims that “in constructing their stories, children draw on images and conceptual resources present in their cultural environment, which shape their imagination and sensibility in profound and subtle ways, but they do not just passively absorb these elements—and the messages behind them. It seems clear that, even at a very young age, they are able to appropriate them and, to some degree, to manipulate them selectively for their own symbolic ends” (p. 209).

In sum, through my conceptual framework I attempted to provide a broad understanding of children, their pedagogical experiences and the ways they make-meaning of their pedagogical experiences. This framework allowed me to view children as rich meaning-makers who actively constructed and interpreted their experiences. I focus on the complexities of the interactions and learning situations children encountered, in order to understand how their agency was both supported and constrained in the two *creches*. I observed children closely and talked to them in different ways. Yet, in order to

establish a rich communication with them, I listened closely to children, particularly to their stories. Children's narratives were crucial to my insights into what it means for children to learn and live in the two *creches*. In sum, I focus on children's pedagogical experiences as "meaningfully experienced." Consequently, I saw the child mainly as a "sense-maker," a human being who "signifies—gives and derives meaning to and from" their pedagogical experiences (Van Manen, 1990, p.14). Next I move to an overview of the various chapters in which I present my data analysis.

Introducing the Children, the Teachers, and the *Creches*

Introducing the Children

Between sixteen and twenty children, ages four and five, were enrolled in each classroom throughout the year. Here I introduce only a few of them, focusing on those who became my main collaborators at the *creche* and at the *Sabiá*.

Cláudia was one of the most active children at the Santa Rita. She had at least two years of early childhood care experience when I first met her. She had been at the *creche* the year before. She had many friends and was particularly close to Gabriela Santos. She seemed very comfortable with both the adults and children, and everyone seemed to know her well. Helena, the teacher, referred to her as a "one of the brightest children in her class," a "*espuleta*" (firebrand) and "*um perigo*" ('threatening'). She is a vivacious child, very talkative and alert. Her voice was constantly heard in the classroom. She played with gusto and seemed to greatly enjoy the so-called educational activities. Her mother worked as a maid. Her boss told me that she was greatly interested in Cláudia's education and had arranged for Cláudia to be at the *creche*. Cláudia and her

mother lived in this woman's apartment at the heart of a nearby bustling commercial area and middle-class enclave.

Gabriela Santos was Cláudia's best friend. They had been together at the *creche* the previous year. The two friends seemed to lead a group of 'in-girls,' which included Daniele and Maria Luísa. This group was among the most socially and academically successful in Helena's room. *Gabriela* played with most children in the classroom. She was a great storyteller who crafted strong narrative images in her accounts of pre-school. She expressed her concerns with *aproveitar* or 'take advantage of the opportunities' at the *creche*. *Gabriela*'s family included her mother, who also worked as a maid in the *bairro*, her father and two older sisters, who had also attended the *creche*. The family used to live at *The Morro* until they moved to a house in a distant neighborhood. Every morning and afternoon *Gabriela* and her mother crossed the city in two long bus rides to and then from the *creche*.

Washington was a somehow quiet boy with serious opinions. He loved to play and told me that he "wanted only to play" at the *creche*. He seemed to struggle with the educational activities, at least during the first half of the year. He also had been at the *creche* the year before. His best friends were Matias and Lucas. Often he played house with the girls, particularly *Gabriela S.* and Maria Luísa. During the first semester, he spent a month with his mother at her father's house in the rural area. He told many stories about the animals there and about bathing in the river. He lived with his mother and his father in *The Morro*. His mother worked as a maid in the *barrio*. His father was a construction worker. His cousins lived nearby, and they walked together to the *creche*.

Davidson had never been in day-care before coming to the *creche*. He seemed to adapt well, and soon became an audible voice in Helena's classroom. He told me that he

“loved the *trabalhinhos*.” Indeed, among the boys, he seemed to be the most at ease with the activities. He is very social and verbally articulated. Exceptionally at the *creche*, his mother worked as a teacher in a nearby elementary school. He was an only child and lived with both his parents.

Margarida, nicknamed Margo, was Sara’s main helper and one of the worst *bagunceira(o)s* (badly behaved) children, according to the teacher. The year I observed was her third at the *Sabiá*. Her three brothers had attended the *creche* before her, and one of them participated in the after-school activities. She was actively interested in everything at the *Sabiá*, from learning and playing to cleaning and helping with lunch. She was constantly calling out or being called out in Sara’s room. She was very poor. She referred to not having enough to eat and not having a shower at home. At that time, her mother worked handing in leaflets on the streets downtown. Margarida’s mother participated in the school’s activities; the teachers seemed to know her well. All teachers at *Sabiá* expressed concern with Margo. She had recurrent lice and often came in unbathed and dirty. They seemed frustrated with the mother’s refusal to discuss these problems. They added that the aging grandmother was the one who took care of the children. They gave Margarida clothes, bathed her regularly and treated the lice. One teacher often took Margarida home with her. The school contributed to the family with leftovers. Margarida lived near the school. The neighborhood was becoming increasingly dangerous, and one of her brothers had been accused of being involved in a robbery.

Joana participated and excelled in all the activities. She was quiet and well behaved. She came to school in cute, pressed outfits. She often reported children’s misbehavior to me. Several children said they liked her best at the *Sabiá*. Margarida explained her preference: “because she is pretty; she has pretty hair.” When I asked what

was pretty about Joana's hair, Margo said, "It's long and combed." Joana left the school on the second semester because she moved to a different neighborhood. The children said that they missed her. She seemed to be an important presence in the classroom. Somehow she seemed to represent children's ideals of nice and right. Joana lived with her father and mother. Her mother interrupted her teaching career and was expecting a second child.

Cleberson also had been at *Sabiá* since he was two-years old. He is a sensitive boy whose insights were very enlightening. The children and the teacher listed him as a *bagunceiro*. Margarida also said that he "did not know how to do draw." He often needed Sara's help with the activities. His mother lived somewhere else, and he indicated that he greatly missed her. He lived with his grandmother very close to the *creche*. His grandmother was active at the community activities at the school, where she taught crochet classes.

Introducing the Teachers

The two teachers I observed were Helena, at the Santa Rita, and Sara, at the *Sabiá*. Both were in their early-twenties and had a high-school teaching-equivalent diploma. Helena and Sara are warm, sensitive and committed teachers who expressed their love for teaching young children.

Helena is a tall, dark-brown skinned young woman. She has a bright smile and a delightful attitude. Only very rarely did she raise her voice in the classroom. Thais described her as "wonderful with the kids." The year I observed was her second at the *creche*. Before working there, she had finished an internship at a municipal center for young children with special needs. Helena wanted to continue her studies. She said that she would like to be a therapist in order to help young children with special needs. She

lived in a traditional low-middle-class neighborhood. Her family had either working-class or low-middle class background.

Sara is smallish and almost shy. She has blue-eyes and is light-skinned. She was raised at the *Sabiá*. Her mother worked as a maid for the founder and her, at-the-time, husband since they bought the lot. Sara attended the *creche* at the *Sabiá* and participated in the after-school program. She had assisted the teachers over the years, and then taught the youngest class for two years. She requested to teach 4- and 5-year olds. The year I observed was her first with that age group. Sara lived all her life very close to the school in an enclosed, stable neighborhood. She and her husband built their house in the same street where she grew up. Other *Sabiá* teachers and several children who attended the *creche* lived nearby. Sara wanted to get a college degree in teaching young children. At the end of the school year she had a baby and decided to stay home for a while.

Introducing the Creches

Associação Educacional Sabiá

The SMED's team considered the *Associação Educacional Sabiá* (Educational Association *Sabiá*-AES) one of the best *creches* in Belo Horizonte. The *Sabiá* was the only center with a pedagogical plan, an important quality indicator, among the fifty in its region. Other indicators were: (a) staff qualifications (the director and the coordinator had a pedagogy college degree, all teachers had a high-school level teaching diploma and some a one-year specialization in early childhood education); (b) the planning of the physical space and the grounds; (c) the efficiency of the organization of the center; (d) the level of parental participation; (e) the school's insertion in the community; and,

finally (f) the staff's active participation, especially the center's director, in the ECCE movement in Belo Horizonte.

The educational role of the center is clearly stated in its pedagogical plan: "The AES is a non-profit and community organization, with educational objectives" (1998, p.5). Generally speaking, the AES' approach to early education reflected in its pedagogical plan is a socio-constructivist approach, which values the child's construction of knowledge from concrete action especially through social interaction with others (1998). The AES's pedagogy has been influenced by progressive educational experiences, with an emphasis on children's exploration in a large, natural space; on supporting cooperation versus competition; on democratic relations in the classroom; and on the objective and subjective aspects of children's learning as stated in the pedagogical plan (1998, p. 21):

In the *Sabiá*, the time-space of the school means pleasure and growth for everybody. At the *Sabiá* there is a change of roles and of the relation between teacher-students. The relationship becomes at the same time, objective and subjective: (a) more objective because it does not follow rigid parameters and tries to achieve change in the student in the sense that the school helps to increase the child's competence and his/her quality of life; and (b) subjective because, by adopting this stance, every one can be him or herself, talk, listen, feel, express feelings and live. The "doing" becomes necessary in the daily life of the school. "Doing" starts from the life one lives, from the relationships; and from this point one starts to construct the schemes to discover and organize 'knowledge.' Starting from the student's concrete action, knowledge is constructed.

The pedagogical orientation of the *Associação Educacional Sabiá* reflects a particular history. The association was created in 1968 by a progressive educator upon her return to Brazil after finishing a Ph.D. in France. Gabriela decided to organize a group of middle-class parents around the idea of an alternative institution to care and educate their young children. The AES became the first early-childhood center for middle-class children in Belo Horizonte. Soon it became a reference for other *creches*. In

1985 the AES moved from an affluent urban area to a large green lot (15,000 square meters) in the heart of one of the poorest areas of Belo Horizonte. Two main objectives prompted this move, according to the *creche*'s director: to "envision and create a unique educational space" and to develop a program that would integrate children from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

The new center was designed to reflect a particular view of how young children learn and how they should be taught. The nursery looks like a small house, with a living room, kitchen and bedrooms, fostering the continuity between home and *creche* experiences. The pre-school rooms are located between the nursery and the elementary age complexes. They are hexagonal in shape, allowing for more flexible group arrangements. Older children's classrooms also stand in a separate complex, higher on the grounds, indicating an educational progression. There is a library, an art room and just recently a *brinquedoteca* (a "library of toys" or a play-room). The kitchen and the cafeteria are in the heart of the school, the latter a large, open patio. The computer room and office constitute the administrative area. The coordinator's office is in a separate room between the cafeteria and the library. The buildings stand in harmony with large mango trees, old bamboo plants, and two vegetable gardens. All the rooms open into the expansive green areas and many activities such as circle time, storytelling and dramatization happen outside. There is also a pool, a playground, and a soccer field. As Mariana further explained the school space had been envisioned as a privileged "learning element or content":

The four-year-old child learns in my opinion, by acting on and being acted upon by the objects... And what are these objects? These objects-- what we call objects and in reality are our contents--these objects are the letters, the numbers and everybody and everything that is around us. In our situation, they include our environment, our plants, our trees... I give priority to this issue of the space as a content of learning (...) As a child, I am leaving my body to learn the

environment, to learn the space, a space outside me, another body. This movement allows me to later abstract other knowledge. (...) Thus, to learn about this space will make other discoveries possible.

The classroom at *Sabiá* looked and felt very different than the one at Santa Rita. The octagonal format was unusual. There was a private bathroom. The room was airy and quiet: two windows and one door opened into the green space outside. The children voted the room name: the Star class. A nicely painted star adorned the entrance door. The walls were brightly decorated with different murals, carefully displaying children's recent *trabalhinhos* and artwork. Other murals included the children-dictated classroom rules ('signed' by each child with drawings or initials), removable cards with children's first names, the alphabet letters and numbers. A blackboard hung close to the floor. Three craters filled with books, magazines and toys sat around the periphery of the room. There were low shelves for children's backpacks, and a water filter. It was a warm and bright room, where children's creations occupied a central place. Yet, as I looked more closely I saw significant similarities with the Santa Rita's classroom. Children-sized tables and chairs occupied the center of the room like they did at the *creche*. Materials and supplies, such as paper, glue, and color pencils were kept away from children in the teacher's closet. Most toys were in a big red plastic trunk donated by municipal social agency.

The vision of a school that integrated children from different socio-economic background was not fulfilled. After the move to the poor neighborhood, the *Sabiá* lost its middle-class clientele. The vast majority of children enrolled came from very poor families. As of November of 1998, only 20 out of the 119 enrolled families at the *creche* received a monthly income equal or higher to five minimum wages (one minimum wage was equivalent to U.S. \$ 60 per month at that time). Seventy-five families qualified for public support with an income equal or inferior to two minimum wages.

Around two hundred children ages two to fourteen attend the *Sabiá*. In 1998 the numbers were as follows: (a) 132 children between ages two and six, (b) 30 between ages seven and twelve, and (c) 50 children between ages seven and fourteen, who attended the after school program. Most young children were enrolled part-time, in the afternoon, although some stayed in the extended-care program in the mornings.

During its thirteen years in the heart of the poorest area of Belo Horizonte, the school became a vital part of the community. For instance, it housed several community meetings such as that of parents enrolled in the *Projeto Bolsa Escola* (Project School Grant). This is a seemingly successful municipal initiative of granting low-income parents of school-age children the equivalent of a monthly minimum wage for keeping their children in school. The school also seemed to exert a leadership among other community centers.

The *Associação Educacional Sabiá* had a particular history, which differed greatly from that of the majority of the community *creches*, including the Santa Rita.

The Creche Santa Rita

The Creche Santa Rita stood in the grounds of the Santa Madalena Church, in a stable middle-class enclave in the South Region, Belo Horizonte's most affluent area. The *Morro do Papagaio*, a traditional, very large shantytown, sat on a hill, looming over the church and its adjacent *bairros*, or neighborhoods. The *creche* was created in 1978 by a group of middle-class women, members of a charity organization: the *Associação SãoVicente de Paula* (Saint Vincent de Paula Association). For over three decades the *Vicentinas* have assisted poor families in the neighboring *favela*, known as *The Morro*. According to Thais, the *creche's* director, the *Vicentinas* created the *creche* as a response

to the “complaints of the mothers of *The Morro*, mostly maids in the *bairro*, because they needed to work but did not have a place to leave the children.” As Thaís recalls:

The *Vicentinas* tried to also educate these parents. (They tried) not only to help them materially, but to motivate them to work in order to offer a better life for their children. And at that time they saw that the mothers complained: “Oh, how I am going to work, where am I going to leave my child?” So the *Vicentinas* saw this need of creating a place to put these children. So, during that time this place (pointing to the *creche*) was a soccer field. There was a priest here who liked to bring the community to the church... And later, this other priest, when he came in he started to change some things and with the *Vicentinas*’ work, they thought that the space had to be this one. So they decided to build the *creche* here.

The number of children attending the *creche* grew rapidly. Soon over sixty children between ages two and six spent their days at the *creche*. Older children came after or before school. For about 20 years, the children’s routine was basically the same: they played in large groups, had five meals a day, and received some medical and material assistance. Only in 1998, when Thaís became the director, she divided the children by age into three classrooms and gradually replaced the caregivers with qualified teachers.

In 1999, the *creche* still cared for the children of maids working in the church’s vicinity. Most families lived in *The Morro* and some in far away suburbs. The main criterion for admittance in the program was that the mother work outside the home. Thaís stated that the *creche*’s main goal was “to keep the children while their mothers are at work.” She further elaborated on the *creche*’s role in fulfilling working-mothers’ needs:

I think (the *creche*) is a great necessity, a great demand. Last year, at the beginning of the year I had sixty children on the list waiting to be called. That is another *creche*, isn’t it? So this is something that I think is a great need so that the mothers can work. Because I think that when the mother goes out to work, works the whole day and the child is at home, she works with that insecurity—how is my child at home? I don’t know what is happening but today everything can happen at any time. So when the mother knows that her child is in an institution, being taken care of, she works much better, happier. I think that this issue of her income suddenly doesn’t even matter as much. I think that if she is relaxed at work, of course the salary could be better, but if the child is here she feels even more satisfied. Because if she knows that the child is locked at home

or is in the middle of the street and she has to leave to work... So, if the child is in an institution, (she thinks), “my child is being fed, is being taken care of, I can work with peace of mind, I can go out.” (July, 1999).

Fifty-three children attended the *creche* in 1999. The municipal government offered public assistance to all children: the equivalent to a monthly per-capita of R\$ 30 or US\$15. Each family contributed R\$10.00 a month, or US\$5. Unlike the *Associação Educacional Sabiá*, the Creche Santa Rita was a full-day program (from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.) serving only young children, ages two to six.

According to the CEI’s coordinator, the Santa Rita was a very well-organized institution “that takes good care of the children, is supportive of their mothers, and whose director has been trying to foster the educational goals of the *creche*.” At the beginning of the school year I observed, the three teachers had a high-school equivalent diploma, and a new pedagogical coordinator had been hired. The *creche* had just been painted, the rooms were clean, the furniture intact, and the kitchen well equipped. A new van donated by the previous state government social agency sat in the parking lot in front of the church, the *creche*’s name painted on its side. All these factors were signs of vitality and organization in the context of *creches* serving the poor population in Belo Horizonte.

When Thaís assumed coordination she initiated a process of change that in a sense reflects or illustrates the course most community *creches* have taken under the new educational laws, and subsequent state and municipal education policies. The Creche Santa Rita seemed to be evolving from a custodial, assistance institution into a center for *educação infantil*, part of the municipal educational system. This was a complex shift. On the one hand, the *creche* seemed to remain rooted in the tradition of the *Vicentinas*. For instance, several of the *creche*’s founders and other members of the church formed the ruling board. These women worked closely with the coordination, visiting regularly,

participating in meetings with the teachers and making decisions such as whom to hire. Thaís' mother, a founding member, opened and closed the *creche* everyday during the first semester. On the other hand, Thaís' arrival coincided with the creation of the CEIs and the efforts to transform the community *creches*. Besides hiring teachers with high-school equivalent diplomas in teaching, Thais required a pedagogical coordinator. In 1999 the board hired Caroline, a former teacher's-aid in a private pre-school, with a high-school level teaching diploma and two years of experience. Thais summarized her vision for the future: "The *creche* should progress towards having an (educational) objective of what to do with the children." She explained that the teachers and the new coordinator worked closely with the CEI's supervisor in "the aspect of early childhood education."

Unlike the *Sabiá*, the Santa Rita did not have a clear, stated pedagogical plan. In the beginning of the year the teachers basically followed a calendar of daily activities developed by Thais. By June, Caroline was revising the calendar and integrating the teachers in the daily planning of activities. On one occasion, I observed her reading the new *Referencial Curricular Nacional para a Educação Infantil* (Curricular Guidelines for Early Childhood Education), a document published by the Ministry of Education (1998). In 2000, Caroline joined a CEI group with the objective to discuss pedagogical practices and develop a more detailed pedagogical plan. By the end of the year, the teachers also joined in the discussion of the plan.

The physical space seemed to reflect the *creche's* history. The *creche* was built with parishioners' donated funds in the only available patch of land in the church grounds. We arrive through a small metal gate, after climbing towards the church main entrance and traversing an ample patio in front of the church. The gate opens to a flight of cemented steps that leads into the *creche*. To the left there is a small-cemented patio

with a metal slide and a group-swing set. The six-year-olds' classroom sits on the further left. Its door opens to the playground. The eating patio, a roofed corridor between the building housing the office and classrooms and the church's outside wall, is on the right. Child-size tables and chairs are arranged to form two long tables. Along the sidewalls are some adult-sized school chairs and desks. On the far left are two large, professional size refrigerators encircled by iron bars. The kitchen is straight ahead, at the end of the long, corridor-like cafeteria.

To enter the classrooms we walk through the cafeteria. First, to the right, we pass the office. This is a small room with a desk, shelves filled with books and toys, and, usually, bags of donated toys. The entrance to Helena's classroom is at the far right of the cafeteria. Along the classroom wall there is a long sink where all children wash their hands and brush their teeth. A small corridor on the far right leads to a small storage room, the two- and three-year-olds' classroom, and to the boys and girls' bathrooms. Both classrooms' windows open into the cafeteria patio and have iron bars.

"Aunt Helena's little class," as the children called it, is a 5m by 6m room with beige tiled walls and red ceramic tile floor. Four fluorescent bulbs were always on since very little light came in through the metal and glass door. The three-meter long tiled sink with three faucets was to the left of the door. Very high on the wall above the sink there was a vowel chart with hand-colored pictures. To the right of the sink, a clay water filter and two metal cups sat on a little stand. Above it, a small window frame opened to the kitchen. Continuing around the room, there was a metal shelf unit. On the top shelves Helena kept a few scattered recycled ice-cream containers with basic supplies such as pencils and scissors, glue bottles, a glass cup with flowers the children brought her, and some paper folders with her ideas for activities. On the lower shelves she stocked the

children's plastic briefcases with their homework notebook. Next came a shorter shelf unit with few other supplies, such as donated games, a box for children's sweaters, and a cardboard box covered with gift wrap paper where the teacher collected children's *trabalhinhos*. Right below the ceiling, above the second shelf unit, there was a wall-mounted rack with a TV; the VCR was stolen. Almost as high as the TV, a 50cm long shelf held a small fan and a single cardboard box with donated large wooden numbers and letters. Next to it there was another shelf with an old record player. Often, Helena put toys or supplies that she wanted to keep out of children's reach on top of the stereo. On the wall, under the shelf, there was a metal rack with a handmade fabric holder for the children's toothbrushes. High up, a fading poster of a blond girl and a child's prayer was taped to wall next to the corner.

Going around the room, high up, on the middle of the third wall hung a clock. Above it, by the ceiling, there was a long banner with the alphabet letters and some hand-painted figures. In a somehow hazardous and inconsistent manner, Helena taped children's artwork and some panels she had made to this wall. For instance, in August, mother's-day flowers coexisted with July lanterns. The flowers were neatly taped in two rows, although some had started to come out. The lanterns looked sort of disorderly, taped with long strips of yellow tape. Under the clock, a birthday chart with a smiling Miney and a teacher's help poster were no longer used. At the very high end of the wall there was a bright yellow and blue poster with the words "to educate is to love" above the names of fifteen children in classroom. The names of the children who entered the year late were missing. The clock-wall ended at an opening into a corridor that led to the younger children's class. On the last wall, hang a 2m by 1.5m blackboard. When children worked on the blackboard they had to stand on a chair. Above the board there was a wall-

mounted fan. It is noteworthy that my videos of children's interactions, filmed mostly from children's eye-level, rarely showed the wall decorations.

Five child-size tables with four chairs each occupied the center of the room. Usually there were three tables by the clock wall and two by the sink. Each chair had a child's name taped to it. When the janitor cleaned the room after the end of the day, she piled the tables and chairs by the clock wall. After circle time the children and teacher took them out, and then, before lunch, they piled them back for naptime.

Overview of Dissertation Chapters

My study is an attempt to construct what Gore (1993) has called "personal accounts of multiplicity and contradiction"(p. 49) that reflect children's efforts at creating a place for themselves at the *creches* through their actions and particularly their narratives. My data chapters discuss children's experiences followed by their meanings of their experiences. Like Patai (1988) in her narrative of the life stories of Brazilian women, I tried to "hang on to a human version of events" (p. 33) or to capture the richness and complexities of the lived experiences of the children and their narratives of their experiences.

Chapters 3 and 5 focus on children's experiences, while chapters 4 and 6 focus on children's meanings of their experiences. It is noteworthy that I fore fronted data collected at the Creche Santa Rita in the discussion of children's pedagogical experiences, while I included data from both centers in my discussion of children's meanings. My decision was informed by my research questions and my methodological approach of uncovering children's meanings. Because my questions mostly focused on children's meanings, I wanted to ensure that my work gave primary attention to this

focus. This decision also allowed me to provide a more fine-grained discussion of children's experiences. I decided to emphasize the descriptive content of the *creche*¹ over the *Sabiá*, first because children's pedagogical experiences were not significantly different in the two centers and second because the Santa Rita was a more typical *creche*.

In my methodology, I discuss my efforts to uncover the rich lives of young children and also the challenges I encountered. The central issues in that chapter are how I came to develop a relationship with the children and attempted to understand their experiences from their own perspectives.

In my first data chapter, chapter 3, I focused on children's pedagogical experiences during the so-called educational activities or the *trabalhinhos*. I introduce life at the *creche*, offering a general sense of "what happened" and "what it was like" at the *creche*. I define the educational activities and then focus on children's engagement with the *trabalhinho*. I attempt to show the complexity of children's experiences during the convivial as well as the conflicting times they shared. In the chapter's third and final section, I discuss children's agency, focusing on how they seized opportunities within the restrictive pedagogy they encountered.

The fourth chapter centers on children's meanings of their pedagogical experiences. First, I explore some of their narratives of schooling, reintroducing the issue of narrative as children's 'mode of knowing' (Carter, 1993). Second I present children's perspectives of learning. I begin by exploring children's reasons for coming to 'school' and their accounts of what they learned. Then I examine their views of the learning process or how they learned, particularly, how they 'learned about learning.' I conclude

¹ Following children and adults' definitions, I use the terms *creche* or Santa Rita to refer to the Creche Santa Rita, and pre-school or *Sabiá* to refer to the *Associação Educacional Sabiá*.

with the discussion of children's complex accounts of how they felt about their educational experiences.

Chapter 5 is about children's pedagogical experiences of playing and also, of *bagunça* and *castigo*, or misbehavior and punishment. In this chapter I start by exploring how children played inside the classrooms and how the teacher acted to control or dictate the form and shape of play. My main focus is on the limitations on children's play: the teacher's control of resources, children's waiting and their distress and experiences of conflicts during play. Thereafter, I shift the focus to children's harmonic play or to the 'happy-waves' of play. Other critical dimensions of children's experiences included *bagunça* and *castigo*. Both were central constructs of children's representations of their experiences at the *creche*, and also, at the *Sabiá*. In the second part of the chapter I describe children's *bagunça* and teacher's *castigo*.

Chapter 6 focuses on children's meanings of *bagunça* and *castigo*. Children seemed to find the conflict-ridden dynamics of *bagunça* and *castigo* central to life at the Santa Rita and also at *Sabiá*. They translated these central experiences in central narratives, indicating that they perceived *bagunça* and *castigo* as crucial experiences in 'need of meaning' (Bruner, 1990). I first discuss how children's accounts of *bagunça* and *castigo* permeated their narratives of their pre-school lives. Then I examine what children said about their feelings and views regarding these prevalent aspects of their pre-school lives. Finally, I discuss children's views or evaluations of *castigo*.

Chapter 7 focuses on children's meanings of *mandar* or 'who is in charge.' Often in children's accounts, *mandar* requires more than being in charge, it means 'being in command' or 'giving orders.' Children's use of *mandar* raises significant questions about their agency and subjectivity, i.e. how they see themselves and how they see adults. I

discuss children's views of the following themes: (a) Who *manda* in children's learning, (b) Teacher's *mandam* by 'giving-castigo, (c) Children's views of power, particularly during play, and (d) Children's views of continuity and change at the *creche*.

Finally, in Chapter 8 I discuss the implications of my study for the policies and practices of *educação infantil* in Brazil, particularly in the lives of poor children.

CHAPTER 2: UNDERSTANDING THE RICH LIVES OF CHILDREN

In this chapter I discuss my efforts to uncover the rich lives of young children and also the challenges I encountered. The central issues here are how I came to develop a relationship with the children and attempted to understand their experiences from their own perspectives.

From the start I understood my research as a relational process embedded in relationships; this understanding guided my methodology. Wolcott (1995) describes fieldwork as an “intimate, long-term acquaintance,” adding that relationships take time and add “breadth, depth and accuracy” to what one learns (p.76). Therefore, my research methods were attempts at communication, embedded in relationships. The connection between the children, and the teachers, and me, was essential to the process of understanding ‘that which I set out understand,’ that is, children’s experiences and views of their experiences and of their world (Wolcott, 1995).

As our relationship deepened, the communication between the children and me became increasingly meaningful and mutual. Van Manen (1990) wrote, “I can only genuinely ask the question of the nature of pedagogy if I am indeed animated by this question in the very life I live with children” (p. 43). His words remind me that my relationship with the children enabled and ‘potentialized’ my understanding of their experiences and views of their experiences. I believe that it also enabled the children to raise their sound voices. The children went beyond actively responding to my interest to learn about their doing and their views. As the research progressed, they took initiatives and participated actively in setting the tone of our interactions. As evident in the data chapters, the children were rich meaning-makers who actively constructed and interpreted their experiences.

In this chapter I explore my research questions, methodological approach, data sources and research methods, and finally, my data analysis.

Research Questions

My research project is part descriptive and part interpretative (Britzman, 1991) involving children's pedagogical experiences and the meanings children give to them. It attempts to bring children's multiple voices and perspectives to the forefront of the early pedagogy debate. It evolved around the following questions:

What does it mean for economically poor four- and five-year-old children to learn and live in two creches in Brazil?

1. What pedagogical experiences do children encounter in the *creches*?
2. What do the pedagogical experiences children encounter mean to them?

My research questions arose from and are coherent with a broad view of pedagogy centered on relationships among children, teachers and knowledge. Such a view relates to much more than mere instruction or knowledge transference from teacher to child, emphasizing instead the quality of opportunities children encounter to make-meaning of their world and themselves (Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence, 2000; Freire, 1998; hooks, 1994; Lather, 1991; Lusted, 1986).

The first sub-question on children's pedagogical experiences covers a wide range of subjects, focusing not only on the tasks in which children and teachers engage but also

on how they engage in these tasks. Or, in Dewey's (1938) words, it explores not only "what is done" but "the way in which it is done" (p. 45). Through this question I attended to an important question in interpretive research; that is, "What is happening, specifically, in social action that takes place in this particular setting?" (Erickson, 1986, p. 121). Therefore, I described the pedagogical activities in which children were involved, particularly the *trabalhinhos* or classroom activities and play and how they participated in the activities. Throughout the description, I explored the nature of the discourse children experienced, particularly the opportunities they had to make-meaning. I also attended to the nature of the relationships children experienced with teachers and other children. I examined interactions when relationships were at equilibrium (when children shared experiences with others) and in disequilibrium (when children negotiated with others) (Selman, 1989; and DeVries, Reese-Learned, and Morgan, 1991). I observed the interactions between children and adults to see if and when they were centered on the children, for example, their thinking, planning, storytelling, playing and relationships, or if they were centered on the teachers, for example, reminding children of the rules, threatening children with punishment, and giving instructions (Katz, 1993).

My second sub-question raises the issue of how children "meaningfully experienced" their pre-school lives (Van Manen, 1990, p. 40). Along with 'what is happening' and 'how it is happening,' I explored 'what does it mean,' or the meanings children constructed. My main goal was to gain insight into how the children themselves came to understand their experiences of their world as they encountered other children, teachers, and knowledge. I attended closely to what children said about their views and feelings of their experiences, and particularly to their narratives of pre-schooling.

As I discuss later, I collected various forms of data in both contexts: the Creche Santa Rita and the *Associação Educacional Sabiá*. However, given my research questions and my methodological approach of uncovering children's meanings, I made the decision to forefront the data collected at the Creche Santa Rita in my two descriptive chapters, chapters 3 and 5. On chapters 4, 6, and 7 I discuss children's meanings of their pedagogical experiences in both centers. Because my questions mostly focused on children's meanings, I wanted to ensure that my work gave primary attention to this focus. This decision also allowed me to provide a more fine-grained discussion of children's experiences. I decided to emphasize the descriptive content of the *creche* over the Sabiá for two reasons: (a) children's pedagogical experiences were not significantly different in the two centers, and (b) the Creche Santa Rita is a more typical *creche*.

Methodological Approach

Feminist and critical authors (Fine, 1994; Harding, 1987; Price, 2000; and Tierney, 1994) argue for the recognition of the subjectivity involved in all research projects. One crucial aspect of recognizing the subjectivity of research projects is situating the researcher in the research process. For Harding (1987), the requirement of making the researcher and her assumptions and practices visible is necessary in order to open to scrutiny the beliefs and actions which shape the research together with the research understandings and analyses. Tierney (1994) argues that "the author plays a powerful role in the development of the reality of the text, and we prepare ourselves for that power by developing a greater sense of self-reflectivity than we have heretofore shown" (p.107).

I understand my work as partial, limited, and constructed through my own subjective lenses. Throughout the dissertation I have attempted to clarify my assumptions

and my practices. Earlier I discussed how theoretical views are productive of the ways one goes about in trying to understand others. In my study of children from low-income families, I have rejected the “oppressive simplification” (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 323) of ‘economically poor’ children as deficient. My view of the young children at the *creche* and the *Sabiá* as complex, rich and capable human beings, have shaped my methodology.

Three main theoretical and pedagogical experiences have inspired me as a beginner researcher, ‘fueling’ the questions I asked and the ways I went about to explore them. First, the work of Vivian Paley (1992) and Jerome Bruner (1990) has instilled in me a desire to learn about young children’s narrative as both language and mode of thought. Second, the experience of the early childhood centers in Reggio Emilia, Italy, which reflects a profound understanding of how children relate to the world (Dahlbreg, Moss and Pence, 1999). Educators in Reggio Emilia developed pedagogical practices that foster young children’s courage to think and act for themselves in the context of a community of learners. Paley’s narrative curriculum and Reggio’s 100 languages of children have kindled visions and questions of what similar pedagogies could be like in Brazil, particularly for young children raised in poverty.

My research methods derived from my desire to develop a connected communication with rich children. I was reminded of Dewey’s work (1938), when he argues that often times educators impose adults’ constructs of the world upon children, thereby creating a disconnect for children. Understanding that they ‘think their own way,’ I attempted to communicate with children in many ways, particularly to connect with their narrative approach to life. I focused on children as they made meaning of their experiences of **their world**, so that they could talk to me about these experiences of **their**

world. As I further discuss, I approached the children at the *creches* in various creative and respectful ways to encourage them to express their own views of their world.

My Personal History

For the first twelve years of my adult life I was an active, direct participant in the struggle for democracy and civil rights, especially women's and children's rights, in Brazil. Politics and social action were the organizing forces in my life during that period, consuming most of my energies and efforts. During those years, I began working at the grassroots level, for example, as a community and union organizer, and eventually took responsibilities at the state and national levels functioning as Cabinet Chief of the *Conselho Nacional dos Direitos Mulher* (National Council for the Women's Rights—CNDM) for the first civil government in Brazil after the military coup. At these different levels I have participated actively in the movement to promote young children's rights to education and care. Out of these experiences, two have been most significant: organizing 'mothers' groups' for the creation of community *creches* in working-class neighborhoods, and teaching adult literacy in a shanty town using Paulo Freire's philosophy. The mothers in these grass-roots groups expressed a strong belief in their children's rights to education. Their commitment deeply impacted my own views of education as a children's right. Teaching adult literacy introduced me to the power of pedagogy as a means to social change and to enhance human agency.

My graduate education was in the United States. In a sense, my graduate studies were simultaneously connected and disconnected from my previous reality of intense political and social-change activism. On the one hand, my past as a political activist has shaped my academic choices. My studies have been guided by a personal commitment to

social justice through a vision of early pedagogy as liberatory and as an exercise of freedom (Freire, 1997; Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence, 2000). On the other hand, the knowledge I have encountered and constructed during these past 16 years has also contributed to new ways of being in the world, including ways of becoming a researcher. During the several years as an undergraduate and then a graduate student in the United States, I have faced a tension between not shorting from the reality of poverty and social inequalities resulting from oppressive political and economic structures, and stressing the local, partial, and multiple accounts of children's experiences and meanings.

At the beginning of my graduate studies I became a mother. Over the past fourteen years, motherhood has been a strong thread of my identity.

These personal experiences of Brazilian woman, young activist, mother, and researcher in a North American university greatly influenced and inspired my research. It is noteworthy that my life experiences have allowed me to understand perspectives of both insider and outsider. A tension that has pervaded my experiences for many years, including those as a researcher, has been how to bridge understanding and social change. At this point, I feel grounded in my passion to understand children's agency and subjectivity in the context of Brazilian extreme social inequalities.

Entering the Two Creches

Influenced by Bogdan and Biklen's (1998) optimistic approach to qualitative research, I chose to observe centers that were considered 'good quality.' Two points deserve further consideration, first an explanation of why this choice matters, and second, a definition of 'good centers' in the context of the present study.

Some researchers (Bogdan and Biklen, Bogdan and Taylor, 1990; 1988; Siraj-Blatchford, 1996) have suggested a shift in evaluation studies. They advocate that researchers committed to social change do not ask ‘if’ certain programs work, which they consider a skeptical question. Instead, assuming that good quality social programs are a matter of values and people’s rights, they focus on questions about what it means to have a successful program and why some programs seem to work. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) have called such a standpoint an optimistic approach to qualitative research.²

I am not strictly interested in the same questions of effectiveness or quality in social programs. Yet, I too believe that early education is a matter of values and of children’s rights. Sharing the principles of the optimistic approach, I wanted to learn from children’s experiences and views in programs that were considered as creating and supporting positive pedagogical experiences for young children. One educator of the municipal government summarized my own thoughts at the time, “We know too much about what doesn’t work, we need to develop a vision of what does help children.”

Site Selection

I started the process of site selection in July of 1998. Fúlvia Rosemberg, one of the most well known researchers and advocate for young children’s rights in Brazil, introduced me to Rita Coelho, a renowned specialist in ECCE in Minas Gerais. Coelho generously facilitated my access to the Coordinating Group of ECCE of the Secretary of

² With the help of colleagues, Bogdan and Biklen have been studying the integration of people with severe disabilities into the community for at least the past twenty years. Believing that integration is a moral value and its promotion a moral imperative, Bogdan, Biklen and colleagues aim their research at fostering integration. In this sense, they consider traditional efficacy studies—which focus on “if” programs work or not—to be based on empirical and skeptical questions which fail to support the task of promoting integration. Instead, Bogdan and Biklen and colleagues argue for studies that focus on the moral questions of “what does integration mean” and “how can it be accomplished” (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998, p.220). In order to answer these questions and support social change, they purposefully choose to observe positive or successful practices in integrating people with disabilities.

Education of Belo Horizonte (SMED) as well as to the *Centros de Educação Infantil* (Centers of Early Childhood Education--CEI's). These two agencies have played a crucial part in the formulation and implementation of the municipal government's progressive educational policies. They work directly with the *creches* that have covenants with the municipality, known as the *creche conveniadas*. Although the educators in these agencies seemed very receptive to the idea of focusing on 'better' *creches*, they noted the precarious situation of most centers serving low-income children. The vast majority of *creches* struggled with lack of resources, chaotic administration, low qualification of teachers, and inappropriate buildings. In sum, none of the *creches* seemed to be a 'model' program with a well-known, respected educational tradition.

Hence, my definition of 'good' centers had to be relative to the reality of the *creches*. I identified the following criteria for choosing 'good' centers: (a) the *creches* possessed or were interested in developing a pedagogical plan; (b) they had a director or teachers who participated actively in the efforts to improve their programs, for example through attending seminars and meetings; (c) they had a stable teaching force with relatively high qualifications such as a high-school diploma; (d) and they provided children with regular services in a clean and safe environment.

An additional criterion for site selection was to observe a *creche* and a pre-school, or centers that reflected the custodial and the educational approaches to early education. Although I never intended to do a comparative study, Dr. Greta Fein, my adviser at that time, strongly recommended that I studied children attending centers with different educational traditions. In hindsight, having two contexts broadened my understanding of children's meanings but did not necessarily deepened my understandings.

The SMED's group, the CEIs' coordinators and I had several meetings to identify the centers that would best fit the criteria above. Following their suggestion, I made a second trip to Brazil, in October of 1998 to visit three centers: the two *creches* I later studied and a public pre-school. During two days in each center, I discussed my project, talked with teachers and educators about their programs, and observed the children. A decisive argument for selecting the two *creches*, versus the public pre-school, was that they represented the vast majority of centers for low-income children in Belo Horizonte.

Establishing Relationships with the Teachers and Coordinators

In February of 1999 I went back to Brazil for a third visit. During that period I further discussed my research project with the directors and the two teachers I would be working with. I established an initial relationship with Helena, at the *creche*, and Sara, at the *Sabiá*, the teachers of the four and five-year old children in each center. Both seemed very welcoming and interested in participating in the research project. I told them about my project and asked them generally about their teaching, the *creche* and the children. I observed each classroom twice for a period of three hours each and photographed the children and the daily activities, the different parts of the centers, and the neighborhood.

The summer of 1999 I returned to the centers for the fourth time. I further discussed my research project with the teachers and coordinators, explaining my methodology in details. I also collected preliminary data on teachers' and administrators' pedagogical views. I conducted two long interviews with the two teachers and coordinators at the each center. We discussed their views of child development and education, their involvement with the *creche*, the centers' histories, their personal

histories and professional life, and their perspectives on children's lives outside school.³ I did an audiovisual and photographic record of the two centers and their surroundings.

Together with securing the two centers participation in the study, during these visits I further developed my relationship with the teachers and coordinators, central to my ideal of doing research in a context of participation and collaboration. As part of my 'giving back' to the centers, I showed a small edition of the video to the children and staff; left copies of the videotapes and photographs at the *creches*; and contributed with digital pictures and suggestions to the portfolio that the *Sabiá's* coordinator was interested in producing. I also discussed my future collaboration with the *creches*, after the conclusion of the fieldwork.⁴

Establishing Relationships with the Children

In establishing a relationship with the children, I made every effort to cultivate a partnership focused on learning about their experiences and views of their experiences. In order to do so, it was important for me to clarify my research objectives to them. I explained to the children my interest in learning about what young children's lives at the *creches*, particularly about what they do and what they think about what they do. I

³ To develop the interview questions I relied on the following sources: Quality in services for young children—Commission of the European Communities (Balageur, Mestres and Penn, 1993; Referencial curricular nacional para a educação infantil (National references for a curriculum of early education) (Minister of Education, 1998); Reaching potentials: Appropriate curriculum and assessment for young children, Volume 1 (Bredekamp and Rosegrant, 1992); Teacher Survey Regarding Children's Social Development (Ardilla, 1996); and finally, the Teacher Questionnaire, Pre-school Version (Hart et al., 1990). Rita Coelho helped me with the translation of the questionnaires to Portuguese. Cristina Mauri, my friend and research assistant, reviewed and contributed with invaluable suggestions to the final list of questions.

⁴ At the request of Thais, the coordinator of the Creche Santa Rita, we agreed that I would meet with the teachers for a week during the following school year to discuss their educational practices. Marina, the coordinator at the *Sabiá*, showed interest in the possibility of developing an exchange between the *Sabiá*, other community *creches* in the region and the pre-schools in Reggio Emilia, Italy. I would help her explore this possibility.

continued to describe every main aspect of my research in simple, detailed and repeated explanations. I also often checked with children about their views of my research.

The data chapters help explain how children seemed to understand, and actively value, my interest in learning from them about their experiences. They knew that I wrote down on my computer ‘the things’ they did and filmed their actions because I studied ‘the things children did at the *creche*.’ I cannot say to what extent the children understood the idea of ‘studying children,” but they seemed to focus on my interest in them and their perspectives. On one occasion, Davidson’s response to my question of why I liked to talk to the children was, “It’s because you like to know us much more.”

Next I explore the process of establishing children’s participation in my research. Then I discuss how our negotiations over my equipment fostered our initial connection.

Supporting children’s voices in the research process.

Wolcott refers to the “never-ending tension between taking a closer look at *something* vs. taking a broader look at *everything*” (1995, p.96). One way I struggled with such tension was around the decision of sampling. I started the process inclined on focusing on six children in each class. In my dissertation proposal I wrote:

I will aim for a careful and conceptually focused selection of participants. I will purposefully sample six children in each classroom (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998). (...) Criteria for sampling will include a balance and variety of gender, race, and social economic status. In my proposal I stated that I would start with an equal number of girls and boys in each classroom and then layer on some other attributes. For example, I will pair children according to their economic status: one who lives in deeper poverty and another who comes from a relatively affluent background. It will also include varied levels of academic ability, socio-development and adjustment to school life (King, 1979). For example, I would like to involve a “problem” child (difficult to handle in the teacher’s opinion) and other who is easy going and cooperative. Further layering the above criteria would include level of participation (non-active versus active), kind of learner (likes to play or likes to sit down), and level of narrative fluidity. Finally, I also would like the group to include children at various levels of the peer hierarchy,

that is, more and less popular, highly sociable and withdrawn. In sum, my goal is to cultivate diversity and complexity within a low-income group of children.

However, as I started actually observing the children in January of 2000 a more interactive process seemed to evolve. First, due to children's active social interactions, I geared my focus of observation towards group-interactions. Second, I was not the only one making the choice of who participated; the children also actively 'chose' to engage in the research. For instance, most children volunteered their views and stories and asked to participate in the activities. Therefore, the process of who became the main participants and thus the main voices in my study was fluid and dynamic. On one hand, I intentionally attempted to establish a closer relationship with some children. Although I tried to be attentive to all children, I was careful to cultivate a core group of children who seemed to have different experiences and perspectives. On the other hand, the children exercised their own intention to engage in the research process.

Consequently, as our relationships evolved, some children became the main storytellers and partners in the research process. In a way, my narrative of children's experiences and views resembles Paley's accounts of the children in her classroom (1995, 1992, 1990, 1988). Like in Paley's books, some children seemed to raise and articulate the collective narrative, or the groups' concerns and interpretations. Their voices were more evident in my study. Yet, I paid attention to the diversity of children's voices in the two *creches*. The sampling criteria above remained as a guideline for including diverse children in the research process.

Developing a narrative practice.

The children seemed to readily embrace me. At first, they apparently enjoyed the novelty of my presence and were very excited about my equipment. My main challenge

was establishing the tone or content of my interactions with the children, i.e. to focus these conversations on children's experiences and views of their experiences at the pre-schools. Psychologist Rudy Bauer repeats in his classes that in Gestalt psychology "everything is method." Likewise, 'everything' or all interactions between the children and me represented potential methods to establish a connection with the children and a practice of communication. For instance, coming to an agreement with the children about my computer and cameras greatly helped our initial connection. This process helped defining my identity and my 'doing' to the children. On the one hand, the children listened to my request not to touch the computer and the cameras. I explained that they were for 'adults only' and for my work, that is, to write down and to videotape what they did at the centers and what they told me. On the other, they seemed strongly tempted to explore the equipment. For instance, particularly at the first months, they would touch the computer and stand up in front of the camera. Despite my frustration and the children's, our discussions over the equipment represented opportunities for interactions and for me to further explain my work. I often attended to children's requests to type their names and to take dictation from them. My assistant and I also showed them the pictures we took and let them hold the digital camera.

Here I want to highlight how my interactions with the children around the equipment became an important means to the development of our connection. These interactions seemed to help the children situate me in their lives. A significant part of my identity seemed to become '*Creche Casulo Nossa Senhora da Glória* with the computer and the cameras.' This helped to establish the identity of '*Creche Casulo Nossa Senhora da Glória*, the adult who studied children and the things they did.' On one occasion I asked Washington what adults do at the *creche*, and he responded, "(They) film like this

girl here,” pointing to my assistant Julia. I asked him what else do they do, and he said, “Stay pressing those things,” referring to my typing on the computer. It is noteworthy that the children seemed to appreciate the documenting of their activities and of their accounts of their pre-school lives. One Friday, I said good-bye to Cláudia and asked what she was going to do on the weekend. She responded, “If I tell you, will you write it down?”

Some children were very helpful during this initial phase of my research. Cláudia, Gabriela S., Washington, and Davidson at the *creche*, and Margarida and Cleberson at the *Sabiá* were among those most distinctly receptive. Our conversations seemed to encourage and motivate the children who did not seem as readily comfortable with me. At first, these children responded almost punctually to my questions or just smiled shyly when I asked for a story. The response of the children who promptly became active research participants seemed to denote a tendency. As most children started to know me, to grasp what I ‘was doing,’ and to understand my work, they met my interest actively.

With time, our informal conversations and storytelling seemed to become a part of children’s lives at the centers, and not only because I wanted so, but also because the children did. We developed a ‘narrative practice.’ Paulo’s account of his play on the sand box at *Sabiá* in August highlights this point. He was breaking apart a wooden fruit crate he somehow managed to get. My assistant Julia videotaped his play while I stood by. Without interrupting his actions or looking at us, Paulo started to narrate his play: “I’m playing ‘of crate,’ later I’m going to make a chair. ... Now I have a truck.” I had the distinct impression that Paulo described his play not only for his benefit, but also for mine. Margarida, who was playing nearby, volunteered, “And I’m playing of jumping tires.” Children’s actions at the Creche Santa Rita further illustrate our narrative practice. On the occasion I returned to the *creche* in June, a large group of children surrounded me

at the eating patio and started telling me about ‘what happened.’ Marcela offered to tell me a story. Daniele asked, “Can I tell you about my weekend?” On another occasion, when I arrived at the *creche*, Davidson ran up to me and said that he was “with a great desire (*com muita vontade*) to talk to me, since early.” He explained, “(I wanted to talk to you) since last night. And then I woke up and changed my clothes very little-fast to come to the *creche*. I arrived and I was playing with the cat, isn’t it. And then I (was like this), where is Leticia?” Even Gabriela Matos, probably the shyest and most serious (and prone to physical conflicts) child in both centers, would eventually hang around me. Although she said very little, to me or anyone else in the *creche*, her proximity indicated her participation in our narrative world.

The children and I developed an on-going communication based on a strong connection. Such narrative practice was crucial to our relationship. At the same time, it supported and was supported by the wide range of ‘ways to talk’ I describe next.

Research Methods and Data Sources

I observed and interacted with the children over the year 2000, during a total of five months. Fieldwork was divided into three periods: (a) the beginning of January to the beginning of March, (b) mid-June to the end of August, and (c) mid-November to mid-December. My main challenge to uncover children’s experiences of their world and their views of these experiences was to develop initiatives that actually reflected my awareness of children’s potential and their ‘way of thinking.’ Uncovering the rich lives of children and gaining insight into children’s meanings demanded ‘rich’ research methods. I made every effort to learn about children’s experiences and to encourage them in various ways to express how they experienced life at the *creches*. It is important to note that I did not

engage these data sources as ‘instruments,’ but as flexible resources to my ‘in the moment’ and ‘in the place’ interactions with the children. I further clarify this point later. Here, I first describe my interactions with the children and then with the teachers. I then discuss my observations and its relationship to the use of audiovisual processes. Finally I describe other data sources, such as documents and reflexive journal.

Communicating with Rich Children: Conversations and Storytelling

My most significant interactions with the children were conversations and storytelling. The boundaries separating these two categories were somehow fluid. For instance, stories ‘about what happened,’ permeated children’s conversations with me. After discussing my informal and formal conversations with children and how I engaged their storytelling and pretend playing, I discuss the following data sources: children’s tour of the centers, conversations with the teacher’s participation, discussion of photographs, and conversations on the way home. Most my interactions with children were videotaped by my assistant Cláudia. I also took notes.

Informal Conversations with Children

My informal conversations with the children were very natural and in the moment. Most of the times, they were also situated ‘in the place’ of children’s interactions, occurring as children engaged with their various daily activities or soon after. Children’s response to Nancy King’s similar methods in her study of kindergartners’ perspectives on play (1979) was an important reference on how to communicate with children about their experiences. Because these conversations were, in a sense, an extension of my observations, I start by describing the later.

After the initial period of more open-ended observations, I focused on certain children and their interactions. From the start my tendency was to observe a child or a group of children over an entire activity, such as the *trabalhinho* or play inside the classroom. This permitted a broader and deeper understanding of children's experiences at the *creches* because it allowed me to follow a particular event and its implications as the activity progressed. I also learned about the rhythm of children's experiences during the different phases of an activity and the different phases of their day.

The children sat at their *mesinhas* (little-tables) for long periods while they did the *trabalhinhos* or played with toys inside the classroom. They also sat at the eating patio *mesinhas* during meals. During those occasions, I sat on a child-sized-chair with my laptop next to the table where the child, children, or activity I observed took place. During recess or outside play observing and talking to children involved following the children around. At the *creche*, it was easier to observe children's play during recess at the small playground. At the *Sabiá*, children ran around the large lot, and I had to trail them, which seemed a little more intrusive. I often observed them from a certain distance, and later asked them about their play. I also asked Cláudia to videotape their play.

As I observed the children over these relatively long periods, I casually initiated conversations with them. These conversations focused on children's school experiences, involving their actions, activities, conversations, and interactions as well as their interpretations of these events. Secondly, we talked about what and how children learned. Although most conversations were in the moment, I also asked children to recap events later. I regularly checked with different children about the same event. The format of our interactions was very flexible. I talked to individual children or to a group. Often children joined in or dropped off the conversation.

Our contacts were embedded in children's doing and interactions with one another. Often children continued with their activities as we talked, for instance, drawing or pretend-playing with their friends. Our contacts were situated where and when children's interactions happened. For instance, as they told me about 'what happened,' children could show me where and how the incident occurred. Being 'right there' helped children to re-enact and reflect about their interactions. These 'in the moment' and 'at the place' routine casual conversations seemed a natural way to engage with young children.

There seemed to be a progression on the quality of these conversations. At first they were mostly descriptive. For instance, children talked about their activities or what they were doing. With time we discussed more complex situations, such as their pretend-play, conversations with other children or teacher, fights, or teacher's punishment. Increasingly our conversations focused on children's evaluations of their experiences.

Finally, during our informal conversations I asked children a few questions about their views of schooling, such as: "why do you come to school" and "why do children come to school;" "what do you (children) learn (study) at the *creche*" and "what did you learn (study) today;" "what do you (children) play at the *creche*" and "what did you play today." Children's multiple responses to these same questions revealed important insights about their views of learning and of schooling.

Structured Conversations with Children

My objective with these interview-like conversations was to further elicit children's general perspectives on their days at the *creches* and their pedagogical experiences. I used an interview schedule developed by Bernadette Duffy, Head of the Thomas Coram Early Childhood Center, in London. Clark (2000) included this schedule

in her Mosaic approach to listening to children under eight. I asked the children the following questions: why do you come to the *creche*; what you like the best here; what don't you like at the *creche*; who are the people you like the best; whom don't you like; what do the adults do here; where is your favorite place at the *creche*; what is the place you don't like; what do you think is difficult; how is the food; what is the best day at the *creche*; and, what the children who are new at the school should know about it.

Generally, I interviewed the children three times, at the end of each fieldwork period. The time of our discussions depended on the daily activities. After the first round, we established a routine of meeting outside of the classroom, on the steps right outside the *creche*'s gate and at the coordinator's office at the *Sabiá*. The fact that we had a good view of both the *creche* and the *Sabiá* as we talked, seemed to help the children to situate the events they were discussing. They often pointed to the area where a particular incident happened or the place they were describing.

I talked to children individually and in groups of two to four children, particularly at the two last fieldwork periods. Group interactions could be sort of confusing, particularly for the quieter children. Yet, some children seemed more relaxed in a group situation. One to one conversations were more intimate and, occasionally, very revealing, like with Margarida at the *Sabiá* and with Gabriela S. at the *creche*. Group conversations offered children a chance to add to, question, and clarify each other's comments.

Children's participation in the formal conversations varied a great deal. Although I have called these conversations 'structured' or 'more formal,' they were rarely structured in a strict sense of the word. It was not always easy for the children to sit down and just talk. Rarely I would go over all the questions in a row. On some occasions, children needed to ran around. More often than not, they would bring out other issues,

and these apparent distractions ended up turning into revealing instances. Thus, I searched for a balance between being active in following the protocol and sensitive to children's actions and needs. Sometimes we seemed to 'get on a roll.' On those occasions, for example, I would ask them to explain their answers and make connections with similar situations I had observed. If children seemed tired or guarded, I would stick to the schedule, or try again later.

One limitation of my interview-like conversations was that I did not read children's previous responses to the children as I re-interviewed them later. I probably missed an opportunity in not doing so. One positive aspect was that I asked children the same questions in many ways. Such 'insistence' seemed to result in rich and complex accounts. 'Why do children come to the *creche*/school' was my most common direct question to children. For example, I phrased it differently, asking 'why do you come to the *creche*' or 'what happens when children do not come to school.' I also asked this same question in various occasions, during formal conversations or during play.

Storytelling

Paying close attention to and actively engaging children's narratives was a very significant part of my attempts to understand children's meaning-making of their experiences. In the data chapters I explore the significance of children's narratives to understanding their meanings of school. To elicit children's storytelling, I asked them for stories, particularly for 'a story about the *creche*,' and to pretend-play school.

Tell me a story about the creche.

My requests for ‘a story about the *creche* or the school’ integrated my routine interactions with the children. I often ‘asked for a story’ during our informal conversations or interviews. Depending on where children were or what they were doing, I situated the request, asking for a story ‘about the classroom,’ ‘about the playground,’ ‘about the *trabalhinho*,’ or ‘about play.’

As with most data sources, children’s responses varied greatly. Some children seemed to jump at the opportunity to tell a story about the school, while others did not seem to comprehend my request and needed prompting. Generally stories became longer and more complex over the year. However, Cláudia dictated one of the most revealing children’s stories at my first month of fieldwork. Children at the *creche* responded to my requests for stories more actively than at the *Sabiá*. I am not sure about why that happened. It is possible that children at *Sabiá* were used to re-telling stories such as fairytales, and might have been confused by my request for stories about the school.

I also asked the teachers to be my story-gatherers during the interval between the last fieldwork periods. Helena transformed my request into a classroom activity. She instructed the children to draw and then dictate a ‘story about the school for *Creche Casulo Nossa Senhora da Glória*.’ Most children completed both activities. Sara was unable to attend my request. Yet, as customary at *Sabiá*, she gave me a letter from the children as a goodbye gift. Each child made a drawing and some dictated a description of their drawings to Sara. Sara then taped these drawings turning them into a long letter.

Children’s pretend-play about school.

To further support children's narratives I followed the suggestion of my teacher, Professor Greta Fein, to provide children with props to pretend-play school. I used a Playmobile classroom set, which included a toy teacher, six toy children, a school-backpack, a blackboard, teacher and students' desks, and a book. There were three girls and three boys, with diverse ethnic characteristics. 'Play with the props' happened in the classroom when the other children were out, or at the *creche* entrance and the office of the *Sabiá's* coordinator. I invited an individual child to come with me to 'play school.' When I attempted to include the play-with-props in children's routine playtime, they fiercely dispute the toys. Only rarely few a small group played successfully together. Hence, individual play sessions were the most revealing.

I participated in children's play, prompting them and, at times, joining in their play. For instance, often children engaged in a sort of physical play, and did not further the play plot. Apparently for the sheer pleasure of exploring, they manipulated the toy-props to make them sit, stand, walk around. After a while, I intervened to elicit pretend-play stories about pre-school experiences. At times my interventions disturbed the children, who told me so. We did not always find a balance between my interest to learn about their views through play and their desire to play. The children were very excited about the toys. They actively negotiated to play, insisting with me to 'let them play with the little toys.' Interestingly, the props seemed to become an unintentional reward to children's participation in the structured conversations. I sometimes combined these activities, and children seemed to associate them. On a few occasions, children's play with props interfered with their participation in the interviews. Although the children agreed to join me for a conversation, they wanted to play-pretend with the 'little toys.'

Children's Tours of their Creche

Clark's Mosaic approach (2000) included participatory methods that involved child-guided walking tours of pre-schools. Clark (2000) argues that the "physical nature" of transects walks, walking interviews, and tours "offer possibilities for exploring children's 'local knowledge' of their own environment" (p. 3). Walking tours were an additional way I asked the children to talk about their experiences at the Santa Rita and the *Sabiá*. I included pretend-play in these tours by (a) asking children to give the tours to a pretend-friend, and (b) re-enacting situations with the children.

At the *creche* I first asked Matias, Washington, and Davidson to walk me through the center to tell me about their day and about 'what happened' at the *creche*. They re-enacted their outside play and 'what happens when two children want the same pencil' in the classroom. I also asked Cláudia, Gabriela S., Daniele and Maria Luísa for a tour. Inspired by the boys' pretend and in order to further elicit children's narratives, I asked the girls to show the *creche* to a pretend-friend, a plastic dolphin, which they named Patricia. I thought it would make more sense to the children to show the *creche* to 'someone' new. They readily embraced the pretend-friend and enthusiastically engaged a storyline, suggesting that they go outside to *fazer-de-conta* (pretend) it was morning and they were arriving at the *creche*.

At the *Sabiá* the tours were more physical and less verbal. I first asked Roberto, Emerson and Cleberson to pretend I was new at the school and they were showing me their pre-school. They took me to the classroom, the eating patio, and the recess area. They showed me their *trabalhinhos* (drawings and paper activities) and described the

classroom murals. I asked Margarida to give the tour to a pretend-friend, this time a puppet. She wanted to show us everything, including the entrance gates and the vegetable garden. Often she would make a relevant comment, for example, the office where she made Xerox copies for the teacher and the classroom where they did the activities. She showed her favorite spot at the *Sabiá* and also where she pretend-played house during recess, commenting on how her older playmate “did not let her hold the baby.”

Conversations with the Teacher's Participation during Circle time

Towards the end of the first fieldwork period, attending my request, Helena and Sara facilitated a conversation with the children during circle time. The teachers asked the children some of the questions I had posed to them, such as ‘why do children come to the *creche*,’ ‘what they learn,’ ‘what they like the best,’ ‘what they dislike,’ and ‘what they would like to be different.’ My objective was to enlist children’s views in a conversation with a familiar adult in a familiar format. I also wanted to observe how children talked to the teacher about their experiences.

Discussion of Photographs

Researchers have engaged the use of photographs to encourage participation in studies with adults (Collier Jr. and Collier, 1987) and also with young children (Wiltz & Klein, 1994). I used photographs mainly as a method to encourage children to talk about their pre-school experiences. Nevertheless, while children photographed their *creches*, I had a fascinating opportunity to observe their own ‘look’ at their pre-schools.

First, I asked children to ‘tell me about’ pictures portraying children their age sitting in a circle, writing, and playing in the *creche* and the *Sabiá*. I also included three pictures of sad-looking children inside and outside the classroom. Children’s comments about the ‘sad pictures’ were particularly telling of the potential of this data source. Had I structured systematic sessions over the year, I believe the use of photograph would have been more helpful to children’s accounts of their pre-school lives.

Second, I asked children to take photographs. At the Santa Rita I gave Cláudia, Gabriela S., Davidson, and Washington disposable cameras to “take pictures of the *creche*.”⁵ Later we talked as they looked at their pictures. To avoid disrupting the activities and upsetting the non-participating children, the picture section happened after school. This was not the best time. Despite his mother’s reassurance that she would not leave, Washington decided to go home. Cláudia, Davidson, and Gabriela S. were greatly excited with the first time they had a camera for themselves. Children’s tiredness and excitement turned the photograph sections into a frenzied pushing of buttons and happy running around. Interestingly, all three children took pictures of their friends, the teachers, their ‘work,’ the eating patio, and the playground.

At the *Sabiá*, I asked a larger number of children to photograph the center with my digital camera. They showed me where and what they wanted to photograph, and I gave them the camera. We talked casually, for instance, about what they would photograph as we walked around, and as I showed them the pictures on the camera’s visor. Since I took one child at a time around the center, children’s photographing was calmer than at the *creche*. Children at *Sabiá* photographed the same elements than the

⁵ I did not have enough resources to bring cameras for all children.

creche children, but they spent more time outside. Most took several pictures of the trees and the pool.

Conversations on the Way Home

Finally during my last observation phase, I walked home with Cleberson and Margarida, at *Sabiá*, and Washington and Cláudia, at the *creche*. Cleberson's grandmother, Margarida's brother, and Washington and Cláudia's mothers picked them up. During these walking conversations I went beyond the boundaries of the *creches* to have a one-time, and thus limited, view outside in the company of the children and their relatives. In addition to interesting conversations, 'walking home' was a powerful learning experience about children's lives. I left Cláudia at the entrance door of the apartment building at the heart of a busy middle-class area, where she slept in the 'maid's room' with her mother. I had a glimpse of the *Morro* through the eyes of Washington and his mother. Margo's brother carried leftovers from dinner at *Sabiá* for the family. Cleberson showed me the factory where he was going to work when he grew up.

Conversations with Teachers

My casual discussions with the teachers resembled my informal conversations with the children. These conversations were also in the moment and grew into a routine of communication. We usually talked after 'classes,' or between activities, as the teachers supervised the children. For example, I asked Helena and Sara about the activities, about the children, and about their interpretation of particular interactions among themselves and the children or among the children. They also volunteered their comments to me.

When I interviewed the teachers the year before fieldwork, asked them at length about their pedagogical views focusing on how children learned and how they taught children. I interviewed them two more times, at the beginning and towards the end of the fieldwork year. These last interviews were more conversational than the first two. Helena and Sara discussed particular activities they planned, evaluated the year, and talked more openly about the challenges they faced as teachers.

I admired Sara and Helena's disposition to teach and respected their dedication and commitment to teaching and the children. I was also very sympathetic to the challenges they encountered as teachers. Both Sara and Helena expressed an active need to be supported in their teaching and a sincere desire to continue to learn as teachers. Sara seemed to speak also for Helena, when she said that one of the most difficult aspects in her experience, as a teacher was to "be alone and not have help with the challenges of teaching young children." While I often felt conflicted as I observed, for instance, them punishing the children, these conflicts did not disrupt my relationship with them. For the most part, I felt that Helena and Sara's potential, as teachers was not actualized by a lack of preparation and support.

Observation and Videotaping

My research was based on a routine of observing, videotaping, and communicating with the children, and secondarily, the teachers. Here, I offer a glimpse at this crucial, interconnected process of learning about children's lives. It is important to note that almost all my interactions with children and teachers were videotaped.

My research methods required great synchronicity of the observation and videotaping process. As I observed, I took notes, directed my assistant Cláudia and

engaged with the children and teacher. Most of the time filming was an extension of my observations. For example, inside the classroom, Cláudia and I focused on the same ‘little-table’ or *mesinha*, thus, the camera captured the interactions I observed. Cláudia also recorded the other children, to get a sense of the whole activity. She had to balance two main tasks: attending to my continuing recommendations and being attentive to what she saw.

One important challenge of the observation/interaction/videotaping process was to be active and yet, to minimize disturbing children and teachers, particularly inside the classroom. The use of a flat microphone was helpful in preventing the two of us from lingering over the children. It allowed Cláudia to film from a distance and still record conversations. A flat, ten centimeters-diameter disk, the microphone worked best when it sat in the middle of the *mesinha*, which was an inconvenience for the children. With effort and children’s goodwill we managed. The sound was quite clear, although the microphone actually worked about 75 percent of the time.

At first I observed and videotaped with an open focus. My goal was to get to know the children and their routines. Soon I centered on children’s interactions over a period of time. As I continued to observe and to videotape, I looked more closely at relevant children’s experiences, such as sharing resources. Throughout the year I rotated the observation periods so that I covered the full range of children’s activities.

Recording Children’s Context: Further use of Photography and Video

Following Collier, Jr. and Collier (1987), I used photographs and video also to (a) map the spatial context of the *creches*, (b) produce an inventory of the centers and classrooms, and (c) register the content and progress of children’s activities, particularly

the *trabalhinhos*. I completed a photographic and video record of the zone surrounding the centers and the children's neighborhoods. I also gathered a visual inventory of the centers and the classrooms to document the changes in children's environment as the year progressed. Photographs, and videos, are great registers of the types of materials and resources that are available to children. They also allowed me to systematically register children's play creations, drawings, and educational exercises.

Finally, I used still photographs and videotaping to produce a record of a day at the *creche* and at the *Sabiá*. At the first and second observation period Cláudia and I videotaped and photographed, children's day in both centers.

Documents

I collected two main types of documents: institutional and in-class. The first were documents published by the centers or by the municipality, including letters to parents, pedagogical plans, and policy texts. These materials facilitated a broader contextual understanding of each centers' pedagogical practices. Examples of in-class documents were children's drawings and dictated stories.

Reflective Journal

Since my first visit to Brazil, I kept a reflective journal where I recorded my "notes-on-notes" (Kleinman and Copp, 1993, in Wolcott, 1995, p.96). Entries consisted of personal reflections on analysis, method, ethical dilemmas or conflicts, my own feelings and frame of mind, and issues that need to be clarified or resolved (Bokdan and Biklen, 1998).

Data Analysis

The rich methods above resulted in extensive data. My data analysis, like fieldwork, continued to be motivated by my desire to bring children's voices to light, that is, to understand and narrate their experiences from their own perspective.

I started analyzing my data during fieldwork. I wrote about four analytical memos during each data collection phase, which served as basis for on-going analysis and guided my future efforts. Between the months of fieldwork, I first worked on the transcription of the audiovisual data with the help of two research assistants. I then open-coded the data from previous months. This first coding process was mostly descriptive. For instance, I described children's activities: "pretend-play—pretending to be the teacher." I also raised general analytical points and fine-tuned the upcoming data collection period. For example, from my notes I identified the *in vivo* concept "I do everything little pretty." Davidson had made that affirmation to explain why the teacher gave him a star on his homework. Next to the code, I wrote down the following commentary:

Davidson congratulates himself and tells me he does everything 'little pretty' because "his mother taught him." D. is probably an exception in the sense that his mother actually taught him. Need to check. Do other kids feel this sense of accomplishment, of knowing how to do the educational activities and feeling good about it? Do other parents teach children, from the children's point of view???? (GOOD QUESTION FOR OTHER KIDS).

Particularly after the second round of fieldwork, I started to identify general themes to further explore in the subsequent fieldwork rounds. For example, as I open-coded and watched tapes of children's interactions from the second observational period, I noted the theme *mandar*, or children's frequent references to who is 'in charge.' During the fieldwork intervals I also continued to survey the literature to help flesh out my ideas, particularly about initial categorizations and the process of data collection.

After the conclusion of fieldwork, I entered a sort of organizational frenzy. I felt a great need to have some control over the vast amount of information and material I had in front of me. I first finished the transcription of my audiovisual data, not a small task, and then completed the open-coding process. Besides identifying descriptive codes, I sort of summarized my notes and transcripts. For example, for the first period of fieldwork at the *creche* alone, I wrote 22 pages of open-coding themes and comments. Although I somehow overdid it, this extensive process of open-coding resulted in close familiarity with my data. In a sense I developed an intuitive knowledge of ‘what, when and how it happened’ and ‘what children said.’

To further organize my extensive data, I used QSR-Nudist, a qualitative-research software. Nudist allowed me to create a great map of all my data sources. I entered in the program all my written data, such as field notes, memos, and transcripts. The program allowed me to easily access these data. I also entered a reference to all other data, such as documents, children’s drawings and photographs. I organized my entries by center, observation date and research method. For example, in reference to my fourth visit to the Santa Rita on January 31, my Nudist files included: field notes, video transcripts, and open-coding notes. It also included a reference to videotaped data, to documents I gathered on that day, and to my reflective journal.

‘Knowing my data’ and ‘knowing where it was,’ I then proceeded to further analyze it. I still used Nudist during this phase. The program allowed me to further situate my data by creating a ‘tree code.’ I coded the data, first referring back to my open-coding themes and developing categories within each data source. My initial categories or ‘code branches’ were general and descriptive, such as ‘children’s talk’ and ‘teachers’ talk.’ Then I started to break these general codes down, for example into, ‘children’s stories

about school,’ and to develop more analytic categories, such as ‘learning to learn: children’s views.’ I began to look across data sources, further developing themes. I also looked at the prominence of themes over time of data collection, for example, the theme ‘*mandar*’ or children’s views of who is in charge.

I found Nudist extremely helpful for coding my extensive data. It allowed me to browse and then code all data sources, and to print out the coded text with references to the data source. These print outs were very helpful in accessing the written data and referring back to the audiovisual tapes. They also greatly facilitated the refining of the analysis. I further coded by hand on the coding printouts, making cross-references between different data sources, over time, and also different coding printouts. I then entered these new categories in the ‘code trees’ in the computer. I coded again, printed out the results, analyzed them, and further refined my coding system.

I conclude this section with the discussion of the issue of the role of audiovisual images in my research analyzes and of my use of Portuguese words as analytical categories.

The audiovisual data was very significant to communicate the depth of children’s experiences and their views of their experiences. Particularly at the last stages of the analytical process, I routinely referred back to the films of children’s interactions and accounts of their experiences. The tape-inserting mechanism of my digital camera did not survive this effort.

Collier, Jr. and Collier (1987) pointed out that the greatest advantage to research of video images is “not only to see but also to understand the sparkle and character of an event, a place, a people” (p. 144). On one hand, these images allowed me to capture the content of the relationships I observed. On the other, they provided invaluable insight

into the quality of such relationships. For instance, when the image of a conflict moved on the screen, it captured children's tears afterwards, their tone of voice, gestures and posture, and also the time that lapsed between the angry remarks and the reconciliation.

Additionally, video's other crucial quality was to make reanalysis of what happened viable at all times (Morphy and Banks, in Banks and Morphy, 1997). The videos allowed me to revisit the "emotional and qualitative depth" of children's experiences during the analysis process. (Collier, Jr. and Collier, 1987, p. 143). This possibility to revisit children's interactions and meanings certainly added a new depth to my interpretative efforts and thus, to my research narrative.

In classifying my data, I developed 'in vivo codes' (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) taken from names and terms the children used. To keep children's meanings intact, most of these codes were in Portuguese. As I wrote down my study, these concepts became part of the final text. The code *mandar* or 'being in charge' is a good example. First an analytical category, it became an important element of my discussion. I also used other words in Portuguese throughout the text. My general criteria for using the Portuguese language was to maintain words that seemed inherent to children's meanings.

On Learning about Children's Pedagogical Experiences and Meanings

In the pre-school programs in Reggio Emilia, Italy, educators work passionately "to (open) the doors to the hundred languages of children." (Malaguzzi, 1993, p. 71). Similarly, I have sought various languages for gaining insight on children's subjective and objective experiences. My data sources combined to create a rich collection of narratives and images of young children's experiences and views of their experiences of pre-school. In a sense, telling children that I wanted to listen to their stories and providing

a routine and a certain structure for conversations, storytelling and pretend-playing, was like opening a door for children to share their narrative world with me. As a result, some children became ‘main narrators,’ and mostly all children joined in the research process. Even when Eduzinho had stopped talking in the classroom, he still wanted to be part of the narrative world the children and I shared. He stood next to me and pointed around to tell me about ‘what happened’ at the *creche*.

My methodological approach was simultaneously disciplined and ‘unruly.’ Balancing these two paradoxical tendencies was quite challenging. Fieldwork was an effort to combine structure and creativity at all times, which required great alertness and constant planning. On the one hand, I made every effort and worked in a very disciplined manner to build a relationship where children participated actively in the research process. On the other hand, I engaged the research methods above creatively, adapting and changing their format. The result was a sort of ‘creative chaos,’ a research process embedded in human connections, based firmly on a routine of systematic observations, videotaping, and communication with the children. Most of all my research was open to what was happening at the moment. Such research approach yielded an extensive, quite wonderful actually, data collection. Nevertheless, I can see the benefits of a more structured use of methods such as the guiding tours, pretend-play with props, and photographs. I also recognize that due to my flexibility with the various research methods, on occasion, I lost focus and missed opportunities, for example, of following up on a theme raised by a child.

Still, my creative use of these various research methods allowed a rich communication between the children and me, where I learned about children’s experiences and meanings in multiple ways. For instance, the significance of children’s

friendships at the *creche* was evident in children's stories and also in the expression of a child who chose to photograph a friend. Most of all, this rich communication seemed to encourage the children to participate in the research process and actively present their own perspectives of their experiences.

CHAPTER 3: CHILDREN'S PEDAGOGICAL EXPERIENCES DURING THE *TRABALHINHOS*

In this chapter I introduce life at the Creche Santa Rita, offering a general sense of “what happened” and “what it was like” at the *creche*. I define the educational activities and then focus on children's engagement with the *trabalhinho*. I attempt to show the complexity of children's experiences during the convivial as well as the conflicting times they shared. In the third and final section, I discuss children's agency, focusing on how they seized opportunities within the restrictive pedagogy they encountered.

My main theoretical “vantage point” (Greene, 1993) is a view of children as rich and active beings (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2000). As subjects who feel a sense of agency in their lives, children can be “conditioned, but not determined” (Freire, 1998, p. 26). Hence, my description of children's experiences grew from the analytic themes

developed from my data in an effort of understanding children's own perspectives and conveying the ways they actively and creatively shaped their educational lives within the constraints of the institutional reality of the *creche*.

Introducing Life at the *Creche*: A Description of Lunch and Circle Time

I begin by presenting a short account of children and teacher's interactions during lunchtime. Then I present life in 'Helena's classroom,' with a more detailed description of a *rodinha* or 'little circle.' These accounts introduce some of the main dynamics of life in the two pre-schools, particularly at the *creche*: children's waiting, the pedagogical requirement that they 'be quiet,' children's *bagunça* (misbehavior), teacher's *castigo* (punishment), children's narrative and self-initiated play, and the tension between children-initiated activities and the teacher-directed ones

Having Lunch at the Creche

Children ate breakfast, lunch, snack, and dinner at the *creche*.⁶ They spent more time eating than at any other single activity, usually around 3 hours. Lunch, including transitions from the classroom to the eating patio and back, lasted about one hour. The three classrooms ate together. Children sat down and waited for the adults to bring their plates, prayed, waited for the spoons, and then ate lunch and desert.

⁶ Starting in 1998, the municipal government implemented a new nutritional program at the *creches*. Full-time children received five meals a day and part-time children three. Mariana, the *Sabiá* director, commented on the importance of whole meals for the children: "See, we even have had cases of malnutrition in the school, extreme needs, and then we have adopted a policy of feeding the family, that is the mother, the brothers and sisters. It did not help for one child to come to this school and have five meals a day and when she/he gets home, neither the mother or the siblings had anything... Then last year the municipal government had a great victory, which is to provide integral nutrition to the child. Before the government only provided the most basic staples (such as rice, beans, pasta, etc), and the *creche* had to supplement. Now the municipal government has made a commitment to offer integral nutrition, which includes fruit, meat, and milk, things that are fundamental to the children. So, what we are seeing is a generation of children who is growing quite healthy. The children have had been less ill. Absence is minimum."

Particularly at the beginning of the meals adults told children to ‘be quiet,’ that is silent and still. Depending on who supervised the meals, the instruction for children to be quiet was more or less rigorously enforced. During the first trimester D. Celina, one of the original founders of the Santa Rita, presided over prayer during breakfast and sometimes lunch. In preparation for prayer, she paced along the space between the two lines of tables, with her arms crossed and a serious face, making loud hushing sounds until the children were absolutely silent and still. All other staff members, including the cook and janitor, also walked around adjusting children’s bodies and telling them to be quiet. When the patio was finally silent, D.Celina signaled the beginning of the prayer, lifting her right hand up and saying “right hand up.” All the adults and most children followed her. Again the staff members walked around lifting the hands of the children who had not done so. When everybody was in position, the D. Celina and the adults started the prayer, and the children joined in.

Meal routines changed as the staff changed. The Santa Rita experienced a great staff turnover—only Helena, Thaís and Caroline remained the whole year. The first and second 3rd period teachers, the first cook, and the first janitor—who had been at the *creche* longer—seemed to take over D. Celina’s role. They required strict quietness and often yelled at the children, particularly at the beginning of meals. An uncomfortable silence reigned among the children (and I would say among some adults like Helena and Caroline) during those moments. By the last trimester Caroline supervised meals. She seemed to be more in sink with Thaís, who related to me her views on discipline during meals in an interview: “the issue of (children being quiet during) lunch and dinner is that it’s [sic] a form of the child learn to eat, value that food. At those times I think that there

should be a little more calmness, let's put it this way. (...) I think that this obedience like in a military regime is not necessary, though."

In a normal lunch day the transition into 'being quiet' to pray could last several minutes. Children waited further as the adults handed their plates. The spoons were the last item children received, after 'being quiet,' praying, and receiving their plates. Images of waves come to mind to relate the quality of a somewhat chaotic but also fluid encounter within the constraints of a teacher-centered structure that required children to sit quietly for long periods. A normal lunch lasted about 45 minutes. The *zoeira* (racket) of children's voices rose and fell as children talked and played and then became quieter as teachers increasingly demanded silence. Even during the most severely disciplined meals, children talked animatedly, pretend played, told stories, and played hitting and banging each other and the table, particularly at the end of meals, when they seemed no longer able to contain their bodies. Lunch started with repeated admonitions for the children to be quiet and often ended with a sort of dissolution of the initial order, with children running around the patio.

The above description of lunch introduces the themes of *bagunça*, *castigo* and waiting, three central aspects of life at the *creche*. Teachers and children commonly referred to children's behaviors described in the above paragraph as *bagunça* (misbehavior). As discussed in chapter 4, *bagunça* had a broad meaning, ranging from pretend- playing or talking during an activity to seriously fighting or refusing to obey. It usually led to *castigo*, or teacher's punishment. On one occasion, Cláudia made *bagunça* when she pretend played sneezing as she waited for lunch. Helena asked her to be quiet, and then threatened with putting her 'of' *castigo* at a different table.

Children frequently referred to waiting as an integral part of their routine, especially, but not only, during meals. At the end of a school tour that Daniele, Cláudia and Gabriela gave me, I asked what happens when a child finishes eating. Daniele responded, “Has to wait at the table [sic].” Cláudia added, “While the others are finishing; we stay waiting and then [sic] go to the classroom.” I asked them to help me understand ‘waiting.’ Daniele showed me: she sat down, rested her elbows on the little table, and held her chin with both hands, looking upwards as if she was bored. Cláudia also sat down with her back straight, but soon looked under the table, bent over Daniele, and started a game of walking her fingers on the table. She explained, “I stay like this; I wait like this; I keep playing, always playing.”

Cláudia’s description of waiting hints at the thin line between children’s playing as they waited and making *bagunça*. Her affirmation that she waited playing and her emphasis on “always playing” while waiting taps into one the central themes of this chapter: children’s own activities within the ruled world of adults. Children’s rich conversations, stories, and play as they waited for the official activities and as they engaged with them conjure children’s worlds inside the teacher-centered -classroom.

Circle time at the Creche: ‘Helena’s Classroom’

To introduce life “inside Helena’s classroom,” as the children called it, I chose an excerpt from my observations of a *rodinha* or circle time. This example reveals a crucial aspect of the pedagogy: the movement as well as the tension between children’s engagement in their own parallel activities and the teacher-directed one.

Circle time routines, like meal routines, varied greatly. Most circles were shorter and simpler than the “talk about what you did” type of circle described. Usually Helena

checked attendance or played a game, and explained the table activity. In the following vignette I describe the entire circle time activity, spanning about 40 minutes: the transition into circle time; both Helena's efforts to keep the children engaged and children's participation in the circle as well as in other parallel activities, such as talking and playing; and finally, the 'dissolution' of circle into the next transition.

Transition into circle time.

Like most *rodinhas* the circle looked more like a loosely round agglomeration of children sitting on the floor. In what would be the center of the *rodinha*, Gabriela Matos walked on all fours like a little cat, sticking her tongue out and pushing her body back and forth. Most children waited while Helena finished "arranging" the other children—telling Gabriela to go sit down and helping Washington up from the floor where he laid. As they waited, children talked among themselves and most shifted their bodies. Matias blew hard on his right hand. Maria Luísa sat cross-legged moving her torso back and forth to an internal rhythm. Marcela held her left foot with her right hand and pulled her foot up, stretching her leg. Cláudia crawled to get something from the corridor. Davidson leaned over the teacher and tried to pull her face towards him. Helena brought his hands down and addressed the children.

Circle time: a dog and a thief.

Helena said, "Now, here [sic]. So, let's start. Paulo is going to start to tell us about his vacation, isn't it Paulo?" She looked at Paulo, sitting at her left. Paulo started, "I will; I played." Matias, sitting next to Paulo, and Davidson, on the teacher's right side listened, but most children were talking about their own vacations or something entirely different. Marcela and Daniele, on the far end, talked animatedly. Helena called children's attention, "Marcela, Daniele, listen to your classmate. Hush; Gabriela, go sit down."

Paulo continued to talk, “I played with my dog and he bit me. He bites everybody. (...) We were running, and then he went and bit me right here.” Helena leaned over the spot Paulo showed on his leg with a surprised expression and said, “Sweet Mary, is he a pitch-bull?” Paulo nodded yes, grinning.

The children seemed excited with the dog topic. They started talking among themselves, some telling dog stories. Only a few seemed to be following the conversation between Helena and Paulo.

Helena called the class’ attention, “Wait, this is not O.K. because everyone is doing something else. Cláudia has turned back; Marcela is playing [sic] with Daniele.” Meanwhile Paulo started calling Helena, “Aunt⁷, aunt,” to finish his story. Helena continued talking to the whole class, “No, no guys, this is not O.K. We have to respect and to listen to what the classmate is talking about; you have not seeing each other for fifteen days...” Her voice did not sound angry or mad. It had a soft pleading intonation, and it was loud enough for everybody to hear her above the noise. The children quieted down for a minute, but continued to talk. Paulo said something to Helena, who smiled and asked him, “And then, did you travel?” He nodded yes. Matias joined in, “I will travel today.” Rejane on the other side of the circle said something about traveling, and everybody talked at the same time. Some were talking to each other, like Cláudia, Daniele, and Marcela. Other children, like Matias and Rejane were talking to the teacher. Helena brought her finger to her lips whispering, “hussssssh [sic].” Touching Matias legs, she said, “Now, Matias is going to talk too.” Matias started, “When I got home, I changed my clothes, played video game and then went to ride my bike. Then I went out; then I got home, and I played video game.” He talked with a loud voice, moving his body forward for emphasis, and the children listened to him. Gabriela Santos, next to him, asked, “(Did you play video games) all the time?” Matias smiled and said, “All the time.” He proceeded with his story, “Then a person opened the door of my house, and then my father got scared, then...” Parallel talk made it impossible to continue. Helena said, “hussssssh.” Matias continued, “(...) When I was playing a video game, a man came inside and robbed my father’s things, and my video game too, everything.” Helena asked, surprise in her voice, “With you inside? You were playing and he got the video game when you were playing?” The story seemed to catch children’s interest. Gabriela Santos said, “It’s a thief; it’s a thief; it’s a thief.” Paulo tried to say something. Two children started calling Helena, “Aunt, aunt, aunt...” Matias tried to continue. Maria Beatriz talked animatedly emphasizing her point by touching each finger of her facing up, open left hand with her right thumb as she said, “People rob; thief robs; *pivete* (street-child) robs.” Rejane joined in the conversation. Vehemently nodding her head she said, “It’s *pivete*, aunt; it’s *pivete*.” While the children above participated in the discussion, Marcela had left the circle and was lying down on the floor by the corridor, pushing her body around. Cláudia, laughing, clapped her hands while she talked to Maria. Paulo tried to bring back the subject of his dog with the teacher.

Chaotic times: when children were not quiet.

⁷ Children and adults referred to the teacher as Aunt Heloisa. This treatment of teachers of young children is common practice in Brazil.

There were a few minutes of chaos. Gabriela Santos, the third child to talk in 10 minutes of circle, waited for her turn, but most children were engaged in parallel conversations. Helena repeatedly asked the whole room and individual children for silence. Gabriela and Daniele yelled, “silence,” and Rejane echoed them saying, “as long as there is not silence nobody will listen [sic].” Gabriela Santos attempted to start a few times. She ended up telling about her vacation to an audience that was partly listening and partly talking and visiting. After she was finished, another noise wave—the zoeira—raised. Children on the next room started singing loudly and Helena’s children all talked at the same time. Rejane sat on a chair at the corner. Leaning over the table, she rolled her upper body left and right. Marcela sat in the middle of the circle. Using her arms to propel her body, she pivoted round and round. Daniele yelled three times, “lower the volume guys.” The teacher said, “Go Maria Luísa.” Maria Luísa tried to start but nobody listened. Helena insisted, “wait, if I have to stop here again with the circle [sic], I will not be able to let you play later with the surprise that I brought; that is hidden there (at the office). You promised me that you would be quiet so you could listen to the classmate. You are going to talk more later, at the little table (during table activity).” She touched a few children calling them to be quiet, “no, not now Rafael; hush, hush Matias; Matias and Gabriela Santos.” Maria Luísa started again, and once more she stopped. Most children joined in the song from the other classroom; some, like Cláudia and Lucas, stood up and yelled the lyrics.

Circle time again: the teacher’s cloud; the children’s moon.

Helena decided to move the circle to the eating patio. After an almost 8 minute transition, the children settled down in front of the office door. Maria Luísa finally described her vacation, followed by Cláudia. The children listened with relative attention, encouraged by Helena’s eventual calls of “hush, hush” and “go sit on your place.” As Cláudia finished, I heard a child saying something to Helena who responded, “It’s not; it’s a cloud because it moves.” Suddenly most children were looking at the sky and saying, some yelling, “it’s the moon;” “moon;” and “that is the sky, where Jesus is.” The wave of children’s excited voices and laughing rose again. Several small hands pointed up as most children leaned back to see the moon.

The end of circle time.

At 9:38 am, almost forty minutes after they first sat down, the circle dissolved. Gabriela Matos went to play at the slide, and Helena stood up to bring her back. As the teacher left the circle, most children hurriedly scattered around the playground. Helena called everybody to come to the classroom. Several children laughed as they ran around and then back to the classroom.

Inside the classroom, Gabriela Matos hid behind the entrance door, her serious face drawn—probably because of Helena’s scolding for sliding during circle time. The others settled on their chairs, played, and talked animatedly. Helena moved around the room conducting the children to their seats, calling them to sit down, and breaking-up fights and games. She went to the door and addressed the whole class in her usual sort-of-calm-yet-pleading-convincing tone, “we were not even

able to finish our little circle; four people did not talk.” She turned to Gabriela S. who was talking loudly with Cláudia, “Isn’t it Gabriela Santos?” Addressing the whole class again she said, “Four people and you did not let them talk. So now I will only hand in the papers for those who are paying attention.” About half the children paid attention to her. Cláudia teased Gabriela saying something like “busted.” Gabriela complained to the teacher, “Aunt, Cláudia said I’m busted.” On her way out to get resources for the table activity Helena responded, “No, sit here pointing to Gabriela’s chair) because I talked to everybody; it was not only to you.”

The lunch and circle time descriptions above show how children, often happily, engaged and participated in the activities suggested by Helena, and at the same time, developed their own activities. Life at the *creche* seemed to involve a dance, and often, as I discuss, a clash between these two dimensions.

The description of the *rodinha* above reveals the two types of talk that reflect these two worlds of the classroom—the “official” and the children’s. The official talk was mostly between teacher and children. During circle time we see how Helena’s directions, questions, instructions, appeals, and often threats of *castigo*, constantly punctuated children’s experiences. Children, like Paulo above, constantly referred back to her, asking that she check their work, watch what a classmate did, or let them be next. Cries of “aunt” were ever present. I imagined the teacher as a central pole with several strings radiating from her to the children around the room.

Together with the official talk, a second, ‘disorderly’ or unofficial talk filled the room—children’s talk. Children talked about the activities, but mostly, as I further illustrate, they shared a distinct narrative world apart from or parallel to the teacher-centered world. They invented and played games, and talked about their lives inside and outside school, about their families, what they did, and what they would do. We see children as storytellers and narrative thinkers for instance, when they attempted to add

their own tales to Paulo Henrique's story about biting dogs and Matias's about *pivetes* (children's thieves). They also sustained private conversations throughout the activity.

Children's and teachers' talk co-existed yet often clashed. Usually the teacher interrupted children by requesting that they be quiet and threatening them with *castigo*. Occasionally children succeeded in 'occupying the floor' and pushing the teacher-centered format by introducing their own narratives and directing the conversation. A good example of what I am describing is the flow of stories and commentaries when children saw the moon in the morning sky. Children seemed amazed by the unexpected moon and fully immersed in their narratives about it. Their conversations at that moment also worked as a refusal to return to the circle, resulting in the end of the activity.

The two observation excerpts above highlight two significant aspects of children's experiences I further discuss next in my description of the *trabalhinhos*. First, the disbanding of the *rodinha* illustrates the 'dis-encounters' of the children's and teacher's 'talk,' and thus, of the pedagogy. Second, the teacher's request that children 'be quiet' reveal the demand the teacher-centered format placed on children's bodies. Even though children's bodies moved constantly, the children were expected to spend the vast majority of their time at the *creche* sitting down.

The *Trabalhinhos*: What and How Children Learned

I divided the discussion of the *trabalhinhos* in three main parts. In the first section, "Little Work," I generally describe what children learned or the content of the activities and the educational goals. In the second, and main body of the description, I focus on how children learned or children's interactions with the content, with each other,

and the teacher as they engaged with the *trabalhinhos*. In the third and final section I discuss how children transformed the *trabalhinhos*.

“Little Work”

Literally *trabalhinho* means, “little work.”⁸ Teachers and children preferred the term *trabalhinho*, which they used to refer to pedagogical or educational activities or exercises. Mostly the *trabalhinhos* followed the traditional model of early childhood education as preparation for formal schooling: Helena explained the activity on the blackboard, the whole class engaged in the same activity every morning and often in the afternoon, and the children worked at tables, each with her own paper. As previously discussed, at the *Sabiá* the *trabalhinhos* included more open-ended activities such as free drawing and painting or playing letter-bingo. Unlike the *creche*, children sometimes worked in groups, such as painting murals. Activities at the *Sabiá* could also be more elaborated, involving different materials and initiatives. For instance, the children worked for several weeks on a ‘name project,’ or a group of activities that evolved around their names, for example ‘writing’ them down by gluing beans on paper and asking families to write down the story of their names, which was later shared in the classroom and posted in the walls. Despite very significant differences in content and kinds of activities, Sara, like Helena, dictated children’s *trabalhinhos*. She explained what children would do, and the whole class worked on the same project, mostly at the tables and individually.

Trabalhinho then means “little school work,” or work little children performed to in order to learn, as indicated by Cláudia’s description, at my request: “we have to use the

⁸ The diminutive form is commonly used in Portuguese, particularly in communication with young children. The literal translation of *trabalhinho* as little work might imply a negative connotation not necessarily accurate in Portuguese. I further discuss possible meanings of *trabalhinho* later.

vowels for us to learn what they are, and, after, we can play on the patio.” Michelle added, “we have to make this name, draw the house, make the name on the bottom, cut these letters out, and glue like this. (It’s) ready.” Cláudia continued, “we... [sic] is to make the vowels, learn the syllables, the number seven, and then later we make the (letter) M.”

On another occasion Cláudia, Marcela, Rejane and Matias further explained the *trabalhinho*’s format to me. I had asked them to tell me what had happened that morning.

Cláudia: we colored. We traced the number two and traced the number three. We did it alone.

Marcela: Cláudia, we colored.

Letícia: why did you trace numbers?

Rejane: it’s for who doesn’t know.

Cláudia: to learn to do.

Cláudia: and then we have to cut out the foot and the hand to glue. (...) Glue the hand here on the arm and on the leg also.

Letícia: Matias what did you do?

Matias: the same thing then Cláudia said.

Cláudia: everybody does the same thing.

Letícia: it’s always like this?

Matias: yes.

Letícia: what happens if somebody does not want to do it?

Cláudia: if do a clown everybody does it, if do an orange everybody does it, if do apple everybody does it.

The children seemed to understand important aspects of the *trabalhinho*. As I further discuss, they were almost emphatic in affirming how they followed directions, how they had to do the *trabalhinhos* ‘alone,’ how they did exercises such as tracing numbers in order to learn, and finally, how everybody had to do the same exercise.

According to Helena and Thaís, the *trabalhinho* foremost educational goals were to teach content to prepare children for elementary school, such as children’s names, alphabet letters and numbers and teach basic concepts such as making relationships (e.g.:

linking body parts) and following directions on paper. Additional goals included fine motor dexterity and skills such as coloring, cutting with scissors, and holding pencils.

Usually students were given dittos, which required individually following strict directions and filling in blanks and often involved several structured steps. For example, children received a ditto with a picture of a boy and several circles with different letters in them. The goal was for each child to color the picture, copy their names, and check out the letters of their names on the circle. Another *trabalhinho* required children to (a) copy down names, (b) make a picture of a house under the word house, (c) cut from magazines the letters of the word house, and (d) paste them under the word house written on cursive on the right of the ditto. Other exercises required copying different line shapes: horizontal, vertical, wavy, and zigzag. Still others were seasonal or related to holidays: mother's day flowers, father's day cards, July's party little flags, soldier's day hat and sword, folklore's week or Christmas pictures.

Although rare, there were other types of *trabalhinhos* besides the traditional dittos. The children painted on two occasions I observed. The first time they copied fine-motor-skill exercises from the blackboard. On the second occasion they painted a strawberry ditto picture following color instructions: green for the leaves, red for the fruit, and black for the little seeds. Twice I observed the children making magazine picture collages when they worked together in two larger groups. On one occasion after the winter vacation, I observed free drawing. Once I observed the children working on a ditto, but on the floor instead of at the tables. Although I did not observe them, the children told me about three activities that differed from the *trabalhinhos*' format: making a fruit salad, making play dough, and creating a "hall of fame" panel with the paint imprints of children's and teacher's hands and feet on two large brown paper leaves.

*‘Doing the *trabalhinho*’*

‘Doing the *trabalhinho*’ was a complex process. This process entailed the following: children sitting down and being quiet; teacher’s control of resources as they ‘gave’ the *trabalhinhos*; children’s waiting and conflict-ridden, often chaotic, resource-sharing experiences; children’s stress due to the demands of the *trabalhinho* format; children’s attempts to resist and challenge the format; children’s competition and exclusion of each other; children’s narrative actions during the ‘happy waves;’ and finally, children’s apparent feelings of loss when they ‘did not know’ the *trabalhinho*.

“Sit and Be “Quietinho!”

During the tour that Washington and Davidson gave me of the school, they explained the transition from circle time to the *trabalhinho*. They described that for the *trabalhinhos* to start the children had to be ‘little quiet’ or *quietinho*.

Washington: And then sit at the table.

Letícia: And what does the aunt say?

Davidson: To sit at the table and be *quietinho*. (...)

Washington: And then (the aunt) puts paper on the table for drawing. (...)

Letícia: And the aunt brings the paper, and then what happens?

Davidson: Then we put name [sic], make house, bunnies [sic]...

As the children explained, sitting down and being silent was the first step of the *trabalhinho*. “Being little quiet” was not a simple process in Helena’s classroom. Transitions were long and often chaotic. In the vignette below I describe the first part of a transition from circle to the *trabalhinho*.

At the beginning of the year Helena and children played the game ‘crocodile’ during circle time inside the classroom. The children yelled and laughed as the teacher went around pretending to gobble little feet, hands, and heads. “Aunt,” cried Maria Beatriz, “Eat the head.” The children played sitting at their seats.

After much fun, Helena signaled the end of the game by lifting both her hands up and saying, smiling, “Now, that’s it; that’s it; that’s it; that’s it; let’s be little quiet...” The children, yelling and laughing, interrupted with requests for more games such as “aunt, let’s sing the shark song.” Voices were very loud, and bodies stood up. Most children called and pulled at the teacher who walked around the room, hands stretched above her head motioning down, “Now, without yelling; wait; wait.” Still children’s loud voices echoed and their busy bodies walked around Helena. She continued to direct individual children to their seats while calling, “Hush; wait, no, without yelling...[sic]” She sang the ‘quiet’ song, “*pararapa* [sic].” Some children responded, “*paraparapa* [sic],” and for a minute it seemed like they would be quiet. However, the *zoeira* resumed. Lucas de Farias and Washington started to play fighting in the corner. Helena quickly approached and separated them saying “No, I will ask you two to go sit down...” More children got out of their seats and mostly all of them were calling “aunt” and requesting games or songs. Matias tapped the teacher’s shoulders repeatedly. Cláudia managed to get the teacher to listen to her song request by pulling Helena’s shirt.

Other children played pretend or talked. Maria Beatriz and Gabriela Santos waved their hands together high in the air and then low by the floor. Helena moved around the room, putting away a book that someone took out, arranging something on the shelf, and talking to the children, “I don’t know that song; if you want to sing it for us you can.” The noise level was very high, for North American standards, maybe insufferably high. Helena told the children she was going to get the paper for the activity from the office. The children yelled louder and played more excitedly; some sang. Davidson squeezed Maria Luísa’s hands, and they both laughed and yelled. Paulo Henrique waved his sock in front of Gabriela Matos’s nose. Several children ran in my direction, asking me to show them the computer, “Let me see; let me see.” A few children just stared ahead. Marcela sat with her knees parallel to the side of the table, facing the wall and sucking her thumb. Rejane, head bent, looked at the floor.

As in the excerpt above, often Helena left the classroom to go to the office pick up the activity dittos, interrupting the process of ‘being quiet.’ Not all transitions were peaceful as the one above. Physical fighting and consequent teacher’s *castigo* permeated the *trabalhinhos*, as I further discuss. After Helena returned to the classroom, she continued to ask the children to be quiet so that she could ‘give them the *trabalhinhos*.’ ‘Giving the *trabalhinhos*’ was the second step in the transition to the educational activity.

Teacher’s Control of Resources: ‘Giving the Trabalho’

Adults and children used the term ‘giving the *trabalhinho*,’ referring to the teacher’s instruction of the table activity as well as to the distribution of materials for the exercises. After most children sat down and stayed relatively quiet, Helena instructed the whole class, step-by-step, on what they had to do. She made drawings of each step on the blackboard and, sometimes, asked a child to demonstrate the *trabalhinho*.

After the explanation, Helena, usually with the help of one child, ‘gave’ the children the necessary materials. Distribution of materials for table exercises followed a pattern similar to that of lunch serving. During meals, the spoon was the last item distributed, so children had to wait for pray and adult authorization to start. During the *trabalhinhos*, supplies were also distributed last, so children had to wait for the teacher’s instructions and her authorization to start. As during meals, the children had to ‘be quiet’ as they waited. The next episode further illustrates the ‘giving’ of the *trabalhinho*.

On the first day of class after the winter break, Maria Luísa and Washington waited standing in front of the blackboard for the teacher and Davidson to return from the office with the papers for the drawings of their vacation. Washington stretched and then rocked his body. Maria Luísa looked steadily ahead of her. Usually Helena asked only one child to help, but today she had asked three children. A few minutes later, Helena and Davidson returned, and Helena went around the room. As she once more adjusted and arranged the children, she motioned them to be quiet: “hush, hush, quiet” and “no, sit ‘right.” She told Washington, “Go sit down and give me your sweater to put away.” She removed Daniele away from a lively conversation with Cláudia, Gabriela Santos, and Matias. Holding Daniele’s hand, she passed by the next table. Edu stood up crying, holding his arm. He called her, “oh, aunt.” Without stopping, Helena asked what happened. Edu responded, “It was Paulo.” Helena continued to walk and, turning her face back slightly towards Edu and Paulo, said, “Oh Paulo, why did you do that?” Without a word to Daniele, Helena put her at the chair next to Marcela and came back towards Edu. She adjusted his chair to face the table. Paulo, sitting across the table, sucked his thumb. Gabriela Matos remained hidden behind the door. Davidson went around handing a sheet of paper in to each child. Maria Luísa and Washington still waited by the blackboard. Most children continued to talk, apparently happily engaged with each other as they waited at the tables. Helena gave Maria Luísa and Washington the ice cream box where she kept the crayons and continued to organize the children and the room. Washington and Maria Luísa started distributing the crayons. Gabriela Matos slid from behind the door and lay down in front of the blackboard. Helena picked her

up by the hand and led her to her Paulo Henrique's table. Cláudia, Gabriela Santos, and Matias chatted and laughed. Helena called Cláudia's attention in front of the class, "Oh, Cláudia, later you will ask me what you have to do. What do you have to do?" Cláudia, looking to Gabriela and Matias, gave a dismissive, mischievous laugh, and said even more loudly to the teacher who was now on the other side of the room, "What do I know?" Helena said, "See?" The teacher's attention turned somewhere else. Children called Washington and Maria Luísa to come give them pencils. Cláudia looked around sort of pensively. Matias made loud car sounds, cranking his neck forward and back as the motor soared. After a while Cláudia called to the teacher, "To draw? Aunt?" Helena did not respond. Cláudia insisted, her voice louder, "Drawing something we did, aunt?" The teacher, coming closer, responded, "Yes, during the vacation." Matias' pretend car sounds and movements became louder and bigger. Davidson continued handing in papers, and Washington and Maria Luísa crayons. Cláudia's table continued to wait for supplies. Cláudia, clapping her hands with wide gestures, turned to Gabriela and spoke rhythmically to the beat of her hands' movements, "I will draw the floor, isn't it? The street I went on." Matias started to sing something about his stomach while massaging it and sort of dancing on his seat. Helena again asked Cláudia to be quiet, "Hush, oh Cláudia." Matias stopped singing and yawned. Cláudia lowered her voice to a whisper, covered her mouth, and said smilingly to Gabriela, "I will draw my house really fast and quick, so I can go and leave." Gabriela started a story about leaving the *creche*, and was interrupted by the arrival of Washington who dropped a handful of pencils on the middle of the table. Gabriela asked Washington, "Give me yellow also." He dropped another handful. Matias sort of yelped happily, "Uh, uh." Cláudia exclaimed laughing, "Oh, my God!" Matias and Cláudia stashed the crayons in front of each of them. Matias cried out, "Look at the sharp points." Gabriela touched Cláudia's pencils. Cláudia handed her some saying, "Gabriela does not have any..." Davidson approached with the papers, and the three children cheered. Cláudia, grinning, said, "I will get the purple." Gabriela and Matias also chose their colors and started to draw.

In the conversation opening the previous section, Washington described the teacher handing in the paper as a distinct step—"and then (the aunt) puts paper on the table (...)." 'Giving' the *trabalhinho*, like many transitions, indeed felt like an activity in itself, one which main requirement was for children to wait and be quiet. Controlling children's bodies seemed to be a first requirement for the activities. Helena's rounds around the room 'hushing' and 'arranging' children were inherent to children's engagement with the *trabalhinhos*, particularly during waiting periods such as the 'giving' of the activity.

Children waited for long periods of time during transitions. About fifteen minutes lapsed between the dissolution of the circle and the moment Cláudia, Gabriela and Matias started drawing. For the children in the last table to receive crayons the transition lasted about six minutes longer, that is, over twenty minutes. As during lunch, children often waited actively, playing, talking, and telling stories, as when Cláudia and Gabriela seem to fantasize about leaving the *creche*.⁹

Most children seemed excited with ‘doing’ the activities, as indicated by Cláudia, Gabriela and Matias’ cheering when Davidson and Maria ‘gave’ them paper and pencils. The distribution of resources marked the beginning of the *trabalhinhos*.

Waiting and Resource-Sharing: The Drama of a Ripe Pineapple

Here, I situate the description of children’s engagement with the *trabalhinho* in the larger context of the teacher-centered *trabalhinho* format, further discussing the teacher’s control of resources. The discussion follows an excerpt from my observations of Davidson and Raíssa as they and the other children colored a ditto of a pineapple. Unusually, the activity was a three-day project. The day before children had cut letters out of magazines. The day I observed Helena drew ‘V’ like markings on the blackboard and explained the exercise steps: write names on individual papers, copy the symbols to represent the pineapple skin, and color the pineapple picture. On the third and last day, children had to form the word pineapple with the cutout letters and paste it on their dittos. It was only then that Helena revealed the purpose of the cutout letters. The vignette below provides insight into the extent of teacher’s control of children’s actions. Children ‘had’

⁹ In the two chapters on children’s views of their experiences, I refer back to significant issues related in the excerpts of observations cited in the descriptive chapters. For example, I discuss children’s stories about the *creche*, including the ones that reflect a desire to leave.

to follow strict steps outlined by the teacher. Helena walked around the room making sure they followed her instructions. She continued to control the distribution of resources, handing in few supplies for each step of the *trabalhinho*.

Davidson, Raíssa and Lucas Mateus shared a table. Davidson and Raíssa worked quickly and finished the first step in a few minutes. Lucas stopped often and still made the little 'V' like marks. Raíssa started writing her name down. Davidson took some outdated donated computer paper from the teacher's shelf and started detaching the paper's edge. Helena came by on one of her rounds to check on the children at the table, and, without a word, took the paper away. Davidson started ripping the edges in tiny pieces. He piled the pieces on a cutout shape of a child's body he somehow found. For over 10 minutes he played, carefully ripping the paper and piling the pieces.

Every now and then he and Raíssa would look at each other and share a comment or a smile. She looked at the back of her chair, to the name card, to spell her name out. She said to Davidson, "my name is like *abacaxi* (pineapple in Portuguese)." Davidson, laughing, pointed to her name on the paper with a piece of paper and sang the syllables, "*a – ba – ca – xi*." She smiled back and continued to write. Davidson ripped the paper and sang. Helena came by and took his ripped paper away, telling him to do the exercise. He stood up, looked around, walked towards me, and gave me a hug. He asked what I was doing. Helena walked over and told him with her usual good voice to go sit down. He told her "I will 'make' my name." She answered, "Yes, that's good; go write your name." He sat down and immediately left the table again to sharpen his pencil at the next table.

During the *trabalhinho* Helena usually set up a 'base' at one of the tables where she kept supplies. That day she had a plastic ice cream container with colored pencils and a pencil-sharpener. As usual, she walked around the room checking on the children and handing about four coloring pencils to those who had finished writing their names. Raíssa started coloring. Davidson, back at his chair, wrote his name. He would finish a letter and twist his body to look at the name card taped to the back of his chair. He asked Raíssa, "are you going to color it all yellow?" Raíssa nodded yes. Lucas Mateus rarely worked on his paper. He had a lead pencil and three coloring pencils on his hand. Davidson asked him for the coloring pencils and he said no. Davidson said, "You can only color after you are done." Lucas, hanging on to his pencil, answered, "The aunt said there is no problem." Lucas coughed hard, and Davidson charged quickly, strongly grabbing a green coloring pencil. Lucas just looked at him. Davidson started coloring. Raíssa said, "Yours is going to be green; mine is ripe." Davidson looked at her pensively, and said, "Mine is also ripe; will you give me the yellow?" Raíssa hid the pencil behind her back, dodging his repeated attempts to take it away.

A long wait ensued. Davidson gave up on Raíssa's pencil and tried the plastic container at the table Helena was now sitting but there were no yellow pencils left. He wandered around the room and came back. Helena stopped by to check on their progress, and he told her, "I wanted to color mine yellow." She responded, "Well, she (Raíssa) got it first; she is using it now; later, after she is done, she will give it to you." Raíssa colored with strong strokes, and Davidson watched. Then he fidgeted

for a long time—he tried to start writing, stopped, bit his pencil, lowered his body, and looked under the table. Raíssa went to look for the pencil sharpener and came back. He asked Raíssa with a ‘little,’ candid voice, “Later will you give me the little yellow?” Gabriela Santos came by and checked Raíssa’s coloring out. The teacher made another round and looking at Davidson’s paper told him “Davidson, this way you are not going to finish today no [sic].” She returned two minutes later. Davidson stood looking at nearby children; his paper was on the floor. Helena, with her regular, ‘good’ voice, called him but addressing the whole group, “Oh, look at Davidson’s (lack of) care; your paper is on the floor. Oh, Davidson, you have to start and finish; you start a little ‘bitty’ and then stop.” She pointed to his paper, “look, start here; look.” Davidson told Helena, “I want the yellow.” She responded, “Raíssa is almost done, when she finishes she will pass it on to you; color here, see? So color the pineapple’s little leaves.” He smiled what seemed half resignedly and half happily, and asked, “Color green?” She said, “Of course, green.” He started coloring. After Raíssa finished, she handed him the yellow pencil. He smiled broadly and started to sharpen the pencil. He struggled with the sharpener for a couple of minutes and then asked me to sharpen the pencil for him. Lucas came over and said he knew how to sharpen. Davidson gave him the pencil and sharpener. Helena came over, took the pencil, and told them to go sit down that she would do it. She left with the pencil and the sharpener in her hands to deal with some problem at a different table. Davidson waited in his seat, eyes following the teacher. Raíssa said something to him, went over, and took the pencil from the teacher. On her way back to the table, Raíssa met Gabriela S. who was watching the scene closely and tried to take the pencil away from Raíssa. Davidson yelled really loud, “It’s mine.” The girls wrestled for about three minutes until Raíssa broke free from Gabriela’s arms and ran with the pencil towards the teacher. “She wants to take it, but it is Davidson’s,” she said in a pitched voice. Gabriela on the verge of tears whined, “I want the yellow.” Helena explained, “Gabriela, Davidson has been waiting; there is a lack of yellow.” Walking towards the pencil container she said, “I will try to find another yellow.” Davidson observed Helena. He pouted and looked quite worried. Helena found another yellow pencil and handed one to Davidson and one to Gabriela. Davidson sort of sighed and started coloring his ripe pineapple.

The vignette illustrates the relationship between children’s engagement with their work, waiting, and sharing limited supplies, reflecting how the pattern of limiting children’s access to resources seems to affect their interaction with their work and each other. Apparently children greatly value their work as indicated by Davidson and Gabriela’s willingness to wait for long periods and their vehement attempts to ‘get’ a yellow pencil. They worked individually, or in several children’s words, “had to do the *trabalhinho* alone,” and ended up competing for the limited resources. Davidson, Raíssa,

and Gabriela Santos all ‘needed’ and wanted the same pencil and, under Helena’s arbiter, struggled to get it. Waiting was inherent to the activity. Coloring a ripe pineapple required waiting for the yellow pencil—Helena repeated that explanation several times. Waiting seems to become increasingly stressing for children, as when Davidson seems to entertain the possibility that, after all, he might lose the yellow pencil. Children’s frustrations, and the potential for worse physical fights, seem evident in the physical struggle between Raíssa and Gabriela at the end of the episode.

As I wrote this vignette, I relived a sense of tension I experienced that morning. It was difficult to describe Davidson’s long wait and Gabriela’s despair over a simple, accessible resource—a yellow coloring pencil. To better understand what waiting, and waiting for one yellow pencil, could have meant for Davidson, I return to the beginning of the ‘class’ and follow its progress. As usual, Davidson started to wait during the long transition to the activity, until the children were ‘quiet’ and the teacher ‘gave the *trabalhinho*.’ He continued to wait after the ‘work’ started. He initiated his own activity (playing with the computer paper), talked with Raíssa, tried to talk to me, sat idly at his chair, made *bagunça* (wandered and threw his paper on the floor), was scolded by the teacher, engaged with the *trabalhinho*, repeatedly and unsuccessfully attempted to get coloring pencils, continued to wait until Helena suggested him to paint the leaves green, continued to wait for Raíssa to finish, waited for the pencil to be sharpened, waited for the end of the conflict between Gabriela and Raíssa, and finally waited for Helena to find an extra yellow pencil.

On the one hand, Davidson’s waiting epitomizes children’s lack of control over their actions. To ‘get’ a yellow pencil to color a ditto often required a great effort. The fact that Davidson and the other children struggled for such a long time over a simple and

readily available resource, tells about not only the extent but also about the quality of teacher's control. On the other hand, children's focused intent in 'getting the yellow pencil' indicates their active attempts to exert some control over the coloring process, thus establishing ownership of their work. Analogously, it could also represent children's way of creating meaning of the limited, contrived activities. Therefore, the right color for a ripe pineapple came to stand for children's expression of their creativity, or their efforts to make their work meaningful, and possibly their own.

The Trabalhinho's Demands on Children

As in the previous example, the *trabalhinhos* involved several, usually ordered steps that required a complicated process of resource distribution with the teacher handing in materials needed for each step. For example, one day she first handed red paint for the strawberry outline, second green paint for the leaves, and finally black paint for the seeds. On another children had to color four different rows of geometric shapes (rectangles, squares, triangles and circles), each in a different color. Each table of four children shared one color pencil necessary for each step of the project. At one table, Davidson, Matias, Gabriela Santos and Gabriela Matos had to negotiate the blue pencil for the triangles, the green for the rectangles, and so on. As Davidson once described, the children had to wait for the others to finish each particular step and then "pass the pencil" (or other materials) before moving on to the next. Such rigid structure seemed to place incredible demands on children, often leading to conflicts. The next excerpt focuses on Davidson, Matias, Gabriela S. and Gabriela M. during the *trabalhinho* of coloring geometric shapes and further illustrates children's waiting and ensuing conflicts.

Helena first handed only one pencil per table. At 9:47 am, one child colored at one table, two at another, while the rest waited for pencils. The children without pencils repeatedly tried to 'get' or grab one. Typically, Helena moved back and forth around the room writing children's names on their papers, handing in coloring pencils, settling disputes, changing seats of fighting children, and further explaining the activity steps. As usual at the beginning of the *trabalhinhos*, there seemed to be tension in the air. Gradually, as more children had pencils to color, the disputes changed into activity, and the tension into satisfaction, until the next conflict.

Matias did not have a pencil. Helena came to his side, checked each rectangle on his paper, handed him a green pencil, and explained how he would color the shapes she had checked. Gabriela Santos was almost done with the blue triangles. She worked vigorously. Then she leaned back on the chair, looked at her paper, and exclaimed with a loud voice and a big smile, "finished." Matias pointed to the shapes she had not colored yet and said with a light tone of voice, "Not finished [sic]; this one, this one, and this one are still missing." Davidson added, "(You) have to color everything, and after [sic] have to change color." He added emphatically, "I will not change," tapping his green pencil lightly on Gabriela S.'s head. She ignored him. Gabriela M. worked quietly, as usual.

At 9:56 Helena finished handing in the materials to the last table. Gabriela S. and Davidson sang an alphabet song from a famous television show. Matias seemed to make up an imaginary game of 'finishing.' He said laughing, "Ah, ah, ah, Gabriela Santos has lost, because she already finished the triangles, and now she has to wait to exchange because we didn't finished yet." Gabriela S. smiled back at him. Davidson smiled with apparent satisfaction and exclaimed, "Finished." Matias replied, "No, you are not finished." He traced Davidson's paper with his finger as if looking for an incomplete exercise. He then turned to Gabriela S., "I will finish this here very fast to give (the pencil) to you." Davidson grabbed the pencil from Matias. He started to make coloring motions in the air and said, "Time finished. Wait, in a second I will give it to you." Matias, apparently not annoyed, grabbed the pencil back and gave it to Gabriela Santos. Then Davidson forcefully yanked the pencil from her. Suddenly, the climate changed. Gabriela Santos yelled for him to give it back. On the verge of tears, what felt like anxious or frustrated tears, she turned to the approaching teacher, "Oh aunt, he got my pencil." Helena told Davidson to return the green pencil to Gabriela S. She added, "All you have to do is ask; there are many green pencils; you do not need to grab from your classmate." Matias asked Helena, "I'm finished, what do I have to color next aunt?" Gabriela S. was still holding on to the blue pencil she used for the triangles. Again Davidson yanked it off her hands and handed it to Matias. The teacher checked the triangles on Matias' paper, telling him to color them blue. Matias asked Helena to write his name on the paper. He watched

attentively as she finished, then looking at the paper, he said “five minutes, hey,” which was a clue for a new game of counting the time until they get finished with the exercise. He and Gabriela Santos counted to twenty when Matias said, “When it (the count) finishes, your time finished.” Davidson apparently still upset, did not play. They counted again, this time Gabriela M. joined in, “One, two, until ten.” Matias said, “Ready, it’s finished; now only I can color. One, ...ten, finished.” They repeated the game several times.

The description above illustrates teacher’s control of resources. It also indicates how children’s struggle for resources is situated in the larger context of teacher’s control of children. As in the ripe pineapple episode, teacher’s rule over pencils or other materials seemed a strategic element of control both of the children and their ‘production’ or work. The success of the structured steps of the *trabalhinhos* required rigid control over resources in order to control the children to follow the format. Only a few pencils were given at a time, so that Helena could check children’s progress. Blue pencils for blue rectangles came before green pencils for green triangles otherwise children might end up with green rectangles or blue triangles.

The dynamics of control of resources inherent to the rigid, teacher-centered format of the *trabalhinhos* seemed to create great uncertainty among the children. The example above also illustrates the volatility of the *trabalhinhos* experience. Children alternated between moments of apparent great satisfaction when they were able to engage with the activity, share and take turns; and moments of great anger and anxiety when they vigorously disputed resources, such as pencils. They could seem relaxed as they worked, talking, singing, inventing and playing games. However, an underlying element of tension seemed to permeate their interactions. Matias’ game of counting the time of the exercise could have played out such tension, especially when he said that “now only I can color,” thus implying that others could not. Davidson’s joke with Gabriela S. about ‘not

passing' the pencil also seems related to the same issue. These jokes seem to reflect children's uncertainty and tension about having or not the resources.

Maria Luísa helped me interpret children's feelings about access to resources when, in the following example, she answered my question about why Davidson had not started the activity. Children were not allowed to use the few classroom markers. Davidson had managed to take a marker, but Helena promptly took it away from him.

Letícia: Davidson, have you started the activity?

Davidson: Not yet.

Letícia: Why?

Davidson did not answer.

Maria Luísa: Because he thought that there was no pencil for him.

Letícia: How is that Maria, I did not understand it?

Maria Luísa: Because he did it (the *trabalhinho*) with the marker, and he thought that there was no pencil for him, then he got the marker, and then the aunt took it away, and he stayed without anything.

Maria Luísa's interpretation of the marker incident reveals children's uncertainty about having access to resources and helps explain the tension such uncertainty seemed to represent. No pencils were left in the teacher's box when Davidson took the marker, thus Maria Luísa explanation that Davidson took it because he thought that there would not be a pencil for him. Her concept of 'being without anything' describes the common situation of a child without materials. That day Davidson 'stayed without' a pencil for more than ten minutes until he finally 'got' Helena to 'give' him one. Davidson and Gabriela S. also waited for more than fifteen minutes for the pencil for the ripe pineapple.

It is important to note that most children seemed to strongly desire to do the activity. Davidson, Matias, and Gabriela's satisfaction with their work is evident in the vignette above. As I further discuss, several children indicated that they greatly valued the *trabalhinhos*. It is also noteworthy that all children seemed to want the *trabalhinho* resources, including those who either did not 'like' or 'know' how to do the activities. I

described in the section ‘Giving the *trabalhinho*’ how children applauded when they received the materials to start the activity. Therefore, the uncertainty children experience around having access to resources seemed to greatly affect them. Children’s often-frantic attempts to ‘get’ resources are noteworthy. I question to what extent ‘staying without’ might have represented a troubling experience of lack of power for the children. This experience might have been compounded by a lack of autonomy over their doing and by the diminished chances for exploration and creation of the *trabalhinhos*.

Resisting the Resource’s Manager

Teacher’s control of resources was an inherent part of the *trabalhinhos* format, a means to control children to do the highly structured activity the ‘right’ way. However, children did not submit passively. Instead they fought, struggled, and at times challenged the activities. Next I further describe children’s interactions with the activities focusing on how some children challenged the *trabalhinhos* format. I discuss Cláudia’s attempts to color when the activity did not involve coloring. At the beginning of the following excerpt of my observational data, Cláudia sat with Gabriela Santos, Raíssa, and Rejane. Helena handed in papers, and children waited, mostly telling stories.

The four girls seemed fully involved in a story about what they would do during Gabriela’s birthday. As they talked, they tore the edges of the paper Helena had ‘given’ them for the upcoming *trabalhinho*. Cláudia said to Gabriela Santos, “But when your gift arrives I will sleep there (at Gabriela’s house); when your gift arrives I will sleep there again; I will sleep two, no this much [sic] days.” She showed Gabriela her open right hand. She then brought her left hand up and said, “No, I will sleep this (much) there.” Helena came in to the table, held Cláudia’s right hand, and placed it, still open, on the piece of paper in front of her. She started tracing Cláudia’s hand. She showed Cláudia how to open her hand wide and told the children, with her good-natured voice, what they would be doing today: gluing the little tissue paper they had done yesterday inside the trace of their hands. Children called Helena up from the other tables, and she responded as she traced. Lucas de Farias came by, and she asked him to go sit down. Still holding Cláudia’s hand down, Helena turned around to scold children who were

throwing their papers on the floor, “Look, look, (remember) what I said; our classroom does not do this; someone is throwing paper on the floor.” Her voice tone remained pleasant, not angry. Helena kept her crayon and pencil holder (a tin can covered with contact paper) at the table next to her. One red crayon was sitting besides it. Rejane picked it up and started drawing on her paper. Gabriela Santos finished detaching the edges from hers. She turned it over and then caressed it with both hands, sort of flattening the paper out. Raíssa watched her. Helena told Cláudia do be ‘little quiet’ that she had finished the left hand. She lifted her own left hand and asked the children, “This one is the ... hand?” The children responded, “Right, left.” Helena asked them to wait and left quickly to tend to a child in the other table. Cláudia took a crayon from the tin and started to color her hands on the paper. Helena came back and tried to take the crayon saying, “No, it’s not to color; no.” Cláudia, smiling, hurriedly hid the crayon with both hands on her lap. Helena stood behind Cláudia with both arms around her body and tried to take the crayon away from her. She stopped, put her hand out in front of Cláudia and asked for the crayon. Cláudia resisted for another two minutes. Helena kept her voice neutral and just kept asking Cláudia for the crayon saying, “It’s not to color, Cláudia.” Cláudia started to laugh, and this time Helena took the crayon away from her. Cláudia tried to take another one out of the tin. Helena put the tin across the table, out of Cláudia’s reach. Cláudia still tried to get it, and Helena, her long arms stretched over Cláudia’s head, took it and then left with the tin. The girls continued to wait. Cláudia traced the shape of her hands with her fingers. Helena came back from disciplining children at other tables, sat the pencil holder on the middle of the table, bent over Cláudia’s sit, and told her, “I will put (Cláudia’s name) here, oh.” Cláudia recited her whole name, but the teacher said, “I will put only the first name.” Cláudia yelled her whole name. The teacher wrote her first name only and said with her normal tone of voice, “I know, I am not deaf.” She started tracing Maria Beatriz’s hands. Cláudia watched closely, right hand under her chin. Gabriela S. took a crayon from the tin box. She showed it to Cláudia, teasing her, “I have a crayon, la, la, la.” Cláudia promptly responded telling Helena, “Oh, aunt, Gabriela got a crayon.” Gabriela watched Helena seeming to gauge her reaction. Showing the crayon she asked, “Can you make mine with this one?” Helena nodded yes and moved behind Gabriela to trace her hands with the crayon. Cláudia kept interrupting Helena’s work by relentlessly attempting to get a crayon. Helena kept moving the can away from her. Cláudia looked at the teacher pleadingly and asked with a soft, trailing off voice, “Oh, aunt, I want a crayon.” Helena did not answer. Cláudia paused, body erect, left arm on the table, right hand tickling her mouth.

Helena considered Cláudia one of her best ‘students.’ Cláudia seemed to greatly enjoy learning. She constantly requested more elaborated tasks, as when she asked the teacher to copy her full name instead of just the first. She constantly recreated the *trabalhinhos*, making up new exercises and drawing extra pictures. Cláudia challenged

both the waiting and the *trabalhinho* format when she insisted on coloring throughout the activity. Helena told me Cláudia was willful and, at times, stubborn. On one occasion she said that she had to be careful or Cláudia would boss her around. However, she seemed to fail to see that Cláudia's 'rebellion' could represent more than mere stubbornness or refusal to wait. Cláudia's ordeal above could indicate her increasing frustration with the structure of an activity that involved long idle periods and dependency on the teacher. The vignette indicates the demand the routine of waiting might have placed on the active four- and five-year-olds in Heloisa's class. Being quiet, especially without an activity, seemed hard, if not impossible, for the children. Waiting could have been even more problematic in the context of the structured, teacher-directed steps that required the children not only to wait but also to accept the ongoing limitation of their doing. Cláudia's insistence to color indicates that coloring with the crayon seemed to mean a lot to her. Her relentless attempts to 'get the red crayon' can be interpreted as attempts to own her work and exercise her agency, or 'to do' her own way.

Competition and Exclusion during the Trabalhinho

The continuation of Cláudia's 'story' illustrates how resources and their management in the context of the *trabalhinho* rigidly structured format might have added to children's experience of competition and exclusion in Helena's classroom. The tracing hands activity required children to wait even longer than usual. In addition to the typical waiting that preceded the official start of the *trabalhinho*, the children continued to wait until Helena traced the hands of each of the seventeen children in the room. Excluding the transition time, the children waited at least 17 minutes before they actually started the *trabalhinhos*, and they continued to wait during the activity.

Like Cláudia, the other three girls in this episode were all highly verbal, motivated to do the *trabalhinhos*, and experienced pretend-players. They had been at the *creche* the previous year and knew each other well. As usual, they waited creating their own activities, including making up games, talking, and planning pretend play, but Cláudia started a heated campaign to exclude Gabriela. She seemed furious that Gabriela persuaded Helena to trace her hand with the prized crayon she had fought so hard and unsuccessfully for. Hence, Cláudia seemed to transfer her frustration to Gabriela.

After Helena left with the crayon, Cláudia started to systematically exclude and aggravate Gabriela. Gabriela said that the paper was shining, and Cláudia said it was not. She called Gabriela ‘annoying,’ stressing the word and looking angry. She flattered the other two girls, calling them friends and talking to them while ignoring Gabriela and sending her mean-looking glances. Gabriela continued to talk to Cláudia, although she looked startled when Cláudia called her annoying for the second time. Cláudia started a game of imitation with Raíssa, “I do everything you do.” The two played, laughing. Gabriela Santos picked up the remains of the edge papers from the table. Rejane said, “this is mine, give me my paper back.” Gabriela dodged her. Helena, from the next table, said “Ah, that table there is going to loose many points; someone is putting the paper on the head thinking that it is a cap; what is this?” The children looked at her for a minute; Cláudia even smiled, and then continued to play moving the papers’ edge around, only a little quieter. Gabriela told Cláudia, “I am playing with Rejane, isn’t it Rejane?” Cláudia said, “Rejane said (she is) not.” She looked at Rejane and smiled seductively. Rejane smiled back at Cláudia. Cláudia opened her arms, pointing at both Raíssa and Rejane, “These two are my friends.” Gabriela said something like “you can’t see my paper,” hiding it behind her back. Cláudia provoked her singing, “I am seeing your blouse, I am seeing your....” naming what she could see of Gabriela. Rejane sided with Cláudia and joined in the new game. Cláudia returned to the birthday party theme, list what the party would have, only this time she excluded Gabriela. Gabriela tried to add corn flake cereal to Cláudia’s list, but Cláudia snapped, “and will have ice cream; corn flake? Don’t even think.” The teasing went on for a while. Cláudia closed her ears with her hands and told Rejane to do the same. Raíssa was not part of the dispute. She was playing with her paper edges all this time. Gabriela stood up and went to Helena. She started saying, “aunt.” Helena, tracing somebody else’s hands, responded with a mechanical “what.” Gabriela said, the girls do not want to hear me,” and then she returned to the table. Helena still tracing, asked, “What happened Gabriela?” Gabriela, standing up in front of her sit, repeated her words. Helena said to Gabriela, but truly to the whole class, “oh, after (the *trabalhinho*) I will teach you how to make little boats.” Turning more towards the children on the table she was working, she continued, “yes, I will; do you know how to make little paper boats?” Gabriela sat down. The girls were winding the paper edges

like bracelets around their hands. Cláudia picked up the grudge again. She said something about making little boats and ended saying, “I will ask Raíssa and Rejane to make them for me.” The three girls talked animatedly, laughing and discussing a pretend play script for playing house. Gabriela put her face down on the table. She looked defeated. She rested her head on her hands, let her body slip from the chair and knelt on the floor. Raíssa, moving her paper around and then covering her face with it, said, “she is the father (pointing to Rejane), you are the ...” Cláudia, smiling replied, “and then you have to be afraid.” The three of them covered their faces with the papers, making “uh, uh” sounds. Gabriela still kneeling down looked at them. Matias, from the other table, seemed to check out their game. Helena, walking towards the shelf, called children’s attention, “Oh Cláudia and Gabriela.” The children continued as they were. Helena called from her new table, “hey, Lucas, it’s not to draw, no.” Luís Eduardo answered, “I’m not drawing aunt.” Helena came back to the girls’ table. She told Gabriela, “sit right,” and then addressed Cláudia and Gabriela, “is it possible that I will have to separate the two? You are not even able to sit down at the same table; one stays teasing the other; what ugly thing (to do).” Cláudia pointed to Gabriela, “It’s her.” Helena said, “I’m seeing the two.” Cláudia repeated, “It’s her.” Helena insisted, “so, it’s to stop [sic], (you) have to be friends, classmates.” Helena dropped a cup of little paper balls on the table, and started to explain the activity again: gluing the balls over the trace of their hands. She finally brought one glue container.

Cláudia’s ‘story’ suggests the unintended (and significant) consequences of a pedagogy centered around highly-prescriptive activities and the ensuing teacher control of resources and of children: children’s fights and exclusion. Children’s tension and frustration with the limitations inherent to the *trabalhinho* format seemed to lead to children’s conflicts. We follow Cláudia during a particularly demanding *trabalhinho* in terms of waiting time. We observe her growing frustration at being prohibited to color and her consequent exclusion of Gabriela. I raised the possibility that Cláudia’s attempts to color when coloring was not part of the *trabalhinho* could take on a deeper meaning or be interpreted as an attempt at self-expression and control of her work. This way, children’s frustration and conflicts equally takes on a deeper meaning. If we see children’s ‘doing,’ such as coloring, as central actions for children, then we better understand the quality of their frustration with not being allowed to color—a frustration with not being allowed to exert their agency and subjectivity.

The Beginning of the Activity: Stories and the Happy Times

The underlying and often plain tension over resources and the long waits did not preclude happy times. To represent children's multiple and complex experiences, I continue to follow Cláudia and Gabriela. As they started gluing the paper balls, their interactions shifted. Despite having to continue to wait, the start of the activity seemed to enable them to better tolerate the *trabalhinho* constraints and hence, to re-connect.

The example below, the continuation of the previous, further illustrates children's intuitive narrative "approach to all occasions" (Paley, 1990, p.17). Throughout the long activity we see children as storytellers in a Paley's sense. Cláudia, Gabriela and the other girls started happily engaged in a birthday story. As her frustration mounted, Cláudia turned against Gabriela, excluding her 'through' story: Gabriela, no longer friend, was barred from the big birthday. In the end, story represented the door for the two friends' reconciliation.

Helena handed in the glue to Cláudia, who started squeezing it on her hand's outline. The other girls watched her closely. She started to pass the glue on to Gabriela, as she would normally do, but seemed to regret it and handed the glue to Rejane saying, "Rejane has to be next." She then changed her mind again and yanked the glue back, "Oh, I forgot, I have to do both hands." Helena sort of jumped up quickly from her sit at the next table. As she tried to wriggle the glued away from Cláudia's grasping hands, she instructed, "No, put (the glue) in one (hand) and go gluing (the paper balls)[sic], and then pass to the classmate." Cláudia tried to hold on to the glue. The teacher finally wrenched it from her. She explained with a calm voice, "Oh Cláudia, you are not going to be able to glue; you have to understand; otherwise the girls will be late; now you glue, because it's going to dry off." Helena passed the glue to Raíssa. Gabriela gave an exaggerated yawn and brushed her two eyes with her hands. Helena touched Gabriela's head lightly, told her to sit 'little right,' and then left. Gabriela and Rejane continued to wait. Children at two other tables still waited to have their hands traced.

As Cláudia and Raíssa started to work, the climate in the table started to change. The girls resumed the birthday theme, which offered a framework for Cláudia and Gabriela to make-up. Cláudia said she would not come to Gabriela's birthday;

Gabriela replied, “There will have barbecue [sic].” Children often talked about barbecue as the greatest party food. Cláudia said she did not like barbecue. She listed the things she liked and would have at her party, which Gabriela “would not go.” At that point, although their words still suggested a dispute, their softened tone of voice and eye contact indicated they were now pretend playing. They talked about friends and ‘not friends,’ people who would come to the birthday and those who would not. Finally Cláudia opened the door. With a smile she asked Gabriela, “If you want to come, you are going to have to wake up at 7 a.m., O.K?” After that Cláudia and Gabriela, with occasional input from the other two girls, enthusiastically discussed the imaginary birthday. They talked about where they would have to be in order to go, how they would get older, and so on.

Seven minutes after Helena first brought in the glue, Gabriela and Rejane were still waiting for it. The bottle clogged up and Raíssa called Helena for help. Helena freed the glue and finally passed it to Gabriela. Cláudia had almost finished to glue the paper balls on her first hand, and Rejane still waited for her turn. Gabriela and Raíssa shared the glue. All four girls talked animatedly, smiling and happy. Cláudia almost done, sort of yelled to Helena, “Aunt, is it (supposed to be) like this?” Helena did not respond. Ten minutes after Helena first brought in the glue, Rejane started to work, as Cláudia stood up holding her paper in her hands and walked towards the teacher calling “Oh, aunt; oh, aunt, look at mine.” As they continued to work, the girls talked, and shared the glue. When the glue clogged up again, Gabriela asked the teacher for help, and Cláudia offered to help saying, “Let me do it.” She did clear the tube. Rejane asked Cláudia if she would help her when it was her turn, and Cláudia promised to do it.

The starting of the *trabalhinho* seemed to allow a ‘happy wave.’ As children finally engaged in the activity, the tension from waiting and fighting for resources seemed to lift enough for children to shift focus from ‘if’ and ‘what’ they would ‘get’ to the ‘doing’ process. For instance, Cláudia’s mood seemed to change after she ‘got’ the glue. I observed similar relief other times, not only during the *trabalhinho* but also during play, after toy distribution. Although children often had to continue to wait for resources, they seemed more able to manage sharing, as they ‘started’ the *trabalhinho*.

The description of the hand-tracing *trabalhinho* illustrates young children’s narrative thinking, or how narrative seems to be “the way children think” (Paley, 1990, p.17). The three episodes are examples of children making meaning of their social world through story or as storytellers. Narrative, or the story about the birthday party, permeates

children's interactions during the entire *trabalhinho*, reflecting children's tension and providing a venue to overcome the tension. The story ended happily: the four girls became friends again and 'everybody' was allowed into the big party.

The next vignette of a *trabalhinho* 'of coloring' further illustrates how narrative actions, such as gladly sharing stories and pretend-playing, marked children's convivial interactions during the 'happy-waves.' It helps to introduce the relevant concept of playfulness as a learning disposition.¹⁰ I observed Gabriela S., Matias, Daniele, and Luís Eduardo color a cat ditto. Although children had to color within the line, Helena called it a 'free' activity in contrast to content oriented ones involving multiple steps and writing.

Daniele said, "I have a pitch-bull." Paulo Henrique responded from the next table, "I have a pitch-bull, and he has seven teeth." Luís Eduardo added, "At my house there is a dog that is like a monster. Everyday he barks." Matias added, "at my house I have sheep, and ... (I couldn't hear him) the things there [sic] we sell, swimming pool, everything." Daniele asked, "and how much is the pool?" Matias said, "Ten *Reais* (Brazilian currency); I'm kidding; it's one *Real*." Gabriela Santos said, "I have one *Real*." Daniele said, "I have one *Real*." Matias continued, "There (at the house) there are a lot of red pools; only that it's [sic] all sold out." Daniele asked, "You give me the red." Gabriela said, "I want one blue." Matias said, "Only there (at the house) has a lot of pink [sic]." Daniele asked again, "Give me one pink and one red, one yellow and one orange." Matias responded, "No, (I) only sell one for ten and for seven." Gabriela said, patting Matias' hand with a motherly gesture, "I have seven *Reais*." Matias responded, "But the pool is one *Real*." Luís Eduardo, who had been drawing attentively, brought his face very close to Daniele's paper. She laughed and tapped him gently on the head asking, "Stop, stop." Gabriela showed her drawing to the camera and to her classmates, saying, "Look here." She brought the paper next to

¹⁰ Playfulness is a learning disposition of young children integrating the new model for assessing young children's educational experiences in the progressive New Zealand curriculum, the Te Whariki (Carr, 1998). Katz views dispositions in education as "habits of mind, tendencies to respond to situations in certain ways" (1998, p.30).¹⁰ The Project for Assessing Children's Experiences in Early Childhood Settings (PACE) in New Zealand adopted learning dispositions as assessment goals in an effort to produce a 'credit,' not a 'deficit' model. If the goal of the curriculum is for an "action to come to reflect a learning habit or pattern," then the goal of the evaluation is to identify those actions "in order to encourage (them) to become a habit" (Carr, 1998, p. 16). Following the model, researchers and teachers evaluating young children's experiences focused on identifying actions reflecting learning dispositions (such as playfulness) and also their context. As a learning disposition, playfulness is linked to children's trust. Playfulness indicates children's wellbeing, one of the five strands of the Te Whariki discussed in my theoretical framework. Carr described children's wellbeing as when children "trust that this is a safe enough place to be involved, focusing ones attention, and encouraging the *playfulness* that often follows from deep involvement over a period of time" (1998, p. 16).

each child's face. Daniele smiled; Rafael made a funny face and, playfully pretended to spit on the paper. He said with a smile, "It's ugly." Gabriela, smiling back, said as she touched her head and then her hair with a feminine gesture, "Ugly? She is going to have a bow, long hair." Daniele, also pointing to her own hair, added, "Mine, do you know what it will have? It will have two little bows here, a piggy-tail and a 'coq' here. I will show to Aunt Helena. Aunt, look at mine..." She left with the paper. When she came back they started a pretend game of eating the pencils. Gabriela said, "look at the beet; I will eat it; finished." All four children play for a while, making pretend sounds. They changed from eating beets to sandwiches. Gabriela S. grasped Rafael's pencil. He asked her to return it "to color," and she immediately attended his request. Daniele said, "My sandwich finished. Now I will color." Pretending to be a teacher, she pointed each child, saying, "You color green, blue, green, blue, green, blue." They continued to color and play. A while later, someone started to sing, and all the children and Helena joined in.

Positive narrative actions—happy engagement in pretend-play, storytelling, and conversations that had a story-like quality—reflected playfulness. Hence, children were playful when they told and enacted stories. The question of resources seemed an important condition to playfulness. Children at the *creche* and at the *Sabiá* seemed most playful when engaged with the *trabalhinho* and, as I further discuss, with play. Having some basic access to and control over resources and toys, and therefore, to their doing, seemed a condition to children's successful involvement with the activity and each other.

When Children 'Don't Know What to Do:' At a Loss during the Trabalho

Frequently, in frank contrast to the behaviors above, children seemed greatly distressed and antagonistic. One of their most distressful experiences seemed the powerlessness of 'not knowing' in the context of the structured and 'close-handed' *trabalinhos* that required them to 'know' how to do 'right.' Most *trabalinhos*, particularly at the *creche*, required that children work alone and follow strict instructions. Helena, and also Sara, often told me about the difficulties of teaching children with distinct abilities and knowledge. At the *creche*, most girls did the *trabalinhos* 'right.'

Championed by Cláudia, and including Daniele, Gabriela S. and Maria Beatriz, a group I named the ‘in-girls’ excelled at the activities, according to Helena. Davidson was the most successful boy. All others struggled to a higher or lesser degree, especially with writing, copying shapes and lines. For example, Paulo Henrique colored beautifully, but could not paint the up-and-down lines. Matias had trouble finding his name letters. Helena summarized her views about developing different activities for different children: “It’s necessary, but impossible (for me) to do so.”

At the beginning of the year Helena told Matias “not to worry,” that he would “learn with time,” a message she often repeated. As she predicted, Matias and most children indeed seemed to learn the *trabalhinhos* as the year advanced. Washington provides a good example of children’s progress. As Daniele and Marcela pointed out, at first he did not know how to write his name. He did not do most of the exercises, and told me he did not like the *trabalhinhos*. He told me he “only liked to color.” One time he insisted he “did not know the *trabalhinho*,” and Helena responded to me saying, “He knows, but does want to do it.” She added, “He is lazy.” By August, Washington seemed increasing engaged with the activities. One occasion at the end of the year he showed his *trabalhinho* to Helena. She complimented him and turned to me, “Now he is doing everything; the biggest ‘gracinha’ (little cute).” Washington beamed with satisfaction.

The learning process of the *trabalhinho* could be painful. Often children seemed at a loss. As Helena went around the room disciplining and checking on children’s work, she was in constant demand and used up considerable time managing resources and conflicts. Thus, frequently, certain children either did not do the *trabalhinho* or ‘did not do it right,’ a common child’s expression to describe the work of children who failed to follow the instructions. Washington for example, made pineapples with dots instead of

‘V’s. As the following account illustrates, frequently children who ‘did it wrong’ or ‘did not know’ (children’s words) looked lost (and alone) in the teacher-centered classroom that required that children “learn alone,”¹¹ as Cláudia put it, and that imposed further wait for the teacher’s help to those unable to do the activities ‘by themselves.’

Silent, eyes wide open, and a worried expression, Matias alternated looking at his classmates, at the teacher, and at his paper. Maria Luísa asked him, “do you don’t know how to make this one?” He nodded no and kept inspecting the room. Maria Luísa told him, “The aunt said that we can color this one,” pointing to a boy picture. Matias responded with a little, playful voice, “You little liar, we are not going to color.” Davidson said, “I’m finished; I will finish; I will finish; 4, 3, 2, 1; hurray, I’m finished; I finished before you.” He went around the room showing his paper to Helena and several children. Matias followed him with his eyes and seemed to focus on Helena. Several minutes later she came by. She told Davidson to sit down and started to draw the exercise geometric shapes with punctuated lines on Matias’ paper. Matias asked with an urgent tone, “Did he (Davidson) make this wrong?” Turning to Davidson he said, “Did you made a mistake on yours?”

Children, like Matias, who ‘needed help,’ such as Washington, Rejane, Marcela, and Paulo Henrique, looked similarly tense or worried when they did not know what to do. Often, those ‘who did not know’ had to further wait for the teacher, as their classmates started their *trabalhinhos*. The additional wait to the conflict ridden transitions, combined with the knowledge of ‘not knowing,’ might have added to children’s distress. Matias did not call the teacher out and refused his classmate’s help. Although he did so playfully, he called Maria a liar, mistrusting her suggestion to color. In contrast to his almost frozen-like wait, Davidson quickly finished his work. He happily advertised his achievement with a count down. He celebrated his knowing and his ability to finish the work (before Matias), and ran to show the completed *trabalhinho* to the

¹¹ The teacher (and the children) often used the terms ‘do alone’ (*fazer sozinha*) to mean to do the exercises independently or ‘by themselves.’ It is noteworthy that Julia coined the expression ‘learn alone’ (*aprender sozinha*). The term can be interpreted as ‘learn by doing the activities independently.’ At the same time, my observations of children’s activities and children’s interpretations of their experiences indicate additional meanings of ‘learning alone’ for the children.

teacher. Meanwhile, looking alone and distressed, his body rigid and his eyes fixed on the teacher, Matias further waited.

Children's experiences were complex. Sometimes they did not know the activity and remained successfully engaged with the teacher or friends help. Others, like Matias, children seemed lost in a frozen-like state, further waiting for the teacher while aware that other children 'knew' not only what to do, but also that they 'did not know.' One significant constraint of the pedagogy was the chaotic and inconsistent quality of children's opportunities to learn. In the above episode, after Helena explained to Matias what to do, he started working and seemed to re-integrate in the classroom life. Other times children did only part of the *trabalhinhos* and, still others, they never received help.

The next account further illustrates the volatile nature of children's experiences. It focuses on Eduardo's rare attempt to join the *trabalhinhos* of drawing their vacation. According to Helena, Edu had serious emotional and learning problems.¹²

Edu walked to the table where Helena sat and asked her to write his name on the ditto paper. With a gentle voice and her encouraging, warm smile, Helena responded, "that's great Edu; you want to write your name. Look, I will write it for you, but you know how to do it; I know that you know. You write the little letters here below the letters that I will write, you know." Edu walked back to his seat with a delighted smile, and started to write. He quickly finished and showed to the teacher, now sitting at his table. Helena said, "hurray, Edu, when you want you do it, you do it. How 'little cute' Edu! I will go there to show it to Caroline (the pedagogical coordinator)." Edu, beaming, looked again at the teacher, and traced with his hand the name he just wrote. Maria Beatriz sitting by Edu, pointed to his name, smiled, and said, "Look here, look." Helena, with a softly joking

¹² The children also recognized something was amiss. Michele once told me that Edu "does not do anything." Edu did not participate in most activities. Helena, in her words, "did not force," but tried to encourage him instead. She repeatedly asked Edu if wanted to do the *trabalhinho*. On one occasion she asked if he 'had decided' to do the *trabalhinho*. She also tried to engage his help in distributing materials. Mostly, Edu wandered inside and also outside the classroom. Once he played with little wood sticks for most of the morning. Sometimes he played parallel to the children, for instance, reading a book on the floor next to Davidson and Maria Luísa while they played house. Often he went to the office to get books or sat outside during naptime. He seemed more attached to adults than to children. By December he seemed not to be talking. On one occasion several children surrounded me, asking me to type their names on my computer. Edu stood by my side pointing silently to the keyboard. Only after I asked him four times to tell me what he wanted, he used words.

tone, as if to stress her affirmation, told Maria Beatriz, “Were you thinking that Edu could not do it? He did it.” Edu left the table and then went to the other classroom, apparently to show his name to the younger children’s teacher. He came back and, with a big smile and no words, brought the paper up to my face. I read his name, letter by letter, pointing to them. He left the room again, towards the office to show Caroline. He soon returned to his chair and started drawing. At his table, Gabriela Matos held the pencils firmly in her hand. She refused to give him one, and they started a fight, hitting each other. Maria Beatriz and Rejane, joined in and told Edu his drawing was ugly. Gabriela Matos slammed his hand on the table. He gave a long wailing cry and brought his thumb and a finger inside his mouth. He cried steadily for about four minutes. Helena, apparently unaware, continued her round from table to table. Gabriela Matos refused to give Rejane a pencil, and a new fight arose. Rejane attempted to scrawl Gabriela’s drawing, and Gabriela reacted furiously, yelling and hitting. Helena tuned into the fighting, separated the two girls, and, without a word, moved Rejane to another table. Edu stood up, positioned himself close to Helena, head down, still crying. She asked him briefly, her attention somewhere else in the room, what happened, and he pointed to Gabriela, “she hit me.” Helena asked him to sit down and turning, addressed Gabriela with apparent exasperation on her voice, “that’s not possible Gabriela; again?”

Several important elements of life at the *creche* are present in the story above: a child’s interest and pride in his work, the teacher’s well-meaning and enthusiastic response, children’s fight over resources, and the crumbling of a rare positive learning experience. A precious window of opportunity ended in crushed feelings. The sad outcome of Edu’s rare attempt to engage with the activity raises questions about the consequences for children of the volatility of their experiences.

In sum, the teacher-centered model required children to be passive: children had to be quiet to follow strict steps. The teacher was the director and supervisor of the activity, dictating children’s doing, controlling the necessary resources, and making sure children did it ‘right,’ or correctly follow the instructions. The process was marked by children’s waiting and limited access to resources, and in turn, by routine tension and conflicts. At the same time, in the process of doing what they ‘had to do’ children actively transformed the official activities and sustained their own activities. Next I

discuss how, as Cláudia said, children “always played,” seizing opportunities during the *trabalhinhos*.

Children’s Agency: Seizing Opportunities during the *Trabalhinhos*

Children did not submit passively to the pedagogy requirements centered around the teacher. Their enjoyment of the *trabalhinhos* might have resulted in part from greater ownership of their work as they transformed the often-bleak traditional activities. I discuss next how children seized opportunities during the activities, first, extending and transforming the *trabalhinhos*, and second, initiating new, parallel activities.

Transforming the Trabalhinhos

Children transformed the *trabalhinhos* mainly by (a) by re-creating or changing the activities; (b) by adding new activities; and (c) by helping each other with their work. The following account illustrates how children transformed the activity of tracing their names. Sixteen minutes after Helena explained the activity and a couple of minutes after she received the pencil from Helena, Cláudia had filled the entire page with her name.

Cláudia tried to hand in the paper to Helena, who refused to pick it up saying to the class, “Cláudia already finished because she knows, but now she has to wait for the little classmates.” With a milder, lower voice she addressed Cláudia, “(You) have to wait Cláudia, O.K.?” Cláudia nodded yes. She then started to draw on the other side of the page. When finished, she pretended to be flying. She opened her arms wide and said, “Look at the wing.” She then wrote numbers and letters on the table. Lucas Mateus threatened to call Helena, and Cláudia quickly wiped them out with her spit. She started a pretend game of being the teacher saying out loud, “pretend I am the aunt.” A little later she instructed Lucas to do a different activity. She said, “Why don’t you make a critter, any critter that you saw at the Zoo.” Lucas asked her, “Does the aunt let us?” Cláudia responded, “Yes, she does, you only have to make it here,” showing the other side of the paper.

Like Cláudia above children transformed the *trabalhinhos* routinely, particularly those ‘who knew’ and ‘finished early.’ They wrote or drew on the back of their papers, colored when not supposed to, and made up counting games (such as counting the number of letters in their names). Often children were quite creative in their own activities. On occasion Davidson and Maria Luísa re-created the activity of using cut out letters to ‘write’ their names below their name cards. While Lucas Mateus, also sitting at the same table, did not know what to do and played with his paper, Davidson and Maria Luísa finished easily. Davidson mixed up the letters and started again, only this time he ‘wrote’ his name backwards. Maria Luísa decided to compose her name on the vertical (like a world puzzle), instead of horizontally below the name card. Children also ordinarily included words, letters, and other drawings on their ditto papers. Marcela did not only carefully color her picture of the Christmas angel, which she insisted I photograph, but also added stars, a house, and the initials of her name around the page.

Children also transformed the *trabalhinho* by adding new activities to the official one. Children’s disposition and desire to learn was evident in their constant ‘search’ for more and new activities. A favorite activity children voluntarily initiated was to copy words. On one occasion Helena wrote Cláudia’s name on her *trabalhinho* ditto. Helena then said she was going to write the month and the day. Cláudia loudly responded, “but I don’t know aunt.” As she wrote the month and the day down, Helena explained to Cláudia what the numbers meant. Cláudia quickly announced to Gabriela Santos, “I will copy it.” Like Cláudia above, children often voluntarily copied words. On a different occasion I asked Matias why his name was on the blackboard. He answered that they were “doing letters” (making up words with the wooden letters at circle time), and that he asked the aunt to write down his name for him “to copy it.” Still another time, when

Marcela finished coloring, she asked Helena to tell her “what are the words on the blackboard.” Helena slowly spelled the letters of the word December, and Marcela soon started to copy it several times. During a transition, Marcela and Maria Luísa copied words from the morning *trabalhinhos* on the blackboard. When Marcelo, a younger boy with serious learning issues, wandered into Helena’s classroom one morning, she created an activity for him—copying his name and different lines. Paying close attention, Davidson asked, “When I am done, will you do that for me?”

Still another activity that children initiated regularly was helping one another with their *trabalhinhos*, even though most *trabalhinhos* were individual. They frequently brought up the controversial topic of ‘helping’ in our conversations. Children often told me that they ‘had to work alone,’ and the teacher often told the children so. In the next conversation Cláudia introduces the concept that children had to ‘learn alone.’ I asked her if she could (in the sense of being allowed to) help a classmate with the *trabalhinho*.

Cláudia: No, the classmate has to learn alone

Letícia: I see, so what about that time I saw you drawing a man for your friend? Could you do it then?

Cláudia: Can.

Letícia: So, you can make the classmate’s *trabalhinho*.

Cláudia: The classmate has to do it. Those who do not know how to make the name somebody can make it, or the aunt. I know how to make my name.”

Although the teacher told academically competent children such as Cláudia and Davidson to help others, she made the distinction that Cláudia explained above. Children could—as Helena told Cláudia when asking her to help Marcela—“give her a little hand (...), but do not make it for her, only if she forgets.” The next excerpt from my observations illustrates how Helena interrupted children who were working on each other’s paper. She invoked the school model to explain to children how, in Cláudia’s words above, they had to “learn alone.”

Maria Luísa said, “Ah, I made a mistake Davidson.” He responded, “Oh, it’s not like this, let me do it for you, O.K.? Make a little stick like this.” Davidson started to draw vertical lines on Maria Luísa’s paper. Matias, also at the table, looked at them. Helena from the other side of the room asked, “Davidson, whose (*trabalhinho*) is this you are making there?” Davidson responded, “I am doing it for Maria Luísa, she doesn’t know.” Helena came by the table, adjusted the paper in front of Maria Luísa, and started showing her how to draw the lines as she explained, “No, did you think about when it’s [sic] at the school, at the time of the test? How are you going to do it for her then?” Davidson responded, “I am doing mine ‘little right’, am I not?” The teacher just looked at his paper and continued to help Maria Luísa saying, “see, you are doing ‘little right;’ see Davidson?” He spoke, “I did it for her, isn’t it aunt?” The teacher, “Yes, but she is doing ‘little right.’”

Even after Helena’s intervention, Davidson still claimed his help to his friend. Davidson’ and Cláudia’s reluctance above exemplify children’s disobedience of the teacher’s rule of ‘doing alone.’ At the end of the year, I asked Washington, Davidson, and Matias about what happened when somebody did not know how to do the *trabalhinho*.

Davidson: then the classmate helps.

Letícia: let’s pretend the aunt told me to write here and I don’t know.

Washington: it has to be one for each one.

Matias: then ask for help, then comes, and does it for him. (He took my paper and pretended to do the exercise).

Children seemed to struggle with the teacher’s rule that they had to ‘learn alone’ and ‘do alone.’ Conversations like the one above indicate that they seemed to experience a contradiction between wanting to help and be helped and the teacher’s rule. The three boys understood that the format required that each child do his or her own *trabalhinho*, but Davidson and Matias insisted on showing me how they helped their classmates. When I pretended not to know the exercise, Matias promptly enacted doing the *trabalhinho* for me.

The following conversation helps to further explain children’s contradictions about helping. Marcela often ‘helped.’ Her divergent answers below suggest that she

struggled with not being allowed to help, for instance, when Washington forgot how to write his name. I asked her if somebody helped her when she did not know how to finish a *trabalhinho*. She answered, “Nobody helps me, only I.” I then asked her if she ever helped a classmate. She answered, “(I) help. Washington doesn’t know how to make his name. He is traveling.” I asked her what did she do when she sat close to Washington and he did not know how to make his name. Marcela responded, “His name is like this (writing on the air); he doesn’t remember.” I asked if she could help him. She nodded yes. I asked how did she help; what did she tell him, and she said, “I tell him like this: Oh Washington, do your name because the aunt does not let me help you.”

Children apparently understood the teacher’s rule of ‘doing and learning alone’ but often disregarded it in practice. The following example further illustrates how children seemed to enjoy collaborating and how helping seemed to make sense for them. Although Cláudia had previously explained how children had to work alone, she clearly enjoyed Gabriela’s help. Helena’s arguments of breach of individual authorship did not seem to move the two girls happily working together.

The children seemed to enjoy a convivial, happy ‘wave’ as they drew what they did at their vacation. Gabriela and Cláudia shared memories of visiting each other at their houses and talked about their drawings. At one point Matias showed them how he was making his name. Towards the end, Cláudia asked Gabriela to draw something for her. Helena came by and said, “Oh, Cláudia, this work is yours. Oh, Gabriela, let her finish hers.” Cláudia responded, “I asked her to help me.” Helena said, “I know, but if it stays like this, it is not going to be yours, it’s going to be Gabriela’s, and Gabriela already made hers. Look there (pointing to the wall), Gabriela’s is already there.” Cláudia asked earnestly, “let her help me.” Helena replied, “You have to make yours your way.” Cláudia insisted, very earnestly, “Let her do it; [sic] helping me.” Helena said, “Oh Gabriela, let her make hers.” Helena left to attend to someone else. Gabriela continued to color for Cláudia. Cláudia said, “Make it like this, oh Luís, smaller, and color in here red. Yes, inside it’s to color red.” Cláudia called the teacher, “Oh, aunt, give red for us to color. Oh, aunt, give me red!”

In sum, children actively seized opportunities ‘to do new things,’ changing the *trabalhinho* into more personal and hence, meaningful, activities. By helping and being helped they stretched the *trabalhinho* format, resisting to “learn alone” and, in practice, seeking a more collaborative learning process.

Parallel Child-initiated Activities

In the first vignette of the previous section ‘Transforming the *trabalhinhos*,’ besides writing her name down several times, drawing on the back of the page, and helping Lucas, Cláudia also pretended to fly and to be a teacher. Like Cláudia, children often initiated activities parallel to the *trabalhinhos* as they waited and worked on the activities. The point in Cláudia’s actions is that children were active beings. The following vignette further exemplifies how play and stories was children’s realm, and thus, important means for children to transform their world. As they colored, children also played with their new Christmas gifts—mostly plastic dolls for the girls and cars for the boys—donated by a parishioner, who had dressed up as Santa Claus. Besides pretend playing, the children also changed the ditto-coloring activity to include gluing little stars they managed to take from Helena’s supply box.

The children played excitedly with their new toys, as they waited on their seats for Helena to hand in materials for coloring a ditto of a Christmas angel. Washington, Lucas de Farias, Edu, and Paulo Henrique raced their new matchbox cars over their papers. Washington played a plastic flute. They continued to play as the teacher handed in coloring pencils. At the next table, Daniele, Samira (the new girl), Maria Luísa, and Maria Beatriz made a little bed for their four dolls. As they colored they put the dolls to sleep and fed them. Somehow Cláudia’s table had access to little stars and glue and started to add to the coloring activity, gluing stars to their drawings and making the clouds rain. Washington stopped coloring and went to play with his car and flute at a corner. He rode his little car around two Christmas cards and then stood the cards up to make little niches or enclosures for the cars. Soon, Edu, Lucas de Farias, and Paulo Henrique joined him.

Helena might have called the occasion above a ‘freer’ day. However, children routinely initiated activities even during the most structured activities. For example, they pretended to read their papers, to draw or work as they waited for resources. They played with water at the sink, brought table games from the next room, read books, and played running games. Like in the example above, boys often played with cars (pretend or toys, when they sneaked them in) or played ‘little fight.’

Hence, the *trabalhinho* could be one activity among several others. For instance, children actively planned their recess pretend-play during the *trabalhinhos*. The next account of my conversation with Cláudia, Gabriela Santos, Maria Beatriz, and Davidson on the same day of the previous vignette further illustrates children’s pretend-play:

I asked the children about the toys and they told me they were Santa Claus’ gifts. I asked if Santa Claus gave dolls to the boys, and the three girls nodded vehemently. Cláudia responded, “No, but (we) can loan for them [sic] to play here, because he (Davidson) is the father, I’m the mother, and she, Maria Beatriz, is the big daughter, and this one (pointing to one of the dolls) is the little daughter.” Davidson continued to update me on the playing situation adding that “Gabriela is not playing because she threw Cláudia’s toy on the floor.”

As Cláudia, Davidson, and Maria Beatriz negotiated their future pretend roles for the recess, they continued to color their angels, to glue stars, and to play with their new dolls. When I intervened to ask about dolls and boys, Cláudia sort of eschewed my question to assert the main subject of interest—‘who would be whom’ during play at recess.

Reading seemed another favorite child-initiated activity.¹³ To conclude the description of the parallel activities children initiated during the *trabalhinho*, I describe one of several children’s attempts to read in Helena’s classroom.

¹³ I am adopting a broader notion of reading to include young children’s literacy activities such as looking at books and telling stories (Strickland and Morrow, 1989).

Fifty minutes after the beginning of the *trabalhinho*, few children were still working. Matias started to look for a book, trying to climb the shelf to get it. Gabriela Santos offered to get the book out for him, “Oh Matias, do you want me to help you find it there?” She climbed up and reached for a book for Matias and one for her. Marcela tried to get one too, but Helena forbid her saying, “No, only after we clean the room, otherwise... we can’t do a lot of things at the same time. No, we can’t.” Helena, Daniele and Cláudia started to clean up. Matias and Gabriela S. looked for a quite place to read. Five minutes later Helena left the room to put away some materials, and several children managed to get magazines out of the cardboard box on the shelf. Lucas de Farias, Davidson, Edu, Maria Beatriz, and Rafael O. sat around Matias and read with him. Helena returned and continued to clean up. A little later Rejane also took a book from the shelf and started to tell the story aloud. Maria Beatriz laughed heartily and said, “you don’t know how to read.” Davidson and Maria Beatriz started a mother-father pretend play close to the reading children. Rafael O. shifted between reading Edu’s book and playing with the two. Marcela and Maria Beatriz joined Rejane, and they read together for a while. Gabriela Santos, sitting on the floor after the last table close to the corridor was still reading one of her favorite books, “Beauty and the Beast.” Cláudia came over, and they started a fight over the book. Helena intervened and told Gabriela to give the book to Cláudia, “You pass it to her; you had the book for a long time.” Gabriela, who cried and yelled when Cláudia grabbed the book, had started to sob. Helena said, “You don’t need to cry Gabriela.” Gabriela cried even louder and harder, and Cláudia read the story aloud. Helena finished the clean up and, without a word, collected all the books and magazines and put them away on the shelf.

Several children tried to ‘sneak away’ books and engaged in literacy behaviors during the long transitions. Children seemed very interested in books, regularly and consistently seizing opportunities to ‘get’ them.

The examples above illustrate children’s attempts to exert their agency within the restricted pedagogy they encountered. In sum, children’s initiatives to re-create or transform the *trabalhinhos* and to develop their own parallel activities reveal their agency, or how children seemed to be routinely attempting to seize opportunities in Helena’s classroom.

Unintended Consequences of Children's volatile Pedagogical Experiences

The traditional *trabalhinhos* failed to engage children's potential to learn actively and meaningfully, despite Helena's best intentions. On the contrary, the activities seemed to primarily teach children to learn subordination, for instance, to wait and to be obedient to adult's directions. The control of children, or the requirement that they 'be quiet' and 'good,' seemed to be salient aspects of the pedagogy.

Conflicts and distress were significant unintended consequences of the pedagogy. Children's pedagogical experiences during the *trabalhinhos* had an inconsistent, and often chaotic quality. My discussion of Matias and Eduardo's difficulty in completing the highly structured activities highlights the volatility of children's experiences. Longer periods when children successfully engaged with the *trabalhinhos* were more an exception than the rule. The children spent long periods without official activities. They usually waited for teacher's directions and resources, and inevitably conflicts seemed to emerge during these times. Children's increasing frustration with the activities, the long waits, and their uncertainty over resources apparently contributed to competition and exclusion among children.

Claudia's pretending to draw after the teacher refused her the red crayon is one of the most powerful images in this chapter. Children's desire to learn seemed to drive them to constantly seize opportunities within the constraints of the pedagogy. Hence, while the teacher offered limited opportunities for engagement with the activities, the children also actively transformed their pedagogical experiences. It is noteworthy that children engaged in intermittent playing and storytelling, and seemed to experience 'happy waves' or extended periods of playful involvement with the activities.

CHAPTER 4: CHILDREN'S MEANINGS OF LEARNING

While the previous chapter focused on what children 'did,' this chapter focuses on what children said about what they 'did.' First, as a prelude to the discussion children's interpretation of their experiences, I reintroduce the issue of narrative as children's 'mode of knowing' (Carter, 1993). Second I present children's perspectives. I begin by exploring children's reasons for coming to 'school' and their accounts of what they learned. Then I examine their views of the learning process or how they learned,

particularly, how they ‘learned about learning.’ I conclude with the discussion of children’s complex accounts of how they felt about their educational experiences.

As I discuss children’s perspectives I reveal that their meanings were shaped by their particular kind of learning experience and particular kind of relationship with their teachers. For instance, when Gabriela Santos gave a tour of the *creche* to a pretend-newcomer-friend, she explained: “This is our school, you are going to stay here. Here (you) have the classroom where you are going to stay and the other classroom of the little ones. Then (the teachers) ask some words, and they (children) know everything, ‘cause here is the school ‘of study.’ Here is the patio. What is your name?” As I further discuss in this chapter, Gabriela’s account illustrates how, for the most part, children seemed to see the learning process as one of teachers dominating actions and interactions in the classroom. They also seemed to see themselves as passive recipients in this learning process.

Children’s Narrative Thinking

To understand children’s stories and what these stories reveal about their experiences and meanings requires an understanding of the ways children relate with their world (Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence, 2000). As I noted earlier, my study is informed by an interpretive and sociocultural model of narrative (Nicolopolou, 1996). Here the interpretive approach to young children’s narrative holds that children make meanings, construct knowledge of themselves, the social world, and culture as little storytellers (Bruner, 1992). As Paley argues, “(young children) do not pretend to be storytellers, they are storytellers. It is their intuitive approach to all occasions. It is they way they think” (1990, p.17). Narrative is also a symbolic action that “gives shape and significance to

reality, even as it represents it” (Nicolopolou, 1996, p. 201). Finally, narrative has a symbolic dimension. Children’s stories, including pretend play, are vehicles of meaning or, in Nicolopolou’s words, “meaningful texts” (1996, p. 204).

Three examples help illustrate children’s narrative approach to life (Paley, 1990): Marcela’s monster story, Cláudia’s death story, and Margarida’s birth story. When I asked Marcela what she liked best at the *creche*, she responded with a story about her fears during naptime, when teachers turned the lights out: “At the *creche*? At the hour that is going to be dark appears a creature slashing everybody who comes; then, (it) slashes like this, slashes the whole body, but do not remember this, it’s sad.” Cláudia and Margarida’s stories illustrate children’s efforts to integrate life’s greatest events, death and birth, in narrative form:

And then do you know what I did? I went to travel, isn’t it? Another day, it was not this week. I went there to Rio de Janeiro, and then I went to Bahia because of the father of my mother who is my grandfather and whom of my little friends are [sic] the great-grandfather. And then he died, and then now he is there in heaven. He turned into a star; (he) will only be born... It’s going to take a long time, and he must be inside the sun.

It (birth) starts when Jesus makes the Jesus. Is the man already buried? (...) The people... How does make Jesus? It must be that he is already hole in the dirt.

Marcela, Cláudia and Margarida’s stories exemplify children’s meaning-making of their experiences through story. Next I discuss narrative as symbolic action. I examine how children actively and collectively engaged narrative to shape (not only represent) their experiences. I first discuss Matias’ story about his sadness with being suspended from the *creche* and then children’s common narratives about school-suspension.

Making Meaning of Sadness: A Story about a Lost Dog

Matias cried on the floor by the stereo-system on the patio, while Helena's class got ready to rehearse for the important mid-year party, the *Festa Junina*. Earlier that morning Helena had explained to me that Matias was having a hard time coming to school due to his parents' separation. Matias and I had the following conversation.

I asked him if he was going to dance and he said, "No, I am angry." I asked him what happened. Matias answered, "(It's) because my dog disappeared." Helena explained to me, in front of him, "He is crying not so much because of the dog. He is going to stay with his father who brought him to school, and his father had to talk to him because he did not wanted to come to school. Then he saw this dog (at the church yard) that wanders around and now he thinks it is his dog, and then he started crying because the dog would not find the way and get lost." As the teacher talked to me, a large group of children circled Matias, trying to console him. Henrique came to me and said, "The dog is not going to get lost; he knows how to find his street." Gabriela Santos, crouched in front of Matias, repeated: "the dog will come back, of course it will; it will come back." Helena told Matias, "You don't need to cry, your father will come pick you up soon, today the class ends earlier, it's only have lunch, nap, have dinner, and then leave [sic]."

An hour later, Matias called me happily and said, "Aunt, aunt, my dog takes a long time to work with my father; he is going to arrive at my father's hour [sic] (at the same time my father will arrive to pick me up)." Henrique, joined in, "Aunt, when it's time to leave; she (Thaís) will call my name, and I will pet Matias' dog." Matias said, showing me the dog's size with his hand, "He is big, this big." Henrique added, "And it has a little tail." Matias said, "Yeah, (the tail) is this big."

Matias's story highlights how narrative can be what Paley called children's "intuitive approach" to life (1990, p.17). Through story, Matias made meaning of his feelings and experiences. The lost dog can be interpreted as a symbolic representation of his sadness of missing his father at school. The children apparently understood and sympathized with Matias' crying over a lost dog, and thus, acted out and sustained his dog story. Matias and the other children seemed to intuitively share a similar narrative ground, one that was distinct from the adult's. Although the teacher was sympathetic, her version of Matias's experience reflected a different interpretation. The children in the class identified and validated Matias' version rather than the teacher's interpretations.

Matias' story and children's response to it also illustrate the concept of story as symbolic action, both representing and shaping reality (Nicolopolou, 1996). More than representing it, Matias interpreted his experience and constructed new meanings 'through story.' For instance, the brilliant solution to the narrative trouble (Lucariello, 1990)—the lost dog—simultaneously acted as a solution to Matias' problem. He was not longer sad because, after all, the dog had not been really lost but had been with his father, and his father and 'their dog' would pick him up soon. Children's active engagement with the story suggests that the shared realm of narrative acted as a source of comfort not only to Matias but also to the whole group. As the children weaved the story with Matias, telling him that the dog was safe, talking about how big it was, and then celebrating the good news, Matias seemed to relax. His friends also might have felt relief with the positive resolution of the troubling issue of missing a parent. It seems that through narrative and within its shared realm the children collectively worked out difficult feelings, gaining a sense of belonging, of understanding and being understood.

Making Meaning of Castigo: At home sick or suspended from school?

Children seemed to share a common narrative around the emotionally charged issue of *castigo*, particularly suspension. In both centers they referred to the same story line—‘being sick’—to explain why children who had disciplinary problems stayed home.

By the middle of the year, *creche* teachers and coordinators had started to suspend children who made the most *bagunça*. Children expressed great concern over these suspensions. When I returned for the second round of fieldwork, several children told me that the aunts ‘gave *balão*’ (balloon) or ‘gave suspension.’ Matias was suspended for, in Gabriela S.’s words, “laughing at the teacher.” The day he returned to the *creche* I asked him about the ‘balloon.’ First, he told me a sad story about a helium balloon: “Ah, the balloon, went up there, and then later the balloon came down and blew up. The boy went up the roof and then fell down.” After the story he tried to change the subject. I insisted and asked him about “the balloon when Helena told him not to come to the *creche*.” Matias responded, “Ah, because I was crying.” Daniele interjected, “It was because he made *bagunça*.” Matias replied, “I was crying because I wanted to go away. Do you know why I didn’t come? Because I was sick every day; I was vomiting.” I asked, “What happens when you make ‘*bagunça*’ at the *creche*?” Matias said, “The aunt does not let me come.” We talked a little about why did the aunt not let him come, and he finally told me he had made *bagunça*. I asked him to tell me what *bagunça* was, and he responded, “Because is *bagunça* that we make; when we make *bagunça* the aunt does not let us come, and then when you don’t make *bagunça*, we don’t make, and we can come”[sic]. I asked him to remind me again what was *bagunça*. Matias repeated, “It’s a thing we make, and we don’t come; when we get sick, when we get sick we go to the doctor, when you don’t make *bagunça* we come. When we stay home we sleep, we wake

up, we brush our teeth, and we see a little bit of a film, a program.” Later he repeated that he did not come to the *creche* because he was sick and vomiting.

Initially I saw Matias’ helium balloon story as an attempt to evade my question. Then, attempting to read it from children’s perspective, I interpreted it as a narrative response to the suspension. The themes of the ‘blown up balloon’ and ‘fallen boy’ might symbolize Matias’ feelings of fear, uncertainty or loss around being suspended from school. Having told me the story, he then tried to change the subject of our conversation. Because I misread his narrative thinking, I persisted questioning him about being suspended, and Matias responded with basically two stories: He said that he stayed home because: (a) he was crying at the *creche* and wanted to go away; and (b) he was sick.

The story apparently seems to offer a reasonable explanation why he did not come to school: ‘when children stay home, they are sick.’ The image of being sick, which he reaffirmed and further described saying that he was vomiting, seems greatly symbolic of children’s interpretations of the experience of punishment. However, there seems to be more to the story. On one hand, home could represent safety or being away from the pre-school, and, particularly, from the distressful experiences of *bagunça* and *castigo*. On the other, being home sick indicates that these pre-school experiences ‘are like being sick,’ a preoccupying meaning for the children and for educators. It is equally significant that Matias’ story was supported and situated within a shared narrative among the children.

Various children from both centers told similar narratives relating being sick with *castigo*. After Paulo Henrique returned from a weeklong suspension due to a fit of anger when he broke a table, he told me that he “was home with a ‘sore’ head.” On another occasion I asked Daniele to tell me a ‘story about the classroom,’ and she began by telling about Matias. She said, “Matias is here sitting next to us. He is sad because his

belly is aching, and he stayed at the office.” In reality, Matias had been on a time out at the office. On yet another occasion Gabriela Santos spoke about fighting at school, which was a serious *bagunça*. She explained that she did not like fighting “because then you go to the doctor, and everybody stays at the doctor without the mother.” The story image of ‘being without the mother at the doctor’ has an almost fairy-tale-like dimension, which represents symbolically the perils of misbehaving. Matias, Paulo Henrique, Daniele and Gabriela’s story all share the narrative thread between *bagunça*, *castigo*, and being sick or going to the doctor.

The same thread re-occurred at *Sabiá*. When after a series of disciplinary conflicts Renan stopped attending classes for a while, several children told me that he did not come to school because he was hurt or sick. I asked Margarida why Renan was not at school, and she answered, “(It’s) because he hurt his foot.” Roberto, next to us, said laughing, “No, he didn’t come because he is the *Saci Pererê* (a one-legged folklore character).” On another occasion I asked Robson where Renan was, and he told me that Renan “is not coming to school anymore because his father is not letting him come anymore.” I sort of nodded, and he added, “It’s because he felt sick.”

The episodes above reminded me of Paley’s kindergarteners who agreed that “bad boys don’t have birthdays” (1991). Like them, children in the *creche* and the *Sabiá* embraced common story lines, such as ‘being sick.’ The common narrative themes indicate children’s joint efforts to make sense of significant life events such as suspension and *bagunça*. It is noteworthy that in both pre-schools, children’s narratives of being sick seemed to be constructed in the margins of classroom life. I never observed Helena or Sara discussing or acknowledging children’s meanings of being sick when given *castigo*.

What Children Learn: Children's Meanings of 'Studying to Learn'

Despite the differences in pedagogical practices, in both centers the teachers dictated what and how children learned.¹⁴ Helena's teaching reflected a traditional model of early childhood education centered on 'school work' for young children. Children's learning experiences seemed to condition children's meanings of learning. In this section I explore what children said about what and why they learned in the classroom.

Again and again children said that that they attended the centers mainly to study and to learn. I start by examining these reasons children gave for going to the *creches*. I discuss next children's other reasons for attending the pre-schools, including their references to their expectations and future possibilities represented by schooling. I then discuss children's views of what happens when children do not go to the *creches*. Finally, I explore children's meanings of studying and learning.

Why Children Come to School: 'To Study and to Learn'

During one of my initial conversations with Margarida at *Sabiá*, I asked her for a story about the school. She smiled shyly. I prompted her, "Once upon a time..." She picked up on my clue, and using a 'story tone,' complemented, "To study." She bowed her head and changed to a more familiar story, her desire to go the beach, "Once upon a time Margarida went to a beach." Margarida's tentative and first story about her school

¹⁴ As I pointed out, children from both centers seemed to generally see their experiences under the same essential light. One difference worth mentioning is that overall children at the *creche* seemed to talk more about their experiences. For example, they gave longer responses and told more elaborated stories. It is possible that *creche* children developed better verbal skills because they had more years of child-care experience and stayed longer hours at the *creche*. Additionally, pedagogically distinct experiences might have also played a role. For instance, children played more at *Sabiá* while the children at the *creche* spent more time under direct adult intervention. Increased exposure to adults could have resulted in greater familiarity to adults' way of thinking. For instance, although young children most likely do not think about the reasons why do they come to school, the *creche* students might have been more used to this type of adult's questioning.

summarized what most children told me most of the time: they came to the *creche* or school to study. Often children used studying interchangeably with learning. Maria Luísa from the Creche Santa Rita made the connection between studying and learning saying she came to the *creche* “because I have to study to learn.” I list below some of children’s answers to the question of “why do children come to school.”¹⁵

Davidson: To learn to write, to read.

Letícia: What else?

Davidson: To draw. / It’s because, to learn to write and read, get [sic] it? //

Daniele: To learn. //

Gabriela: To study otherwise gets dumb. (...) It’s because, if you don’t (come to the *creche*), doesn’t learn to write, doesn’t learn ...

Daniele: to do not get dumb, donkey’s ear with four legs. //

Washington: To study, to draw.//

Cláudia: For me to learn to read, to study a lot.

Davidson: For me to learn the things.

Maria Beatriz: For us to write, to write the numbers, to play.

Samira: To study, to write.

Maria Luísa: For us to write. (...) to write the numbers. //

Washington: To draw and for (the teacher) to see the (homework) notebook.

Joana: I know, to learn. (...)

Joana: Write the name.

Margarida: We study and play. //

Joana: to study.

Letícia: What else?

Joana: to write. //

Bel: To study. //

Edu: To learn and do homework.

Ruth: To study. //

Emerson: To study. //

Margo: To study. //

Eduardo: Read, write, study. //

Roberto: For me to study. //

Silmara: Because has to learn. //

¹⁵ I used the following conventions throughout the chapter to quote children’s answers. I wrote the child’s name, followed by her response and a ‘//’ sign to indicate the end of the response (see first answer below). When other children made additional comments, I included them right after the first response, marking the end of the group conversation with the ‘//’ sign (see third group of answers below). Interruption in the quotation, noted as (...) often represented a question I made asking for clarification (see third group of answers). When I wanted to include more than one response by the same child, I put a ‘/’ sign to separate them (see first group of answers). Finally, I grouped responses by center. The first group refers to children from Santa Rita, and the second to children from *Sabiá*.

Renan: To study and not get dumb. //

Studying and learning were the main reasons children gave for attending the pre-schools. As summarized by Maria Luísa, children said they came to school to ‘study to learn.’ The 4- and 5-year-olds in the two centers seemed to connect early-care-and-education with formal schooling.

A Comprehensive View of Why Children Go to School

Although children stressed that they came to the *creches* mainly to study and learn, they also gave comprehensive responses to my question of ‘why do children/you come to school.’ Like Matias in the following example, some children responded to my question by listing what they did at the center: For us to do the *trabalhos* (works) first, have breakfast, then play, and then you go and you come... Besides ‘working,’ eating and playing, some children referred to ‘liking’ the *creche* and even ‘to grow.’ Gabriela S. said, “It’s because I love (it), because here we study, do things, eat, play and grow.” Cláudia added, “And eat, you forgot to say to have coffee (as in snack). (Children) come to study, to learn things.” It is significant that some children gave personal reasons, such as their enjoyment, as a main reason for attending the *creche*. Besides Gabriela, who said that she went to the *creche* because she loved it, Washington and Lucas said they came because they “liked it.”

Matias, Gabriela s. and Cláudia’s responses above indicate that together with a general view of coming to the *creches* to study and learn, children connected studying and learning with ‘doing the things’ or the *trabalhinhos*. Thus, not only children came to school to study and learn, but more specifically, to do the educational exercises.

Rejane, at the *creche*, and Robson, at the *Sabiá*, gave additional reasons for going to school. Rejane said, “Because the mommy has to work,” while Robson said, “Because my mother goes to work.” I expected more children would give these responses, particularly at the *creche*. There, teachers and staff often referred to its main role as providing working-mothers a safe place for their children. At my request, Helena posed this question about purpose for attending school. Below is an excerpt of this discussion.

Helena: But is it only for this (study and learn) that your mother put you here, Daniele? Because of this? She put you here because she needed to do what?

Daniele: Work

Helena: Ah!

Gabriela Santos: The mother has to work, has to clean the entire house.

Daniele: (She) cleans her house, makes the food for her house, for her boss’ house.

Helena: And you Luís H.? How did your mother put you here?

Luís: Because she did.

Helena: But is it because she also needs to work?

Luís nodded yes.

Helena: (She) does, doesn’t she? If the *creche* did not exist where would you stay?

Daniele: I would stay there at Fabiana’s school.

Matias: Me too.

Before Helena started questioning children above about their mother’s needs that they stay at the *creche*, children said that they came to school to study and learn. Although children seemed to understand that ‘mothers needed to work,’ and thus, they ‘needed’ to be at school, they did not seem to see their mothers’ work as a primary reason for going to pre-school. In sum, children seemed to have a comprehensive view of why they attended the *creche* and the *Sabiá* that centered on their own interests and needs.

Why Do You Come to School: Children's Future Expectations

Children seemed to relate going to the *creche* with their future adult lives. Before I quoted Gabriela saying that she attended the *creche* “to grow.” The following comments by Cláudia, Gabriela, and Matias further relates schooling, learning, and ‘becoming.’¹⁶

Cláudia: To study, to learn, and (to) when (we) grow up [sic] become good and obedient to the mothers.

Gabriela Santos: For me to learn, for me not to miss/lose anything (opportunities), for me not to forget to do the homework, because otherwise I lose everything and stay without school.

Matias: because we all have to study for us to make money.

Cláudia: Because for we to get more intelligent, for when we grow up, we become everything we want, [sic] be a teacher, a mother, be everything.”

In the first response above Cláudia related going to school (and studying and learning) with growing up to become a good (as in obedient) person. Cláudia also related schooling with adulthood success. She indicated a relationship between being good and successful. Gabriela Santos seemed to equal schooling (and learning) with a great opportunity that, if lost, would have significant impact. While the two girls seemed to think more in terms of being good, enjoying opportunities, and being successful adults, Matias referred to future material success. This difference might be gender-related. Gabriela and Cláudia used strong words, such as gaining or losing ‘everything’ indicating a sort of intensity in their views of the effects of schooling in their future lives.

At *Sabiá*, Cleberson made an interesting connection between ‘work’ at the pre-school and his adult work life. I asked him what he liked best at the *creche* he answered,

¹⁶ I asked Cláudia, Gabriela and Matias ‘why do you come to school.’ Cláudia’s second answer was to the question of ‘why children have homework.’

“To do work, homework. I also like here at school—study, lunch, and work. I like to work. When I grow up I will work there, at that one that is a warehouse.” He pointed at a factory he visited often on his way back from school.

The next excerpt from my observations is a ‘story about the school.’ Later I further address its significant elements, particularly children’s meanings of ‘good’ and ‘pretty.’ Here, the story illustrates the connection that at least some children seemed to make between going to school and ‘becoming:’

This school is very pretty; it is beautiful. This school is where the adults stay to do [sic] on the computer how are the things that the children make. And then, and then [sic], you stay little good that you are going to win a prize after you make the things little pretty. And later, when (you) finish to make [sic] you stay little good that you leave. And then, and play when be little good [sic], who be [sic] stubborn are [sic] not going to play in the afternoon. And then, after you do all this you go home and study. And later when (you) see a worm on the street is only to step on it and kill it. Then after you do, go study little right to grow, have a boyfriend and a baby also, studying and studying a lot. After (this year we) are going to Aunt Manuela’s classroom (3rd period class). Whose house be [sic] very far, it’s only to get a bus.

Cláudia’s story seems to be about studying/schooling as route and key to future success or to a ‘happy ending’: if Cláudia or children study ‘little right’ and a lot they become adults with a ‘boyfriend’ and a baby. Although it is risky to read narratives literally, the story can be read as a tale of ‘conformity’ to the school model: if you are good, you win prizes; if you are not, you stay ‘of *castigo*’ and do not play. Alternatively, the story could also represent Cláudia’s interpretation of adult’s views of what school life ‘should’ be. Cláudia’s story is relevant because, like other children’s responses, it reflects children’s aspirations for the future and how they relate to schooling and learning. Generally, some children related ‘going to the school’ with their ‘process of becoming,’ associating schooling with future success.

What Happens When Children Do Not Come to the Creche/School?

Some children raised the issue that they would ‘get’ or ‘stay’ dumb if they did not go to school. Daniele said, “We have to (come to the *creche*) in order to do not get dumb—donkey ears with four legs.” Similarly, Renan at *Sabiá* said that he went to school “to study and do not get dumb.” I also asked children ‘what would happen if they did not go the *creche*’ and next are some of children’s responses:

Cláudia: Then (child who does not go to school) doesn’t learn anything, gets dumb. /

Daniele: And then the mother asks something, then tells her... /

Cláudia: Then (the mother) tells (the child) ‘(do you) want popcorn?’ and the other person says, ‘what is popcorn, ah? What is popcorn, mother? What is popcorn; is it you?’ /

Daniele: (Child) does not learn to write, does not learn to read.

Cláudia: It’s because Jesus, he is never going to teach, isn’t it? Because only the aunt teaches. //

Davidson: (Child) doesn’t learn to read neither to write. I already learned to read and to write, both.

Gabriela S.: It’s because if (children) don’t (come to the *creche*), (they) do not learn to write, they don’t learn.

Eduardo (*Sabiá*): Gets[sic]dumb.

Children’s answers above echoed their answers to the question of ‘why children come to the *creche*/school. Children said they came to the *creche* to study/learn and if they didn’t come, they did not learn and ‘got’ dumb. In her conversation with Daniele, Cláudia stressed the exclusive role of schooling—not even Jesus can teach, “only the aunt.”

Margarida made an interesting distinction between playing and learning:

Letícia: And what happens to children who do not go to school? Do they play?

Margo: Ah, everybody plays.

Letícia: And the child who doesn’t go to school, does she learn to read?

Margo: No, if doesn’t go to school, doesn’t learn to read.

On one hand, she did not seem to restrict playing to the school. On the other, she seemed to see learning as exclusive to the school. Hence, children indicated that if they did not attend school they would not learn.

Gabriela S. was the only child who referred to greater consequences of ‘not coming to school,’ as illustrated with the following story: “Then (the child) does not know how to draw and gets dumb, and the mother doesn’t have nobody [sic] for him to stay with. And then the robber goes and gets and robs the son, and the mother gets preoccupied.” Once again Gabriela engaged powerful narrative images in her meaning-making efforts. ‘Children’s thieves’ and ‘worried mothers’ both suggest the disastrous consequences of not going to school, in addition to getting dumb. The story also indicates her attempts to understand the scary prospect of what happens when a child does not go to school and does not have ‘anyone to stay with.’ Gabriela’s comments discussed earlier shed further light on her views of pre-schooling. I quoted her reflections about learning and the importance of taking advantage of the opportunities she had at school. She associated “staying without school” with “loosing everything.” I asked her then what happened to children who stayed without school and she answered, “gets poor.” Therefore for Gabriela, ‘not going to school’ and thus ‘not learning’ seemed to have serious and various meanings.

Children’s Meanings of Studying and Learning

Given that children identified to learn and to study as one of the primary purposes for going to school, I now turn to the discussion of their meanings of studying and learning. Here I discuss what children said about (a) what they learn and study, and (b) what they know.

What Do Children Learn and Study at the Creche/School

In sum children told me they ‘studied’ the *trabalhinhos* to learn the ‘things’ they ‘did’ at school. Earlier I noted Matias’ comments that he came to the *creche* “to do the works first,’ and Gabriela’s that she came “because for me to study, for me to do things.” These ‘things’ referred to the *trabalhinhos* and included drawing, writing names, and copying letters and numbers, which could be constructed as the content of children’s learning. Below I included other children’s accounts of what they learn:

Letícia: What do you study here?

Davidson: (The) *trabalhinho*.

Letícia: How are these *trabalhinhos*?

Davidson: (They are) about the name, (they) have [sic] a bunch.

Letícia: Why do you come to school?

Silmara: Because (we) has [sic] to learn. (...) (Learn) to do the things.

Letícia: What about you Bel, why do you think you come to school?

Bel: (I come to school) to do the things. (...) (To do) th drawings.

Ruth: The drawings.

Children’s use of the term ‘things’ to identify what they learned and their references to ‘learning to do the things’ further indicate their views of learning the content of the *trabalhinhos* by ‘doing’ the educational activities.

Children’s meanings of these ‘things’ they learned can be generally divided in (a) a broader view, such as reading, writing, and drawing, and (b) a more specific view of the content they learned, such as numbers and letters. On probing their meanings of ‘things,’ Davidson said, “To learn to read, to write,” and Samira said, “To study, to write.” The specific ‘things’ children learned included writing the name, geometric forms, and numbers. For instance, as Silmara cut and pasted geometric forms, I asked her, “Why children do this?” With an expression indicating the obviousness of the answer, she said pointing at each shape, “Da-ah, to learn ... circle, square, rectangle, triangle.”

Children’s meanings of learning to draw and learning to do the drawings are noteworthy. For the most part, children seemed to see drawing, and also coloring, as a general term equivalent to the *trabalhinhos*. Above I quoted the girls at *Sabiá* saying they

came to school ‘to do the drawings.’ Luís Eduardo told me he came to school to “play and draw.” Washington also said he came “to draw.” Drawing and coloring could have a broader meaning like reading and writing; and a narrower, content-like meaning. The children referred to ‘learning to draw or coloring’ and ‘learning to do the drawings.’ On one occasion Roberto told me he had to “draw the name.” Children talked about learning to ‘color within the lines’ and to draw a certain object such as a house or a person. Finally, drawing also referred to other ‘things,’ such as tracing hands or making shapes.

The next conversations with children from *Sabiá* further illuminate children’s view of ‘things’ they learned. The following excerpts are children’s responses to my question of ‘why do you come to school?’ and my “what do you learn or study?”:

Emerson: To learn the things. (...) Play and write the name.//

Margo: To study.(...) I already know my name. To study to help (to) do the letter of the name.//

Bel: to study. (...) **Bel:** does not answer. /

Roberto: We drew. (...) (We drew) our name, the name of the little rat. /

Letícia: Little rat? What name of little rat?

Roberto: And then his teeth grew and grew, and then cut his teeth.../

Letícia: Ah, the little rat from the story (the teacher read).//

Letícia: to study what?

Emerson: to draw.

Letícia: Ah, what else?

Emerson: To paint. //

Roberto: I learn to play, also name.//

William: To study. (...) (Study) to read and to write the name.//

Margarida: For me to study, for me to learn to write my name without looking on the card.//

Letícia: Emerson, what did you learn today?

Emerson: Nothing, only to write, the numerals, did you see on the board? The two, the one, and the three [sic].//

I pretended two Playmobil dolls were children who went to school.

Letícia: Margarida, this one here goes to school.

Margarida: Because she has the backpack.

Letícia: What does she do at school?

Margarida: (...) (She) reads number, writes...//

Next I include excerpts of circle time conversations when the two teachers, at my request, asked children ‘why they came’ to the two centers.¹⁷ The first is from the *creche*.

Letícia: What have you learned this year at the *creche*?

Daniele and Gabriela M.: Play dough

Boy: Little car.

Matias: Little car; doll for girl.

Helena: You said that children come to the *creche* to learn to read, to write, did you learn something?

Child: I learned to write my name.

Daniele: I learned to write Daniele.

Letícia: What about you Matias, what did you learn?

Matias: To draw.

Marcela: I managed to write my name.

Helena: That’s right Marcela. See guys, Marcela also (learned to write her name).

Letícia: Matias said he learned to draw and Marcela that she learned her name.

Maria Beatriz: I learned to make a house in the drawing [sic].

Letícia: What about you Washington?

Washington: To do a little house also.

Rafael Otávio: (I) learned to draw and to make the name.

It is significant that children included ‘learning play-dough, cars and dolls’ in their responses above and that Helena intervened by making clear references to learning to read and write. As a result, children no longer mentioned play. At *Sabiá*, after children said they came to school to learn, Sara asked them what did they want to learn:

Margarida: To make my name, to study.

Sara: Margarida said that she wants to learn to make her name, to study. Study what Margo?

Margo: Yeah, (I also want to) play.

Sara: What about you Joana, what will you want to learn Joana?

Joana: My name.

Sara: What else do you want to learn? (Addressing the whole circle).

Children: The numbers.

Sara: How are the numbers? How are they, Joana, the numbers that you know?

Children: 3, 4, 5, 6, 7.

Sara: We are going to learn a lot of numbers, aren’t we? What else?

Children: 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 12, 14, 4.

Sara: What else are we going to learn that’s fun? (...) What are we going to do that is fun here in this little classroom? So that our classroom stays very pretty?

¹⁷ Due to noise level, I had problems identifying who spoke at times. Some of the most verbally articulated children, like Cláudia, Gabriela S., and Davidson, did not participate.

Boy: (Draw) house, sky.

Child: Listen to stories.

Sara: Who likes to hear stories?

Children: Me, me, me. (Yelling).

While children gave comprehensive reasons for attending the *creche* and the *Sabiá*, they indicated that studying and learning were the most important reasons for their enrollment in pre-school. When I asked them what they learned, children expressed a largely traditional view of schooling and learning, limited to the school-related content of the *trabalhinhos*. In sum, children said they came to school to learn the ‘things’ (*trabalhinhos*) by ‘doing the things’ (*trabalhinhos*).

What Children Know

Children’s meanings of knowing echoed their traditional meanings of schooling and learning. Hence, children said they knew the ‘things’ they ‘already learned’ by doing the *trabalhinhos*. Most of all they mentioned knowing how to write their names or letters. On one occasion Cláudia mentioned that she ‘knew’ high case letters. Some children debated knowing or not to read. They also referred to knowing to draw, color, cut with scissors, do homework, and water plants. The following excerpts from my conversations with the children about ‘why they come to school’ and ‘what they learn’ include children’s comments about what they knew or already learned:

Cláudia: To study, learn to read, learn to write. I only know how to write my name; I don’t know how to write car, don’t know how to write bus, yet. I know how to throw water on the plants, but now we will have to wait a lot because of our flower [sic], so it can grow very strong and beautiful! Only [sic] is growing first is the dirt.”//

Washington: I know how to write (my) name on the notebook.

Letícia: What letters do you know Washington?

Washington: I know all.

Letícia: What about you Paulo Henrique?

Paulo: I know three (pretended to write on the table)

Letícia: What about ‘W’ of Washington?

Paulo: ‘T’ of *tatu* (armadillo) //

Cláudia: I know how to make my name like this, but now I don’t make it this way. I make it this way (‘writing’ with her fingers on my papers): I pull this little

leg little short. I make it like this now; I make it like this, and then I pull the 'L' like this, make the 'I' like this. Then I make the 'A;' and it's ready. (...) I know how to make your name. //

Marcela: My letter is like this. (Pretending to write the letter 'M' with her finger).//

Marcela: I only learned to make my name and everything that I draw pretty. //

Davidson: Today I am learning the alphabet!//

Margarida: I'm writing my name without looking at the card!//

Roberto: I know how to do everyday homework. //

On the one hand, these statements reveal children's eagerness to learn and their sense of pride in their work. Children often joyfully reported that they 'already' learned or 'knew' specific content. The comments above remind me of Washington and Margarida's radiant smiles when both of them, he at the *creche* and her at *Sabiá*, greeted me with the news that they had learned to write their names during the two months that I was gone. On the other, Cláudia and Marcela's reference to knowing 'only' to write their names seems symbolic of how the narrow and restricted activities they encountered conditioned the construction of children's meanings. In contrast to children's rich narrative thinking, potential and desire to learn, these accounts evoke their 'impoverished' opportunities for learning and knowing.

Children's Meanings of Knowing to Read

Children seemed vividly interested in books and reading, and spontaneously talked about various early literacy experiences, such as reading stories, telling them aloud, drawing, and pretending to write. They also relentlessly attempted to 'get' books. Like Margarida, in the first episode below, children seemed to debate between 'knowing' and 'not knowing to read.'

Letícia: And do you know how to read?

Margo: I do, a little bit.

Letícia: What do you read here?

Roberto: I know how to do everyday homework

Davidson: I already learned to read and write both.
Luís H.: I already know how to make my name.
Davidson: (Pretending to write his name) Davidson Barcelos...
Letícia: Oh, (you learned) all you're names. That is great."
Letícia: What are you learning here?
Selena: To draw, and also to cut with the scissors.
Letícia: Ah, I saw you doing that.
Selena: I already learned to do (it).
Letícia: What about your name?
Selena: I already learned. (I) Only look at the name card.
Letícia: And do you know how to read?
Selena: Yeah.
Letícia: Why do we need to learn to read?
Selena: To read little stories.

Letícia: Cleberson, do you like to read?
Cleberson: yes
Letícia: Do you know how to read?
Cleberson: (I) do know.
Margo: (He) doesn't know ... He doesn't know how to read

In the first example above, I showed Margarida a picture of young children looking at books, and she told me that they were reading. When I probed her, she responded that she could read, and then quickly retracted her claim. Davidson, Cleberson, and Selena too said that they could read.

These excerpts, together with my discussion below, reveal the developmental nature of children's early literacy experiences. In a sense, knowing how to read meant knowing how to hold a book, look at pictures, and tell a story. These were the meanings that children actively constructed for themselves. However, the children's representation of knowing how to read did not readily match the teacher's conception, which, for instance, entailed copying letters. Hence, children seemed to 'negotiate' these two meanings of knowing how to read, as Cláudia explained to me.

On one occasion Cláudia pretended to read from my notes. Noticing me watching her, she asked what I was doing, and I said that I was watching her read. She smiled and said, "Ah, I don't know how to read, I am only making-believe." Then we spent a few

minutes in a game of naming letters. After Cláudia effortlessly named the letters I pointed to, she said, “Let me see if I know how to read here at the bottom. She then tried to spell, “D, E, T, R ...” I sounded the letters out to her, but she said, “You don’t need to say it.” She continued sounding different letters out loud. She stopped and sort of looked at me inquisitively. I said, “When you have three letters like D, O, and S, you say ‘dos,’ putting all the sounds together. These words are difficult because this is a grown-up’s book.” The conversation continued:

Cláudia: But I know (how to read). We don’t know; we read make-believing.

Letícia: How come?

Cláudia: To learn, to learn, to learn.

Letícia: I see. (...) Why do children learn to read?

Cláudia: To know which is the way, which is the stair, which is the town’s name ... I know the name of this *creche*.

When I showed her how to spell out the word *dos*, Cláudia watched me eagerly. When she first said she knew how to read her voice was intense, affirmative, but then she paused and gave me one of her bright trickster smiles. Shifting from the first person to the collective we, she explained that ‘we,’ or young children like her and her friends, did not know how to read but made believe instead. She then made a most important connection, akin to literacy researchers, saying that children ‘pretend’ to read in order to learn to read.

When Cláudia explores the boundaries between ‘knowing’ and ‘not knowing’ to read, she breaks away from narrow constructs of literacy and offers a situated and personal account. Her insights about knowing to read indicate the richness of children, who did not simply mirror but actively interpreted their experiences. Children’s vitality sparkled as they told their stories. The children offered rich insights about these ‘things’ they learn, for instance as they negotiated the meanings of knowing how to read.

In sum, while children seemed eager to talk about learning and revealed a sense of pride in learning, for the most part they expressed narrow views of what they learn. The contrast between the sparkling vitality of children as they told their stories about what they learn and their accounts of learning and knowing as mastering traditional, school-like content is stark. Overall, consistently with the pedagogical practices they encountered, children's narratives about what they learn and know expressed a traditional perspective of schooling. Children's rich narrative thinking and meaning-making seemed hidden in the day-to-day life in the classroom. As Maria Luísa summarized, children expressed that they went to the two *creches* and the *Sabiá* "to study to learn." They said that they learn and know the 'things' they did to learn or the 'things' in the *trabalhinhos* or, in other words, they learn and know specific, school-related content, such as their names, numbers and coloring within the lines. In the next section I further discuss children's meanings of learning by examining their perspectives on the learning process itself. The discussion focuses on what children said about how they 'learned to learn.'

How Children Learn: Children's Meanings of 'Learning to Learn'

On one occasion I saw Davidson going home with a new homework folder. I asked him about the folder, and he offered to show it to me. With great animation he went over his homework notebook, while Maria Luísa, Daniele, Luís O. and Gabriela S. eagerly surrounded us, asking me to see their folders as well. With apparent pride Davidson pointed to a sticker Helena had glued to his last homework.

Davidson: Look at the star; there is a heart too.

Letícia: Wow, it sparkles. Why do you get a star?

Davidson: The aunt gave (it) because I did the *trabalhinho* super little pretty, everything right. I do alone; I read this here; I do everything alone.

Davidson's comments about how he did the *trabalhinhos* 'right,' 'pretty,' and 'alone' introduces children's meanings of the learning process. Next, after discussing

children's views of learning to do the activities 'right and pretty' and 'alone,' I focus on how children evaluated themselves and others to the extent they knew and did not know how to 'do right,' and how they encountered contradictory meanings of how to learn. I then discuss how, in addition to 'doing right,' children also referred to learning a 'right way to learn.' Finally, I explore children's comments about the teacher being in charge of the learning process and their teacher-centered descriptions of learning and studying.

Learning to 'Do Right'

On one occasion I asked Gabriela S. why children do homework, and she responded, "to learn to do little right." (18June16SR). At *Sabiá* Cleberson told me: "I know how to do (the *trabalhinho*) pretty," meaning that he had learned to color inside the lines. Davidson indicated a relationship between pretty and right. He said that the teacher gave him a star because he did "the *trabalhinho* super little pretty, everything right." This reminds me of an excerpt I noted earlier in this chapter when Cláudia said:

And then, and then, you stay 'little good',¹⁸ that you are going to win a prize after you make the things little pretty. (...) Then after you do, go study little right to grow, have a boyfriend and a baby also, studying and studying a lot.

Cláudia included important symbolic references about the *trabalhinhos* in her story. She associated being 'good' or quiet with making a 'little pretty' *trabalhinho*. Her accounts of teacher's reward and of studying 'little right' suggest how learning 'right,' or learning to do 'things right,' composes a narrative of 'goodness' at school. Furthermore, like Davidson, Gabriela S. and Cleberson, she indicated the interchangeability of the concepts of 'little pretty' and 'little right.' Children often evaluated the *trabalhinhos* mainly to the extent that they were 'little right' and 'little pretty;' that is, correct

¹⁸ "Little good" is the literal translation of *bonzinho*, a term used with young children to mean wellbehaved.

according to the teacher's instructions. The two examples below illustrate ways that children talked about their work:

Matias: I will color the boy.

Davidson: I will not; I will color the letters.

Maria Luísa: I will color little pretty."

Davidson: Wow, my black is getting very dark.

Maria Luísa: Wow

Davidson: It's getting pretty, isn't it?

Maria: It didn't go out of the line. Mine also did not go to the outside (of the line).

Davidson: Only the pink.

Maria: Only this pink.

Davidson: How ugly...

Maria: I'm changing the color only to make it little pretty.

Children often described what they were doing and how they planned to work on their *trabalhinho*. Often they evaluated each other's work, like Davidson and Maria Luísa, talking about it being right or wrong and pretty or ugly. Coloring, which the children greatly enjoyed, was 'pretty' when it was 'right' or inside the lines of the ditto drawings.

'Having to Learn Alone'

Davidson indicated that doing the *trabalhinhos* 'alone' was intrinsic to doing them 'little right.' Children emphasized how they did the exercises alone, and also how they 'had to do (them) alone.' An implicit meaning of 'doing alone' seemed to be the concept of 'learning alone.' Cláudia talked about how children had to 'learn to do alone,' and Marcela highlighted the experience when she said, "the classmate is who has to learn alone." The conversation below further illustrates children's views of how they learn. On one occasion when children waited for lunch, I asked them what happened so far that day:

Maria Beatriz: Nothing.

Letícia: Nothing interesting? Davidson, what happened that was good?

Davidson: We colored. We passed over the number two and passed over the number three... We did it alone.

Marcela: Cláudia, we colored, isn't it?

Cláudia: Then we still have to cut out the foot and the hand to glue.

Letícia: Cut out the hand and the foot?

Cláudia: To glue the hand... Glue the hand here on the arm and on the leg also.

Letícia: What about you Matias?

Matias: I did the same thing that Cláudia said.

Letícia: The same thing?

Cláudia: Everybody did the same thing.

Letícia: Is it always like this?

Matias: Yeah.

Cláudia: If do a clown, everybody does; if do an orange, everybody does; if do an apple, everybody does.

Children seemed to be 'learning that learning' involved the whole group doing certain structured activities individually. Here they followed clear directions in order to produce an expected and defined 'right' product. Their comments indicate that they seemed very familiar with the instructions and the general format of the *trabalhinho*. By saying that "we did it alone," Davidson seemed to be both describing the *trabalhinho* format, or the way they did the activity, and announcing that they 'knew' or 'had learned' since they finished the exercise without help. Cláudia's repetitious description that everybody did the same activity is also telling of children's understanding of the format.

Often when children talked about doing 'right/pretty' and 'alone' they brought up the related issue of knowing or not knowing. In the next section I discuss how children's learning about learning 'right' and 'doing alone' led to a certain 'knowledge' of learners 'who knew' and 'did not know.'

Who Knows how to 'Do right' and Who Doesn't

Children knew or 'already learned' when they 'knew to do right and pretty.' The following example further illustrates children's meanings of knowing:

Roberto: I know how to do everyday homework.

Cleber: I don't know. Now I learned to do. I used to do *rabiscado* (scrawled)

Letícia: And now how do you do?

Cleber: I know; I do pretty.

Letícia: How is pretty?

Cleber: It's like this, coloring pretty (pretending to color carefully).

Letícia: How is it to color pretty Roberto?

Roberto: Color pretty [sic]; write the name.

Cleber: Silmara.

Letícia: What about her? Is she nice?

Roberto: She does it all scrawled.

Letícia: Why do you think she does it scrawled?

Roberto: Because she still doesn't know to do.

Children seemed to possess a clear understanding of the objective of the *trabalhinhos* and also of homework: to 'teach' a 'right way' to do the activities. Before he 'knew' how to 'color pretty,' Cleber did his homework all 'scrawled.' Silmara has not learned yet, so she does not know how to color right. Davidson, apparently quite proud with knowing 'to do right,' volunteered to me how his mother taught him: "I do everything little right because my mother teaches me. All the *trabalhinhos* that I will do, she already knows. So then, I go doing everything little right; my mother teaches me." Still on another occasion, I talked with Rejane, Gabriela S., Matias and Cláudia right after they had finished a ditto exercise of tracing numbers. Writing numbers on my notebook with the same punctuated lines of the exercise, I asked them "why do you that thing with punctuated lines, like this?" Rejane answered, and the other three nodded in agreement, "It's for whom [sic] doesn't know."

Cleberson and Roberto's comments and Rejane's explanation indicate that children not only evaluated their own and others' work to the extent that they were right, but also evaluated 'learners' according to the extent they 'knew' and 'did not know' how to 'do right.' Therefore, some children knew how to write their names and some didn't; some knew how to color within the lines and some didn't. In sum, the children in both classrooms seemed to share an ingrained 'knowledge of knowledge,' that is, they knew those who knew or did not know how to do the *trabalhinhos* right and alone.

During the 'ripe pineapple' *trabalhinho*, Raíssa, Gabriela Santos, and Daniele referred to Washington's 'wrong' work. While they were almost finished, Washington was still at the beginning. Instead of making the little 'V' marks for the pineapple skin, he was making little points. Daniele pointed at him and said, "he doesn't know how to do it." Later, as he handed in his incomplete *trabalhinho*, Helena showed it to me and said aloud, for Washington to hear as well as myself, "he knows how to do it, but he's lazy." Washington responded, affirming his not knowing, "No, I don't know, aunt." Helena did not seem to mean lazy as in the negative connotation of English word. She spoke lightly, apparently wanting to stress that he knew how to do the work. The following examples further illustrate how children expressed a view of 'young children's knowing' restricted to the knowledge of doing the *trabalhinho*:

I asked Edu to see his *trabalhinho*, and Daniele answered, "he didn't do anything; he doesn't do anything." On a different occasion Gabriela S. told me that Edu "didn't know anything."

Rejane walked to Helena, tugged at her shirt, and urged her to help Marcela, "Aunt, she doesn't know how to do it."

I talked with Roberto and Robson about what they were doing in the classroom. Roberto volunteered, "Robson doesn't know, does everything wrong, scrawled."

Letícia: Margo, is there someone you don't like at school?

Margo: I don't like Cleberson because he scrawls on his entire paper.

The 'knowledge of knowledge' I have described seemed to serve to categorize children. It sometimes also served to separate, or even alienate those who 'did not know' as indicated by Margarida's comment above or in the following conversations during the *trabalhinhos*. Gabriela Santos told Marcela, "The aunt said that you and I is [sic] the only one who are [sic] *de parabéns* (to be congratulated)." On another occasion Matias said, "Lucas de F.' tree is ugly; my tree is (little) pretty."

Yet, children's 'knowledge of knowledge' did not always result in alienation of those who did not know. I described Cláudia insisting with Helena to let Gabriela draw for her. Even though Margarida said that she did not like Cleberson because he could not color right, when I asked if Cleberson "wasn't learning," she answered, "Yeah, because I am coloring for him." Children often seemed to enjoy teaching and learning from their friends, and those 'who knew' and 'did not know' cooperated with each other. They somehow resisted the lesson of learning 'alone.' They seemed to 'know' or 'have learned' that the *trabalhinho* format required them to work individually, but that did not prevent them from helping each other. On the occasion Washington, Matias, and Davidson gave me a tour of the classroom we discussed 'helping.' I suggest we pretend play that "the aunt gave a *trabalhinho* to write, and Matias did not know." Matias immediately responded adopting a story tone of voice: "And then asks for help, and then comes and does for him." Washington and Davidson moved closer, pretending to 'do' Matias's *trabalhinho*. Davidson, an enthusiast 'helping' advocate, further explained what seemed to be the *creche* children's views. I asked if he had ever helped a classmate.

Davidson: Yes, (I've helped) Lucas de Farias and Lucas Mateus.

Letícia: And are you allowed to help?

Davidson: Can, whom doesn't know (you) can (help).

Letícia: Cláudia told me that you can't because the little classmate has to learn. What do you think?

Davidson: She is right and so am I. Both of us are right.

Letícia: How come?

Davidson: Who doesn't know (you) can (are allowed to help).

Helena asked children like Cláudia and Davidson to help those who had difficulties with the activities. However, she did not want children helping without her asking and definitively did not want the helpers to “do the *trabalhinho* for the little classmate.” Children apparently reached a compromise between ‘having to learn alone’ and ‘helping’ as expressed by Davidson above: help when a child ‘did not know.’

In sum, children seemed to take the lesson of ‘learning to do right’ to heart, but to question the pedagogical requirement that they ‘learn alone.’ Next I further discuss children’s views of how they learned to learn, addressing the contradictory meanings of learning and doing they encountered during the *trabalhinhos*.

Contradictory Meanings: ‘Not Right is Good’ but ‘Follow the Instructions’

While both teachers encouraged children to work at their own pace and in their own way, the activities required a right way of ‘doing’ that resulted in children being caught in contradictory meanings of how to learn. On one occasion, drumming her pencil on the table, Cláudia sort of sang out, “He is getting it wrong, he is getting it wrong, he is getting it wrong.” Lucas, who did not know the *trabalhinho*, looked at her, seeming confused. Maria Luísa asked quickly, “What about me, am I making a mistake?” Helena quickly came over and emphatically addressed the ‘little table,’ “Nobody is getting it wrong; you are not getting it wrong, Maria Luísa.”

Helena and Sara intervened when they heard derogatory comments for ‘not knowing’ or making mistakes. They encouraged children to do the activities and did not seem to stress doing them ‘right.’ For instance, at the beginning of the year, Helena handed out a ditto with fine motor skills’ exercises and said, “It’s only a try, O.K. guys? You don’t need to be upset (if you don’t know), because with time you will learn. I will go to each table because a lot of people don’t know.” Throughout the year she continued to show such flexibility. In the middle of the year, after she instructed the children to draw a house, Matias said, “Aunt, I don’t know how to draw.” She answered, “Just do it; anyway is good; my little house also is not all little right.’ On another occasion Lucas de Farias asked Helena to help him trace his name. Maria Luísa asked him, “Don’t you know how to do it?” Lucas said, “No.” Cláudia showed him saying, “It’s like this oh, put the paper over it.” Helena came by quickly, checked Cláudia’s actions, asked her to help Lucas, and left. She soon returned and took over. Holding Lucas’ hand over the pencil, she encouraged him saying, “(It’s) like this; hold the pencil’s edge. There is no problem if it is not little right. All you do is to follow the letter’s shade.”

On the one hand, the teacher valued children’s efforts and minimized the focus on the right product. On the other, the *trabalhinhos* did not allow flexible interpretations: an exercise was either right (Lucas’ tracing matched the letters) or wrong (the tracing did not match the letters). Despite the teachers’ comments to children “not to worry,” “just do it,” or “nobody is getting it wrong,” either a child could color within the lines or not, ‘know’ or ‘not know.’ Maria Luísa, Davidson, and Edu’s conversation during a writing *trabalhinho* further illustrates the contradictory meanings of ‘right’ and ‘not right’:

Maria Luísa asked Davidson to check her work, “Is it right?” Davidson nodded and said, pointing to Eduardo next to him, “He doesn’t know how to color; he colors like

this (pretending to scrawl).” He started doing the exercise for Edu. Helena came in and said, “Don’t do this, otherwise he doesn’t learn.” She then held Edu’s hand and helped him saying, “Like this, see? I know you can do it.” She addressed the whole table, “Look at this; how little cute. He knows how to do it, Davidson.” Edu answered, “Ah, I don’t (know how to) do.” Davidson said, “It’s ‘little’ easy.”

The *trabalhinhos* format seemed to stand in opposition to Helena’s efforts to encourage a more open view of learning and knowing. Regardless of the teacher’s encouraging words, Edu still insisted that he did not know how to trace his name. As long as he did not draw ‘right’ figures, children continued to think that he could not draw.

Learning to ‘Learn right’ or Learning the Teacher’s Way to Learn

The *trabalhinho* format seemed to greatly impact children’s views of the process of learning or how they learned to learn. As children learned about ‘doing right,’ they also learned to ‘learn right.’ The following examples indicate children’s concern with the *trabalhinhos* rules, evidenced in their constant monitoring of ‘right’ or ‘wrong;’ ‘allowed’ or ‘not allowed.’

Marcela: *Pode* (am I allowed to or can I) put the name, aunt?

Luís Otávio: (It) is to cut here, she (the teacher) *mandou* (ordered) to cut. Marcela: It’s not to glue.

Gabriela: Yes, it is.

Cláudia: Careful with the edge, it might make you make a mistake and draw on the table.

Cláudia to Gabriela Santos: “Do you want this? Later you give it back to me, O.K.? And color without getting out (of the line)”

Matias: (Davidson,) you do not *pode* (can’t), you have to paint only around it (the strawberry).

Matias: Look aunt, Davidson wants to paint everything red.

Lucas Mateus: You do not *pode* (can’t) pain here. Davidson, “I made a mistake”

Helena: Didn’t you wait for the green paint for the little leaves?

Marcela: No.

Helena: “But it’s pretty; guys wait for the green paint.”

Children's 'doing' was marked by a discourse that revealed the nature of learner-teacher relationships. Children were concerned with what the teacher *mandou* (ordered) them to do. *Mandar* (order) implies a clear power relationship: someone *manda* or gives orders or instructions to those who follow them. Therefore, like Marcela, children constantly asked the teacher what they could or were allowed to do. They used the verb *poder* (be allowed) to ask permission or check if they could do certain things, such as write their names. Like Davidson with Matias, children often discussed what they *podiam* (could) do. Like Cláudia, they told each other to be careful, not make mistakes and do 'things' right. They also reproduced the teacher's instructions telling others how to do the *trabalhinhos* 'right.' For instance, Luís O. invoked the teacher's authority to tell the others how Helena *mandou* or told him to cut in a certain way. Finally, the conversation between Marcela and Helena is a good example of how children learned about learning. When Marcela did not wait for the green paint and handed in a strawberry with red leaves, Helena complimented her but quickly instructed the class to follow the directions. The underlying message seemed clear: Marcela's strawberry was not right (and thus, not pretty) because it had not been done the right way or the way the teacher had instructed.

Children's experiences of what the teacher 'allowed' or 'ordered' them to do during the *trabalhinhos* produced a perspective of learning that the right way to learn was the teacher's way. In the next section I further discuss children's views of the teacher being in charge of the learning process.

The Teacher is 'in Charge'

Even though the children at *Sabiá* made fewer comments about ‘doing right’ they seemed to share same views of the learning process as the children at the *creche*. Eduardo and Renan told me that they came to school to study and I asked what did they study. Eduardo replied, “Everything the aunt *manda* (orders) we copy on the paper” while Renan said that, “We copied of [sic] the big clock.”

On one occasion, I asked Cláudia about her day at the *creche*, and she said, “I start at the patio.” I asked what she did next, and she said, “After I go to the classroom.” I asked what did she do there, and she was vague in her response: “I do *qualquer coisa* (whatever).” On another occasion, she pretend played school with the props. She said the children were studying, and I asked what.

Cláudia: Whatever (*qualquer coisa*) the aunt says there at the blackboard.

Letícia: What is the aunt going to say?

Cláudia: (She) will say that is to make a little airplane.

Letícia: What else?

Cláudia: After I will see what the aunt will choose.

Eduardo’s use of the verb *manda* suggests that he saw the teacher ‘in charge’ of, or having full authority over how and what children learned. Cláudia also portrayed the teacher’s role in a similar light—the teacher decides what children study and children study ‘whatever’ she chooses.

In the following conversation with Samira and Luís H., Matias complemented the view of the teacher’s role expressed by Eduardo and Cláudia. Samira told me she came to school to study and to write and Luís H. to play and to draw. I asked what did they learn and Samira said, “to write.”

Matias: We take whatever that is there (motioning to the homework dittos on the shelf).

Letícia: Take where?

Matias: Home.

Letícia: What else do you study?

Matias: We study the things that we *pode* (can or allowed to) do.

Eduardo's response that children 'studied' what the teacher 'ordered' them to do, and Matias' comment that they studied what they 'were allowed' to study, suggests children's lack of ownership and participation in their learning process. Cláudia and Matias' use of the word 'whatever' to refer to what they study further corroborate children's 'learning about learning' as 'doing whatever the teacher told them to do.' Eduardo, Cláudia, and Matias further explained possible children's meanings of 'giving' the *trabalhinho*. The word giving entails that teachers are in-charge or the ones who *mandam*. When children see teachers as 'givers' of the activities, they see themselves mainly as recipients of the teacher's knowledge and followers of teacher's instructions.

The Counterpart of the 'In-charge' Teacher: The 'Good' Student

The next episodes of children's 'pretend-play of teacher' and their descriptions of teaching further illustrate how the 'good' student seemed to be the counterpart of the teacher-who-*manda*. Daniele, Gabriela, and Cláudia gave a tour of the *creche* to a newcomer, a plastic dolphin 'pretend-friend' they named Tatiana. Daniele explained the *trabalhinhos*:

Daniele: The aunt goes and explains it on the board.

Letícia: Wait, Tatiana is not understanding anything. How does the aunt explain on the blackboard?

Daniele: (She) goes explain on the board.

Letícia: How is explain?

Daniele: What (does she) explain, Gabriela Santos?

Gabriela S.: (She) does the ABCD.

Cláudia: That's right, the aunt taught this today in the morning.

The extent to which children's descriptions of their experiences were teacher-centered was striking to me. When explaining the activities, children focused on what the

teacher *did*. I came in the classroom at *Sabiá* and a group of children ran to meet me. Emerson told me, “Today the aunt is doing *Saci* (a folklore character).” When children told me about their activities they would often represent them as the actions of the teacher. Their actions were not present in their accounts. Interestingly, in both centers children referred to the classrooms as the ‘aunt’s class.’

The following two episodes further exemplify the teacher’s commanding role as reflected in children’s pretend-play. Both Cláudia and Margarida enacted the teacher dominating the activities. Cláudia pretend-played ‘studying’ with props, and I asked her to “show me how studying was.” The pretend teacher yelled at the students, “Put the homework away in your folders.” Then, holding a pretend *trabalhinho* ditto and with a milder voice the ‘teacher’ said, “We hold the paper like this; write like this; then we draw; write the little letters that is higher case and lower case.” 20June28SR Margarida pretended played with the Playmobil props. She moved the child prop and said, “She is reading. (Let’s) leave the book close to her to write. The little chair (adjusting the chair)... (I) have to put here at the front (moving the toy teacher)...because she is front of everybody. It’s the teacher giving (the) lesson.”

The following example again illustrates how children’s accounts centered on the teacher. Cláudia pretended to be Gabriela S. and Maria Luísa’s teacher as they took turns playing with wood sewing panels while waiting for the others to finish their *trabalhinhos*.

Gabriela S.: You are letting everything tangled.

Cláudia: I did not know but the aunt taught me, and I learned. I will teach you how to do it. Changing voice to indicate pretend teacher is speaking, “I will spank you with my slipper and you will learn without bleeding. My shoe hurts; does your hurt Gabriela? I will teach you Maria Luísa, and you are going to do it right.”

Maria Luísa's sewing 'mistake' prompted the pretend-teacher's intervention to teach Maria to 'do it right.' Significantly, 'the mistake' prompted the image of the punitive teacher, suggesting that Cláudia interpreted Maria's 'not knowing how to sew' or 'sewing wrong' as disobedience to be punished. In contrast, 'doing right' seems to mean being 'good' or obedient. The next exchange between Cláudia and Helena reveals children's learning of the relationship between 'doing right,' 'doing/being good':

While most children were still working on their papers, Cláudia and her two friends had been finished for a while. They waited until Helena brought them the sewing wooden tablets. She said, "Since Cláudia already knows she is going to give me a great help." Gabriela S. immediately responded, "I also know aunt." Helena soon returned and said that Cláudia was a good seamstress. Cláudia, very proud, told her friend, "Look the aunt called me a good seamstress." Gabriela added, "Me too." Cláudia walked to Helena and asked the teacher, "Aunt, why am I good?" Helena answered, "Because you already did everything little right, starting from the bottom and filling in all the little holes."

Helena spelled out the message inherent to the *trabalhinho* format that 'doing good' is 'doing everything right.' Children's obedience of what teacher *manda* or 'orders' seemed to be a main pedagogical requirement echoed in children's narratives of being right and being good. Hence, the counterpart of the 'in-charge-teacher' seems to be the obedient, instruction-follower learner who does 'things right.'

In sum, here I further developed my analysis of children's narratives of their learning process by examining their views of how they 'learned about learning.' Children indicated that they seemed to 'be learning to learn' how to closely follow the teacher's directions in order to make a 'pretty' or 'right' product. They 'had to do' and also 'learn

to do' alone. Yet, they questioned the lesson of 'having to learn alone' by helping those who 'did not know.' Their views of knowing were consistent with their views of learning: children 'knew' what they 'had already learned' to 'do right, pretty, and alone.'

Children's experiences seemed to greatly impact their understandings of the learning process. Children seemed to be not only learning 'to do right,' but, maybe more importantly, to 'learn right.' Children's 'doing' was marked by a concern with what the teacher 'ordered' them to do and with the 'right way' of doing, or the 'teacher's way.' Children seemed to see the learning process as one of teacher's dominating actions and interactions in the classroom. In turn, they seemed to be constructed views of themselves as passive, and often invisible, recipients in this learning process.

I now turn to the more elusive terrain of children's evaluations of how they experienced learning, i.e. what they felt, what they liked and disliked, and their challenges in learning.

How Children 'Felt' about Learning at the *Creches*

Children seemed eager to learn and to deeply value the 'things they studied to learn.' Their public admiration of their *trabalhinhos* was an important indication of how they felt about their work. As I noted earlier, they constantly showed their papers to each other, the teacher, other staff, and myself. On one occasion Rejane called Cláudia across the room to come see her "beautiful *trabalhinho*." When I returned in November for the last period of observations after a two-month absence, several children literally dragged me around to show me their new work. While they exhibited and wanted others to admire their work, children also physically tried to destroy each other's work. Scrawling, smashing, or ripping a *trabalhinho* represented a very serious (and common) offense in

the classroom. Children's strong reactions to these destructive acts further indicate the value they placed in their work.

In this section I explore children's feelings and evaluations about learning. I discuss their comments about (a) how they liked the pre-schools, (b) how they liked the *trabalhinhos*, (c) the 'difficult' *trabalhinhos*, and (d) 'not standing' the *trabalhinhos*.

Children's Comments about Liking' the Creches or School

Letícia: Davidson, it has been a long time since I came to the *creche*, please tell me what you have done here?

Davidson: I did *trabalhinhos*; I did drawings; I did a drawing of computer like this one here, yours.

Letícia: how do you like the *creche*?

Davidson: I am adoring, adoring (he emphasized the word) it.

Letícia: What do you prefer to stay home or come to the school?

Davidson: To come to the school, of course, to come to the school.

Not all children sounded as enthusiastic as Davidson, but most affirmed and re-affirmed their liking of the *creche* and the *Sabiá*. When I asked directly if they liked the centers, they responded "yes." They confirmed their responses when I changed my question, as I did with Davidson above to whether he preferred to stay home.

When Washington returned from a two-month absence due to his grandfather's illness, I asked how he felt when his mother told him it was time to come back to the *creche*. He responded that he "thought it was good." He also volunteered that he missed the *creche* and preferred 'staying at the *creche*' to being on vacation. Similarly, after the winter vacation at *Sabiá*, I asked Cleberson if he missed the school, and he answered "yes." On the same occasion I asked a group of children whether they preferred vacation or school. Cleberson, Margarida, and Selena said they preferred the school; Ivo and Emerson said they liked both; and Edu and William preferred to be on vacation. At my

request Sara asked during a circle time, “Who likes to come to the *Sabiá*?” The children answered with a happy chorus of “Me, me, me.” Only Margarida did not yell out, and Cleberson motioned ‘no’ with his head. As I further discuss, Cleberson was one of the children who strongly voiced his distress, particularly over fighting, *bagunça*, and *castigo*. Even though, he often told me he liked the school. For example, on one occasion I asked if there was another place where he would prefer to stay instead of the *Sabiá*, and he responded, “No, only here.” Another occasion I asked if he preferred to stay home or at school, and he answered both. He then said that he preferred coming to school to being in vacation. As Cleberson’s responses suggest, children responded differently depending on their experiences, but mostly they said they liked coming to the *creche* and the *Sabiá*. However, some children seemed ambivalent. While Cláudia enjoyed coming to the *creche*, when I asked her what her response might be to her mother’s question of “Clau, it’s time to go the *creche*,” she said, “I wake up and don’t go. (...) Because I don’t want to. I want to play all day long.” At the same time, when I asked her whether, in the event she could stay home, she would prefer to stay home or come to the *creche*, she responded: “To come to the *creche*. One day I traveled, and I missed the *creche* so much, because it took me a long time to come back.”

Children, especially those who had good friends and successfully engaged with the *trabalhinhos*, seemed to generally ‘really like’ going to school. Yet, although children enjoyed the activities, they also seemed ambivalent about going to the *creche* ‘to study.’ Next I further examine children’s ‘feelings’ about learning at the *creche*.

Children’s Comments about Liking’ the Trabalhinhos

Overall children seemed to experience great satisfaction with the *trabalhinhos*. They apparently considered ‘playing and studying,’ or ‘doing the things,’ their main school experiences. Children’s description of their favorite activities systematically included: learning, studying, and writing their names, coloring, drawing, reading and doing the *trabalhinhos*. When I asked, “what do you like best at the *creche*/school?” most children said play but often integrated the *trabalhinhos* in their answers. At the *creche* children offered the following responses:

Davidson: To do the *trabalhinho*. //

Gabriela S.: To play and make pudding.

Letícia: You like to play and make pudding?

Gabriela: Do the *trabalhinhos*, color, do parties, everything we do. (...) //

Lucas: I like to make drawing. //

Marcela: I like to come to the *creche*. (I repeated the question) I like to color, to go to the *creche* that everybody plays during recess of little house, of dolls. //

Rejane: To color. //

Maria Beatriz: To color, to play with... //

Gabriela S.: I like to play; I like to paint (...).

Cláudia: I like to read story; to give the aunt many flowers and also to Jesus’ mother; and I like the most is [sic] to read story, to learn to read... //

Davidson: I like to stay here, to study and play. (...) To do the *trabalhinho* and play. (...) //

Daniele: To play, to play with dolls. I like to play with dolls and to color. //

Samira: I like only to write. //

Luís O.: I like to draw. //

Washington: I like to draw, but sometimes (I) stay delaying. //

Gabriela S.: I like to write, to do the activity, like to eat lunch, to drink water, like to go home, like to be barefooted, like to do everything. //

At the *Sabiá*, they responded as follows:

Margarida: To do my name. To eat. //

Roberto: To draw. //

Cleberson: To do drawings. //

Margarida: Homework, to color. //

Robson: To study. //

William: To study.

Letícia: What do you study?

William: I study with the book. //

Selena: I like to stay at the classroom, to stay at recess and in the classroom, to bring toys (on toy-day). //

Emerson: To draw and play. To watch movie of us I like [sic]. //

Selena: To draw and color, to stay at the school and to play down here. //

Paulo: To stay at the school. //

Paulo: To study. //

Margarida: Drawing. //

Ivo: Paint. //

Edu A.: I like to draw. //

Cleber: I also like here at school: study, lunch and work. //

Silmar: To color. //

Emerson: To write, paint, make little watch (the activity they had finished).

Children's responses to the question 'what is your favorite place?' confirmed children's preference for play but equally suggested how they enjoyed the *trabalhinhos*. Although almost every child said their favorite place at the *creche* was the 'little playground' and the 'recess' at *Sabiá*, children's responses often included the classroom. It was not only Cláudia, Gabriela S. and Emerson, or the children who seemed more competent in the traditional activities, who said they liked the classroom. It was also the children who often struggled with their work, such as Maria Beatriz, Marcela, Edu A. and Roberto. Cláudia was very specific when she said that her favorite place was "in the classroom," and then added, "It's on my table, on my (school) desk." On one occasion Gabriela S. said she liked the "patio where we eat and the classroom" and then named the classroom when I asked which one she liked the best. On another occasion Gabriela S. further explained her preferences, "The classroom and the little playground. Because the patio is for us to play and the classroom is to make the *trabalhinhos*." Marcela's response was "Aunt Helenas's little classroom" while Maria Beatriz said, "I like the classroom and the little playground." At *Sabiá*, Roberto just said, "The classroom" while Emerson responded, "The toys and the meals, and the classroom, and Lily (the teacher), and the little classmates, and Clau (my assistant), and you." Finally Edu A. said, "The trees (*pé de árvores*) and the pool, the classroom, and the homework."

Davidson, an enthusiastic ‘student,’ further suggested that the *trabalhinhos* were significant to children’s constructs of ‘doing’ at the centers. On one occasion I asked Davidson to explain why he said he liked to go to the *creche*:

Davidson: To come here. It’s the thing I like the best.

Letícia: Is it? What do you do here that you like so much?

Davidson: A lot of things. (...) For example, (I like) the *trabalhinhos*.

On another occasion, I asked him how his week was going. He responded:

Davidson: Too good!

Letícia: Too good, isn’t it? What was the best thing you did?

Davidson: The mermaid.

Letícia: Ah, the mermaid. You really like folklore, don’t you?

The centrality of the *trabalhinhos* in children’s constructs of ‘doing’ at the pre-schools was also evident in children’s stories about the school. At *Sabiá*, Margarida described the *trabalhinho* when I asked for a story about what they did at school. Margarida asked me, “That we did today? Can I tell you what we does [sic] today? Is it the *trabalhinho*?” I responded that she could tell me about anything she wanted, and she described her latest work with a storyteller intonation and a big smile: “I did a *trabalhinho* ... the moon, the sky, the sun, the ground, and ... what else? Ah, the rain, only that. I have more drawings...”

To conclude, children’s accounts and responses to my various questions about what they liked the best at the pre-schools seemed to confirm that they greatly enjoyed the *trabalhinhos*. Children’s systematic references to the educational activities suggests how studying and ‘doing’ the pedagogical activities were indeed a central and valued aspect of their lives at the centers. Yet, children’s engagement with the *trabalhinhos* was complex. They seemed to experience marked frustration with the limited format and the regular conflicts that marked the activity. Next I highlight children’s more conflicting perspectives and feelings about their educational experiences.

The Difficult Trabalhinhos

While children said that they enjoyed the *trabalhinhos*, when I asked ‘what they found difficult’ at the pre-schools they responded the *trabalhinhos*. Some children specifically described the more formal activities such as writing their name and copying the alphabet. Below I note the responses from children at the *creche*:

Lucas: (What is) difficult? The task of homework. //

Maria Beatriz: I don’t like the name.

Letícia: Do you think the name is difficult? How come, Maria?

Maria Beatriz: The name is not difficult.

Letícia: What about you Maria Luísa? Is there anything you find difficult?

Maria Luísa: No.

Maria Beatriz: These names here (pointing to homework).

Letícia: Ah, to write.

Maria Luísa: I think it is difficult to do the task. //

Gabriela Santos: Exercise, exercise of name and of color. (...)

Cláudia: *Trabalhinho*. It’s (because) that when we [sic], we don’t use the glue to stay around the things (describing an activity they had to cut and paste tree parts). You know that thing of little branches that you go putting [sic] the rope underneath? I think it is difficult. //

Davidson: The (*trabalhinho*) to build the tree, to cut and put all the branches, all little green, and after put the plants. //

Marcela: I can’t make my name, but I’m learning. //

Washington: Difficult is to make my name. //

Matias: I think it is difficult is to do homework. (...) My name.

Samira: Today our homework was little easy.

Maria Beatriz: Exercise is difficult; homework is little easy. //

The responses above suggest different and related meanings of ‘difficult.’ Generally, children seemed to have found the activities difficult in the sense of arduous or hard. ‘Difficult’ or ‘hard’ might mean challenging or requiring too much effort, for example when Davidson and Cláudia described the cut and paste activity or Marcela talked about learning to write her name. While children found the activities challenging, ‘difficult’ also referred to their frustration. This meaning of ‘difficult’ was particularly

evident when children ‘did not know’ how to complete an activity. For instance, when Maria Beatriz said that she found the homework of copying names difficult.

Sabiá children seemed to find the *trabalhinhos* difficult, listing the same kind of activities as the *creche* children. However, a number of children at *Sabiá* said they did not find anything difficult, which might be a consequence of the school having less traditional activities.

Bel: The exercises.

Ruth: Me too.

Letícia: Which exercises do you find difficult?

Bel: Cutting. //

Emerson: To do (or make???) number.//

Selena: My name. //

Ivo: To do number. //

Edu: To read. //

Cleber: Drawing, to do homework also. //

Emerson: To make the names of the little classmates. //

Edu M.: To write.

Margarida: I don’t think anything is difficult here at the school.

Roberto: Nothing.

Edu A.: Nothing.

Renan: Nothing.

Edu A.: Nothing.

Silmara: Did not answer.

Davidson further elaborated on the meaning of ‘difficult.’ He explained that difficult was ‘not knowing how to do’ the *trabalhinhos*:

Davidson: (Difficult is) some of the things the aunt gives; *trabalhinho* that we don’t know how to do. (...) The alphabet. I had to do the alphabet four times, all the time!

Letícia: Uow, that must have been a lot of work, but did you do it?

Davidson: I did; I succeeded.

Letícia: That’s good.

Davidson: Today I am learning the alphabet.

Davidson’s indignant intonation when emphasizing that he had to do the activity “four times” and “all the time” indicates children’s frustration and stress with having to

do so much for so long, hinting at an additional meaning of difficult I discuss next: the excesses of the *trabalhinhos*.

When Children ‘Could not Stand’ the Trabalhinhos anymore

Most children seemed to share Davidson’s mixed feelings of frustration and joy: they seemed frustrated with the demands of the teacher-directed tasks and simultaneously experienced joy and pride in completing these tasks. In the example below, Gabriela S. further suggested how children could at the same time greatly enjoy the *trabalhinhos* and find them overwhelming. Like Davidson, she sounded authoritative. When she affirmed the activities were “too much,” she spoke with a strong voice and emphatically moved her head from side to side.

Letícia: Are you enjoying the *creche*?

Gabriela S.: I am.

Letícia: What do you like the best at the *creche*?

Gabriela S.: Everything.

Letícia: Is there something you don’t like?

Gabriela S.: No, I like everything, everything, everything [sic].

Letícia: And if you could change something, what would you change?

Gabriela S.: I would change to draw and study because it’s too much.

Letícia: And then what would you want? To draw and study less or more?

Gabriela S.: Less a little bit and then play.

Gabriela brought up a second significant issue—the imbalance between play and ‘work’ in children’s school lives. ‘Too much’ meant not merely excessive, but excessive in relation to children’s desire to play more. Daniele and Davidson raised similar points. On one occasion Davidson answered that “not play” was difficult at the *creche*. On another, in response to the question of ‘what children would do differently at the *creche*,’ Daniele said that she would “get more toys.”

What else was excessive about the *trabalhinhos* for the children? Davidson described having to repeat the long exercises they ‘did not know.’ The expression “all the time” suggests that he found the activities too demanding. In the two conversations

below, Cláudia and Gabriela each further explain the difficult *trabalhinhos*. Cláudia referred to the difficulty of the format, particularly of having to be at a table for so long. Apparently she experienced sitting down as an act that was imposed by the teacher.

Letícia: What do you find difficult here at the *creche*?

Cláudia: I think it is difficult that the aunt make me stay this way on the table. I think it's difficult.

Gabriela described how overwhelmed children could feel with the activities. As in previous conversations, she spoke in a collective voice:

Letícia: What do you find difficult here at the *creche*?

Gabriela S.: Exercise. Exercise of name and of color. And we can't stand to do everything, otherwise our ear hurts, we get irritated, (we) start to yell, and that when a boy yells in my ear I stay with my ear hurting.

I often felt that children came to a point where they 'could not stand it anymore' to contain their active and energetic bodies, to wait, to work on the repetitive activities, and to struggle for materials. The yelling Gabriela described was probably related to the constant conflicts. In the example below Cláudia further explains how conflicts were a significant element in the children's 'not standing' of the *trabalhinhos*.

Letícia: What is the place you don't like or like the least at the *creche*?

Gabriela S.: I don't like without fan, without mother and father.

Cláudia: I don't like to stay in the classroom when it's stinking and is very hot.

Letícia: Why don't you like to stay inside the classroom?

Cláudia: It goes happening that everybody fights. (...).

Daniele also referred to the hot classroom. When I asked her about the place she most disliked, she said, "The classroom and the kitchen. (...) Because the classroom is very stuffy, and also (it) stays with the door closed." Gabriela, Cláudia, and Daniele indicated that children might have felt almost trapped in the noisy, and at times, uncomfortable, hot room.

Ultimately, a group of children from the *creche*, whom interestingly excelled at the activities, voiced strong negative feelings about their experiences of the *trabalhinhos*. Davidson, Gabriela S., Cláudia and Daniele objected to the restrictions imposed by the pedagogy requirement of ‘being quiet to do the *trabalhinhos*’ upon the seeming natural expression of their bodies. They indicated that the activities were ‘too much’ and that they wanted to play more. Gabriela S.’s narrative image of being “without mother and father” in the ‘without-fan-classroom’ captures the extent of children’s distress. It indicates that, at times, children’s experiences of working on teacher-directed activities that required that they ‘be quiet’ inside the classroom and often led to conflicts were more than frustrating or overwhelming. ‘Without mother and father’ suggests that children might have felt without security.

The Paradoxes of Children’s Meanings of Learning

Here, I want to call attention to the paradoxes of children’s meaning-making about learning: (a) children’s great enjoyment of learning, (b) their narrow and passive meanings of learning, and (c) their lucid articulation of the demands the teacher-centered activities seemed to place on them.

Children’s enjoyment of learning stands out in their accounts of their educational experiences, particularly those about ‘why they come to the *creche*.’ Even though children referred to play being their favorite activity, they emphatically indicated how ‘doing the *trabalhinho*’ was a central and valued aspect of their lives at the two centers.

Yet, children’s desire to learn seems to strongly contrast with their narrow meanings of learning. Children expressed a comprehensive view of why they came to school. Such view included playing, eating, and also their enjoyment and future

opportunities. Nevertheless, for the most part the children talked about the *creches* as ‘little schools.’ Their descriptions of the *trabalhinhos* seemed to reveal a view of young children’s education as learning limited content. Maria Luísa summarized children’s meanings of their education when she said that they attended the centers to ‘study to learn.’ Hence, children’s accounts of what they learn and know centered on limited school-based content of the educational activities, such as writing their names, numbers, and coloring within the lines. Children also said they learned to read and write.

In this sense, for the most part, children’s comments echo understandings of young children’s learning as mere preparation for formal schooling, lacking an intrinsic role, and reduced to a miniature parody of traditional schooling. Children indicated that the educational activities ‘given’ by the teacher represented the locus of their learning and knowledge: the *trabalhinhos* were the ‘things’ they did to learn and they learned the ‘things’ in the *trabalhinhos* by doing the activities.

Children’s comments about ‘how they learned’ indicate a marked understanding of learning as a process dominated by the teacher where young learners are obedient students who correctly follow the teachers’ instructions. The routinely used phrase ‘the teacher gives the *trabalhinho*’ takes on further meaning under the light of children’s comments that they ‘study’ or learn what the teacher ‘orders’ and that they ‘have to’ do what she ‘allows’ them to do. Children seem to be coming to see themselves as passive recipients of knowledge that ‘belongs to’ and is ‘donated’ by the teachers.

At the same time, some children strongly expressed feelings of frustration with the demands of the teacher-centered pedagogy. They revealed their increasing distress that often reached a point when, in Gabriela’s terms, they “could not stand doing

everything.” They highlighted the ‘excessive’ *trabalhinhos*, the fights, the yelling, and the containment of their bodies in a sometimes hot and closed room.

Finally, it is noteworthy that children seemed to interpret their experiences at the *creches* in ‘their own way.’ My discussion of children’s narrative thinking highlighted how children seemed to construct rich shared narrative meanings of their pedagogical experiences.

CHAPTER 5: CHILDREN’S PEDAGOGICAL EXPERIENCES OF PLAY, *BAGUNÇA* AND *CASTIGO*

This chapter focuses on different children’s experiences at the *creche*: (a) children’s play inside the classroom, and (b) *bagunça* and *castigo*. Play was children’s favorite activity and the other main activity that children engaged with, besides the *trabalhinhos*. Cláudia once said that children “play all the time,” highlighting that children played not only during the teacher-designated play times, but also during the other official activities. Teachers often considered children’s ‘all-the-time play’ as *bagunça* because this kind of play conflicted with the teacher-directed activities. *Bagunça* was punished with *castigo*, a routine that at times seemed to dominate children’s experiences.

Inside-Play at the *Creche*

My discussion of play, centers on children’s ‘official’ play or play inside the classroom during ‘playtime.’ As the following conversation with Daniele indicates, children’s ‘inside-play’ revealed crucial aspects of children’s pedagogical experiences:

Letícia: When the aunt brought in the play dough, what did you do?

Daniele: We make little parties, soccer, a bunch of little things.

Letícia: And what do you talk about?

Daniele: We say, “let’s play of little party,” then everybody says whose birthday is it, who is the birthday person, if is Maria Luísa, Cláudia.

Letícia: Whose birthday was it today?

Daniele: The birthday today was of doing little party, the aunt took (the play dough) away at the hour we were doing it. The aunt *mandou* (ordered us) to do tic-tac-toe. Today a woman brought us some little gifts for us to take home as Christmas (gifts), but some people is not going to win, few people are not going to win, because the *bagunça* is too much. Davidson is not going to win, Luís Eduardo, maybe.”

In the first part of this conversation, Daniele pointed to children’s active involvement during play. She looked animated and happy as she described the “bunch of little things” she and her friends made. In the second part, she highlighted a different aspect of play when she talked about the teacher interrupting their play dough party and ‘ordering’ them to play something else. She indicated that play, as the *trabalhinhos*, was similarly centered on the teacher who tended to exert much control on play resources and the kinds and duration of play.

In this chapter I explore both how children played and how the teacher acted to control or dictate the form and shape of play. While I continue to provide examples of children’s enjoyment of play, my main focus is on the limitations on children’s play. I start with a discussion of the similarities and differences of play in the two centers and then describe ‘inside-play’ at the *creche*. Then I discuss the impositions on children’s play experiences through exploring: (a) teachers’ control of resources; (b) children’s continued waiting; (c) children’s exclusion of children during play; (d) teachers’ interruption of children’s activities; and (e) children’s tension and conflicts. Thereafter, I shift the focus to children’s harmonic play or to the ‘happy-waves’ of play.

Children at both centers had two official play times, play ‘inside’ the classroom or play outside during recess that the children called “play outside at the little park.”

Outside Play in the Creche and the Sabiá

While teachers and coordinators at both centers talked about the importance of play in young children’s development and education, such understandings seemed more evident at the *Sabiá*. It is important to note that the school moved from the city to the *sítio* or small farm so children had room to play and explore in a natural setting. Although the more experienced teachers and coordinators had left the school by the time I began my study, Sara and other newer staff spoke of the significance of play in young children’s pre-school experiences, a viewpoint represented in the school’s educational goals. Unlike the *Sabiá*, the *creche* had an ‘assistentialist’ tradition that saw its role as ‘keeping’ or ‘guarding’ children while their mothers worked. Children’s development and play seemed much less significant as a goal. Prior to my study, during an exploratory field visit to the *creche* I noticed a calendar of activities, which was prepared by Thaís, the coordinator, posted in Helena’s classroom. For that Monday the calendar read:

08:00 a.m.: arrival
 08:30 a.m.: breakfast
 09:00 a.m.: classroom activities (presence call, time, calendar, day’s helper)
 10:00 a.m.: *trabalhinho* of the day
 11:00 a.m.: bathroom time and preparation for lunch
 11:30 a.m.: lunch and preparation for nap
 12:30 a.m.: nap time
 02:00 p.m.: snack
 02:30 p.m.: cutting and collage
 03:00 p.m.: manipulatives
 03:30 p.m.: bathroom time and dinner preparation
 04:30 p.m.: preparation for dismissal
 04:50 p.m.: dismissal

Out of the 9 hours children spent at the *creche*, the calendar included three hours allocated for educational activities and none for free play either inside or outside the classroom. During the year I observed, however, teachers and coordinators seemed increasingly more aware of ideas of learning and play. Teachers from both centers met regularly with educational agents of the municipality and educational ‘experts’ who promoted play in the curriculum, a dominant perspective in developmental research that originated in the United States and Europe. As the *creche*’s educational practices changed, Thaís no longer developed the calendar. Instead, she hired Caroline, an educational coordinator, who helped the teachers plan their own activities.

Incorporating play into children’s experiences was not accomplished easily at the *creche*. For instance, it took several months to establish outside play as a routine activity. During the first month of the year, children played in the playground as they arrived and waited for breakfast. Soon the coordinators suspended outside play in the mornings, “because of the *bagunça*,” according to Helena. She said that the children “fought too much.” Cláudia and Gabriela Santos indicated that the suspension of play had been a *castigo* because “we made too much *bagunça*.” At the end of May, Carina, a new teacher, proposed recess after naptime because, as she explained, “These children need to play; all they do is eat, eat, eat.”

Otherwise, play routines were pretty established at the *Sabiá*. The curriculum integrated play, particularly outside play, more consistently. Children had recess everyday, and they seemed to assume it was a regular aspect of their pre-school lives. The school grounds were extensive and included three different playground areas, numerous trees, a large bamboo grove, a swimming pool, and two soccer fields. It contrasted sharply with the *creche*’s cemented patio, bare except for a slide, an eight-

person horizontal swing and three planted pots. Children at *Sabiá* ran barefooted on the dirt, ate mangoes and other fruit from the trees and played with water and sand.

The sense of freedom and the kinds of opportunities *Sabiá* children enjoyed during recess might represent the most significant differences in children's experiences at the two centers. However, Cláudia's remark that "we always play" serves as a caution against drawing conclusions about differences in the quality of children's play. Cláudia seems to be claiming a component of play constructed by the children and symbolic of their embrace of play, be it in a developmentally appropriated center at a North-American university or a cemented patio in the Third World. Her affirmation can mean that 'aside from the conditions adults provide, children always play.' Therefore, in spite of the limitations of children's play at the *creche*, outside play was lively and active, and certainly creative. Notwithstanding the cemented patio, children folded sweaters to pretend they were babies and rolled buttons and rocks pretending they were cars. They sneaked toys and materials out. For example, on one occasion, Marcela organized a jumping game with nap-mats that involved about ten children.

A one-foot diameter hole filled with dirt lay in the outside patio at the *creche*. This hole and the dirt became a significant metaphor for children's play. On the one hand the patio was barren and there were restrictions on their play. At the same time, children were inventive, using this hole and the dirt as central components of their play. This adaptation of children reveals the richness of their play and their ability to 'always play.' Despite the rule that 'you can't play with the dirt in the hole,' children often disobeyed it. On one occasion, Washington and Rejane bathed their baby, pretending the hole was a tub and the dirt the water. Cláudia and Gabriela pointed out "and here is the hole," when

giving a tour of the patio. Helena told me that “the children are crazy about this dirt, but they can’t play with it because of the janitor’s complaint that it gets everything dirty.”

Another difference in children’s experiences in the two centers is that the *Sabiá* had a ‘toy-room’ or *brinquedoteca*. *Brinquedotecas* were part of governmental policies to advocate play in its covenant early-childhood centers. The Municipal Department of Education donated a large collection of developmentally appropriate toys, including ‘little house’ toys, cars, tools and music instruments. Children at *Sabiá* played for one hour each week in the *brinquedoteca* during what was called ‘the *brinquedoteca* day.’

Toys were an essential element of children’s play inside and also outside the classroom. Besides the *brinquedoteca*, the *Sabiá* seemed to have more educational toys, such as manipulatives and puzzles, while the *creche* seemed to have a larger collection of mostly donated toys. Every week I would find new bundles of plastic bags with donations on the office floor. These toys seemed in good condition, but they made up a sort of disorganized or mismatched supply, which seemed to frustrate teachers and coordinators. On one occasion Thaís said that her “biggest dream” was to have a *brinquedoteca* at the *creche*. On another, Caroline referred to the limitations of being dependent on donated toys. Helena had asked for puzzles, but Caroline responded that “the ones in the office are all incomplete.” She then added, “This thing of waiting for donations is hopeless.”

In sum, children seemed to encounter different play opportunities and experiences in the two centers. Overall, children at *Sabiá* enjoyed outside play as a more established routine in a much more expansive space.

Inside Play at the Creche

The children played in the classroom in the morning, after they had finished the *trabalhinhos* and often, in the afternoon, before dinner. Most play in the classroom consisted of ‘playing with toys,’ which also included games or play dough. Inside play could be roughly grouped into four categories: playing at the tables; ‘freer playing,’ official pretend play, and teacher-orchestrated games. My objective in this section is to briefly describe these categories.

Playing at the tables was an integral part of the daily routine, and the most prominent kind of inside play. After the *trabalhinhos*, usually children remained at their tables waiting for Helena to choose activities, to ‘give’ them toys, waiting for her to direct their play. Helena handed out play dough, board games such as puzzles, Chinese checkers, and tic tack toe, and manipulatives such as Legos, other building toys, sewing panels, and plastic figures, for example, cowboys and horses.

Another kind of play, ‘freer play’ was the kind of play that happened during the ‘looser or freer days,’ according to Helena and the coordinators. Helena, Thaís, and Caroline seemed to consider ‘freer play’ a non-planned activity and maybe, even a lesser activity compared to the *trabalhinhos*. Such play often occurred on days at the end and beginning of school, around the pre-school parties, vocations, and holidays. For example, on one day at the end of the first semester, Helena said, “I will give them toys, because today Thaís told us not to plan anything because of the party.” On another occasion, when Helena was sick, Caroline explained to the children that they would “just play.”

At the beginning of ‘freer play’ children waited while Helena made several trips to the storage room and to the office and dumped large amounts of toys on the floor. These toys included dolls, cars, board games, manipulatives, and plastic figures. After her

last trip, the children ran to the pile and frantically grabbed toys. Conflicts among the children arouse. Gradually Helena managed the disputes, often giving toys to particular children. The toys that children ‘acquired’ seemed to greatly impact their play. After the initial conflicts subsided, the children settled into small playgroups around the room. During these ‘freer play times,’ Helena busied herself with managing conflicts while she, for instance, corrected homework. On occasion, she supported play by bringing new toys and asking questions such as “what happened to your baby?” and “are you going to go out in your car today?”

The third king of play was pretend-play. Children pretend-played ‘all the time,’ during the *trabalhinho*, transitions, and meals. Most of their ‘official play,’ for example play during recess and ‘freer play,’ was pretend. Interestingly, teachers in both centers did not refer to these experiences as ‘pretend-play.’ Pretend-play for Helena and Sara was official pretend-play, or the special (and rare) times they organized. Pretend play occurred during times and activities that the teachers designated. Children were not seen as active instigators and creators of pretend-play in the classrooms. The *Sabiá* schedule included a weekly ‘pretend-play-day’ when children were supposed to bring dressing props from home and play dressing-up. Few children, often one or two, brought clothes from home, so pretend-day usually turned into regular ‘play-with-toys’ inside the classroom. At the *creche*, Helena gathered dress up props, mostly women’s dresses and accessories from the church bazaar, in a cardboard box and brought it to class in late August. She told the children she had a “big surprise” for them. She included a few non-gender-related props such as a camera and a stethoscope. After the children ‘got’ the toys from the box, she brought in little-cars ‘for the boys.’ As I describe later, she did not bring dolls or furniture so that the children could be in character enacting ‘house-stories.’

Helena intended to integrate official pretend-play in her teaching: “Where I used to work before, we always did this (dressing-up) with the children, and I told Caroline (about it). Now we are going to do it once a week, maybe twice a month, because, also, too much they (the children) get tired of it.” The idea did not seem to surface again though; I did not observe it, if the children subsequently dressed up. Helena’s ‘surprise’ is another example of her teaching disposition and best intentions. At the same time, it indicates her view of children’s pretend-play. When she said that children would get tired of playing pretend, she ignored children’s routine, ‘all the time,’ pretend-play. She also ignored children’s constant pleas for her to ‘give’ them toys to pretend-play. While she could support children’s play and seemed to want to provide play opportunities, for the most part, Helena failed to recognize children’s need to construct and imagine their own forms of play.

Pretend-play seemed mostly gendered, with the girls playing variations of ‘playing house’ and the boys ‘pretend fight,’ cowboys, horses, guns and ‘of little-cars.’ Often girls and boys’ play intersected. Girls playing ‘little-house’ and boys playing running games of monsters and bad guys joined together during recess—mothers hid their babies, while fathers chased the monsters. Davidson and Washington regularly joined ‘little-house’ play as a father, baby, or doctor. Occasionally, other boys participated in the play. Girls also joined in boys’ play. On one occasion, Cláudia, Rejane and Maria Beatriz played ‘little-road,’ a car game originated by the boys. Cláudia became the traffic-guard.

Finally, the fourth category of inside play consisted of whole-class games orchestrated by Helena. Both teachers were adept at playing with the children, often orchestrating games that looked like lots of fun. Helena initiated traditional musical

games such as ‘attention, concentration’ (singing aloud names of fruits and flowers) and sitting games such as ‘cordless phone.’ She also organized and directed what she called ‘movement games,’ such as ‘statue’ and ‘rowing.’ On one occasion, she lined up the children, and they did summersaults on mats on the floor.

Inside play dynamics at *Sabiá* somehow mirrored those found at the *creche*, yet there were also differences. The most significant difference regarding inside play at the two centers seemed to be a consequence of a less formal separation between play and work at the *Sabiá*. The educational activities often included elements of play and exploration, such as the daily drawing record of stories or life-events and regular opportunities for free painting. Sara also played more educational games inside the classroom, such as bingo and hide-and-seek of children’s name cards. She also played more movement and singing games with the children, inside and outside the classroom. In addition, every weekday children had a different one-hour-long activity after recess: Monday, ‘bring-your-own-toy’ day; Tuesday, *brinquedoteca*; Wednesday, library; Thursday, pretend-play; and Friday, swimming. Although children mostly ended up playing inside with toys instead of pretend-playing and swimming, playing with toys at the tables seemed less structured than in the *creche*. For instance, children seemed to play on the floor as often as ‘on the tables.’ The main similarity between inside play in both centers was that the teachers dictated children’s play inside the classroom. Like Helena, for the most part, Sara decided what the children would play and with what toys. However, overall, children seemed to play more and more freely at the *Sabiá*.

In sum, teachers and coordinators at the *creche* and at *Sabiá* seemed aware of ideas about the importance of play or about young children’s “need” to play, as the new teacher who recommended recess explained. However, particularly at the *creche*, the

teacher and the coordinators seemed to struggle with changing pedagogical practices to integrate play as an essential element of children's way of learning. Play, particularly at the *creche*, often ended up being, in Caroline's words noted earlier, "just play," and thus, 'lesser' than the *trabalhinhos*. The difficulty to understand and integrate children's play in the pedagogy was more evident at the *creche*, for instance, in the changing, unstable recess routines. However, it was also evident in the invisibility of children's pretend-play in both classrooms. At the *creche*, the teacher and the coordinators seemed to exert more control on play resources and kinds and time of children's play during inside-play. Below I turn to a discussion of the limitations that seemed to pervade children's play.

Impositions on Children's Play

While Helena consulted children and often attended to their requests, she noted in her weekly planning the games she would play with the children and the games that children would play. She planned play carefully, avoiding repetition of activities, which she thought could be boring for the children. During inside play she decided what game a particular child would play. In the conversation below Helena clearly reveals her sense of control of play. For July 11 she wrote 'play with puppets' on her planning notebook. On that day she asked children if they wanted to play with 'little games,' puppets or play dough. Marcela eagerly replied, "those toys from yesterday," referring to the toys for playing 'little-house.' Helena replied, "Not like yesterday; we already did that; otherwise everyday we have the same thing. I will give the puppets that I have already separated." Marcela kept asking for the 'little-house' toys, until Helena said, "No, imagine if every time I give you toys and you don't want (them)? I will give the puppet toy to everybody." (These instances reveal the many tensions that emerged during play. Tensions that arouse

from, for example, teachers' control of play and conflicts among children. These impositions, among others, I discuss below.

Teacher's Control of Resources

Play inside the classroom, especially 'play at the tables,' the most common kind of inside play, 'felt' very similar to the *trabalhinhos*. For the most part children had to wait and be quiet in their seats while Helena distributed resources of her choice for play activities of her choice. In a way Helena dictated or 'gave play' as she 'gave' the *trabalhinhos*. She seemed to remain in the center of the activities as the children played inside the classroom. She moved around the classroom checking on children, calling their attention, and solving conflicts.

The play format often echoed that of the 'work' format of individual children during the *trabalhinho*. Helena controlled the use of toys during play just as she controlled resources during the *trabalhinho*. Right before 'play-inside-the-classroom,' she left the room to bring out toys and games just as she left the room and brought out dittos and pencils. For the most part, she handed particular toys to individual children sitting at the table. Children did not have direct access to toys, except when they sneaked them out of the storage-room without authorization. Below I provide an illustration of the teacher's domination of play. Helena stood in front of the classroom with the two Lego buckets under her arms, telling the children waiting at the tables to play 'little right':

Helena came back from the storage room with two Lego boxes. She set them in the corner by the sink and went around, 'arranging' the children. She said, "No, this way is impossible, guys; let's stop with this (racket). Guys, you can talk but lower your voices; stop with this Gabriela." Gabriela Matos was imitating Marcela crying, making loud noises. Helena said, "Oh, Gabriela, we cannot do this with a classmate; how ugly." Six minutes after she first came in, Helena picked up the Lego boxes, put one of them under each arm, and stood in front of

the class. She said to the children, “You have to play ‘little right;’ you know how it is; nobody needs to stay under the table or throwing things on the floor; everybody has to share, because you know that nothing here belongs to anybody; it belongs to everybody.” Gabriela S. asked with urgency in her voice, “Give me some; give me some.” Helena responded, “No, Gabriela, I don’t know if I will give to this little table yet.” Helena walked around the room putting a handful of Legos in front of each child. Two tables had toys twelve minutes after she had first came in.

As with Gabriela, Helena often threatened children with the *castigo* of not ‘giving’ them toys, if they made *bagunça*. She dictated and limited children’s access to toys. For instance, she handed each child a handful of Lego pieces or a tiny (in North American standards) ball of play dough, smaller than a ping-pong ball. The following example further illustrates how, in a few but significant instances, she controlled play through how she distributed the play dough colors she ‘gave’ each child:

Helena walked around the room giving out play dough to the children. She handed each child a piece of a new play dough stick. Sticks were about the size and shape of a marker and came in basic colors. Helena approached Rejane with a black play dough piece in her hand.

Rejane: I do not want the black.

Helena: No, everything is play dough, only the color changes.

Rejane: I want the purple.

Helena: But I will give you the black.

Rejane crossed her arms in front of her chest and refused to get the piece Helena held in front of her.

Helena: (You) don’t want it? So I will give it to another (child) and you will be without, O.K.? Washington, keep the black.

Rejane did not raise her head or uncrossed her arms, and Helena moved on.

Later Helena explained to me that Rejane was a strong-willed child and that she could not “let her do everything she wanted.” This encounter reminds me of comments I heard Helena making in reference to children’s attempts to ‘get’ books: “You can’t do what you want,” or “you have to do one thing at a time.” Limited resources certainly affected the amount of toys or materials available to the children. The issue of play dough color, however, just like the times when the teacher gave children a few coloring pencils,

seemed more an issue of the teacher's control of children's actions than of resources. Earlier I noted Helena's question to Marcela: "Did you think about (what would happen if) every time I will give you (a toy, a game) and you do not want it?" Helena's question illuminates a tension between maintaining order and fostering play in children's lives. For the most part, Helena seemed to privilege her goal of maintaining order during the activities rather than children's exploration during play.

Waiting during Inside Play

Children's restricted access to available resources led to them waiting for long periods of time. Children waited for the food during meals, they waited for pencils during *trabalhinhos*, and they waited for toys during inside-play. On one occasion Helena brought one book to the entire circle and asked the children to read it and pass it around. During another circle time, she invited one child at a time to join her and play with a geometric-shape game in the middle of the circle while the whole class watched and waited a turn. Although these previous examples may seem extreme cases of maintaining order, they were the norm. Such activities required children to wait a long time for their opportunity to play.

Children's wait for resources was a common occurrence of each day. The following excerpt illustrates this point. I observed children's interactions after Helena brought a one-person game to a table of three children:

After the morning snack and a number activity, the children prepared to play inside the classroom. Cláudia, Maria Beatriz and Daniele sat together. Their eyes eagerly followed Helena as she moved around the room handing in toys. Every now and then one of them they would yell, "Here, here, aunt, give it to us." They waited for about six minutes until Helena brought a wooden toy to their table. The toy was a twelve by one-inch strip of wood with two small wood cups at each end and a little ball tied to its middle by a six-inch string. The game consisted of catapulting the ball from one cup to the other. Putting the toy down at the table

the teacher directed the children's play, "Here Cláudia, you first, then Daniele and then Maria Beatriz." Cláudia played for about five minutes, while the others grew increasingly frustrated.

Daniele asked Cláudia for the toy and repeated, "Cláudia, Cláudia, Cláudia." She tried to grab the toy, but Cláudia dodged her saying, "I will play until I win." After a couple more minutes Maria Beatriz said, "Now me, Cláudia." Cláudia responded, "No, I will give to Michelle." Daniele said, "Now me," as she attempted but failed to take the toy from Cláudia. Cláudia said, "No, I'm the one who will give it." Daniele responded, "The aunt said to give to me Cláudia." Cláudia responded, "I will give to you, I will say 'go.'" Daniele, now laughing, said, "Go, go, go, go." Cláudia continued to play, closely watched by the other two children. Cláudia announced, "I will not give (the toy) to Maria Beatriz; when I give (it) to you (Daniele), you do not give to her." Daniele swiftly took the toy away. Cláudia said, "I have to say 'go;' I am *de mal*," as though I broke up with you or I am not your friend now. Cláudia looked around, apparently checking to see if teacher was paying attention, and forcibly snatched the toy back. Daniele yelled, "Aunt, aunt, aunt," but Helena had stepped out of the room. Cláudia said, "Stop, later I give (it) to you."

Although Cláudia played, trying without success to catapult the ball into the cup, a great part of her energy seemed to be directed at securing her chance to play despite the growing impatience of the other children. When she told Daniele to not give the toy to Maria Beatriz, she tried to establish an alliance with Daniele to eliminate Maria Beatriz from the competition for the toy. After Daniele grabbed the toy, she tried the same divisive tactics again, only this time she turned to Maria Beatriz against Daniele.

Cláudia said, "Maria, when I win, I (will) give (the toy) to you; I will not give (it) to her (Daniele)." She finally gave up and handed the toy to Maria Beatriz saying, "Take for you; you are my friend." Daniele hastily stood up, threatening to call the teacher, Maria Beatriz handed her the toy saying, "Take (it), take, take; you can play; you are my friend, aren't you?" Maria's alliance with Daniele upset Cláudia who said, "I will *ficar de mal* (break up) with you, Maria." Maria reaffirmed her friendship to Cláudia saying, "I'm your friend too."

Daniele played repeating the previous scenario: she played non-stop while Maria Beatriz and Cláudia pleaded insistently for a turn. Cláudia reintroduced the friendship issue, saying, "If you are my friend, you give me (the toy)." Daniele ignored her. Cláudia then tried cooperation, saying, "You are my friend; let me help you." Daniele accepted to

share the toy with Cláudia and then handed her the toy. Maria Beatriz reacted angrily and threatened, “I will tell the aunt that you do not want to give to me.” Daniele and Cláudia told her to wait.

Cláudia and Daniele played together, Daniele said, “I will help you, you helped me.” Maria Beatriz seemed to get angrier. She tried to grab the toy when Cláudia handed it to Daniele. Daniele hid it behind her back. Maria Beatriz said, “I will not be your friend.” Daniele gave her the toy. Cláudia yelled, “no, don’t give to her.” Daniele stole the toy back. Maria Beatriz literally ran to the teacher yelling, and Daniele ran after her and handed her the toy. Cláudia told Maria Beatriz “I will not be your friend.” Daniele and Cláudia started to whisper looking at Maria Beatriz. Daniele said, “Fat.” Maria Beatriz again literally ran to Helena, “Oh aunt, they called me fat.” Helena came to the table, “What is this, calling the little colleague fat?” Cláudia said, “Aunt, it was not me; it was Daniele.” Daniele said to Maria, “Sorry, O.K.?”

Maria Beatriz finally started playing as the other two watched. Luís Eduardo came over to the table and started playing with Maria Beatriz. Cláudia screamed, “Don’t let him play.” Maria Beatriz and Luís ignored her. Luís’s hand was down on the table next to Cláudia, who then made a fist and punched Luís’s hand really hard. Luís, who at this point is new at school (later he would hit the children really hard), lifted his hand threateningly towards Cláudia, but started to cry loudly. Cláudia said, “Sorry, sorry.” Daniele spoke softly to Luís, comforting him. He left.

Having one toy among three children clearly provoked tension and conflict. Maria Beatriz’s threats to call Helena became more serious until she finally ‘got’ the toy, which seemed to result in growing resentment on Daniele and Cláudia’s part. When Luís Eduardo attempted to join the game, Cláudia reacted almost violently. The episode lasted about 15 minutes. At 10:36 Helena ‘gave’ the toy; at 10:51 she took it away. She simply removed the toy from Maria Beatriz’s hands and asked Cláudia if she would like to play memory.

Although the three girls seemed to grow increasingly frustrated with the waiting for a chance to play, they apparently managed, to a certain extent, to work out a system. However, play became punctuated by the negotiations to gain and keep access to the single toy. As a result, play seemed marked by anxiety. Waiting so long to play seemed to contribute to a complex dynamic of belonging and being excluded, which in turn seemed related to gaining and maintaining access to the wooden toy. Eventually children’s tension led to verbal and then physical conflicts as when Cláudia hit Luís. Below I further discuss how the competition for resources led to excluding children from play.

Exclusion and Resources

Teacher's control of resources during play at times provoked separations and isolation among the children. In her book "You Can't Say I Can't Play," Paley (1992) described the interconnected dynamics of play and friendship: friends let children play and play fosters friendships. However, this dynamic was complicated when children had to wait for long periods to 'get' toys and to systematically compete for limited toys. Particularly in the *creche*, toys seemed to become central to play and also to friendship during play. Gaining and securing access to toys seemed crucial in the negotiation of play, leading to frequent exclusion of children. As in the episode above, toys and resources were traded for access to play, and ultimately, for friendship, often at the cost of excluding other children. Matias further explained the relationship between sharing resources and friendship. Washington had given him play dough, and Gabriela Santos told him to give Washington's piece back. Anxious with the possibility of losing the play dough he greatly needed for his large-snake project, he responded eagerly, "He gave the little piece to me; he gave the piece to me; he is my friend." Through the barter exchange of toys, children were able to deepen the ties of friendship, and often those bonds became more fragile.

Toys and resources seemed to become not only a means for inclusion but also a means for exclusion. On one occasion, Washington gave Gabriela a toy chair. I asked him about it, and he told me "even though I gave her (the chair), she did not let me play." On another, Gabriela M. offered Cláudia, Daniele, and Davidson her precious sparkling star stickers in a failed attempt to avoid being excluded from play. The following play vignette further illustrates the relationship between access to resources and exclusion

during play. The description shows how three children ended up forming a coalition to block Luís Otávio's access to Lego toys:

After the afternoon snack and a noisy 'freer' play session with a recently donated set of musical instruments, Helena and the children started arranging the tables and chairs for inside play. At 3:27 p.m. Raíssa and Marcela sat at a table by the wall opposing the entrance door. Soon after Washington sat across from Marcela, to Raíssa's left, and Luís Otávio sat between Washington and Marcela. The four children waited as Helena moved around the room in her ritual of arranging the children. Before long the first conflict involving Luís O. and Marcela happened. As soon as he sat down, Luís picked up from the table what looked like a piece of a toy and started playing with it. Washington and Raíssa watched the teacher, and Marcela sucked her thumb, looking at the wall. Marcela and Raíssa started a game of talking and playing with their hands. Signaling the transition into the 'giving of play,' Helena addressed the class: "Guys, I will start but you have to stop this *brigaiada* (imbroglio or brawling); next time I will not..." A fight between Marcela and Gabriela interrupted her likely warning to do not give toys out if the children continued fighting. Marcela had snatched the toy piece from Luís Otávio, who responded swiftly, hitting her on the head with both hands. Helena quickly separated them saying, "Jeez, Luís Otávio, learn to say please to your classmate." She rearranged his chair to face the table. Walking towards the door on her way out to get toys she said, "Wow, what great number of *brigão* (big brawler) children. You keep fighting with each other. Guys, let's stop that. (You) already stay here all day long, and still (want to) fight? That's not possible."

At 3:36 p.m. Helena dropped four handfuls of Legos in the middle of the table, the second to 'get' toys. The excerpt from my observation illustrates how the four children divided up, guarded, and fought for the Legos. Their building with Legos was punctuated by tongue showing, hitting, and snatching toys from each other.

Raíssa pulled some Legos very close to her body, leaning forward and protecting them with both arms on the table. Washington and Marcela dragged most of the lasting pieces towards themselves. Luís O. secured a few pieces, and built with great concentration, eventually managing to take away pieces from Washington and Marcela. Several small conflicts between him and his colleagues ensued. Helena walked around the room, settling fights and continuously redistributing Legos. She tried to support children's play by taking Lego pieces from one table and giving to another. The children on this table ended up with a nice amount of Legos, maybe the equivalent to the smallest Lego bucket sold in the United States stores. As time passed, Raíssa, Marcela, Washington, and Luís guarded their Lego pieces more and more fiercely. Luís Otávio turned his body away from the table to face the room and kept his few pieces on his lap. At some point, he started to get Legos from the next table. Rejane crawled on the floor between Washington

and the wall, picking up Legos. Washington hit her on the head, and further secured his Legos by pulling them closer and putting both arms around them. Around eight minutes after they received the toys, Raíssa, leaning totally forward to guard her toys and motioning toward Luís told Marcela and Washington, “Let’s store everything here (close to her), so he can’t take them.” The three children made a Lego pile in front of Raíssa. Luís Otávio just looked at them and remained focused on building. When he used all his Lego pieces, he took apart his creation and started to rebuild it. Washington built what I later learned was a hose. He pretended played that Raíssa’s Legos were plants that he was watering. Raíssa identified his play and said, “You are is [sic] washing the things.” Her play seemed to center on guarding the pile. At 3:54 Luís Otávio walked to the next table and got some pieces, keeping them folded inside his shirt. Washington gave him the tongue as he sat down. A few minutes later Raíssa, pointing to the Lego pile, told Washington, “Guard it for mommy, mommy is going out.”

The alliance to exclude Luís seemed to significantly impact play by apparently dampening it. Although Luís Otávio built busily, he looked sad. I did not hear laughter or stories from Marcela or Raíssa, and Washington pretend-played only briefly. Their play became centered on ostracizing Luís, and only at the end of this play section the three children were able to develop a joint play theme. The play activity became that of ‘guarding’ the pile of Legos from Luís. Excluding Luís from play meant excluding him from having access to toys. Their attempts to systematically exclude Luís resembled Cláudia, Daniele, and Maria’s actions during the ‘one-toy’ episode I noted earlier.

The following conversation with Washington provides an understanding of how children experienced exclusion during play. Washington and I talked during outside recess on one of the ‘recess-with-toys-day.’ Cláudia refused to ‘let’ Washington play.

Letícia: What are you going to play next?

Washington: I will play of slide and swing.

Letícia: Is that right? Do you know what else you are going to play?

Washington: Nobody wants to let me play.

Letícia: Nobody wants to let you? Whom did you ask if you could play with?

Washington: Nobody.

Letícia: So who doesn’t want to let you?

Washington: They (Matias and other boys playing with cars) don’t want to let (me).

Letícia: What about (playing) house?

Washington: The girls don't want to let me.

Letícia: The girls don't? Did you ask them?

Washington: No

Letícia: Go ask them.

Washington: They don't want to.

Letícia: Yes?

Washington: I asked and they don't want to let me. (pause) I don't even have a toy.

Letícia: Didn't you just have a little chair?

Washington: But I gave (it) to Gabriela.

Letícia: You did?

Washington nodded.

Letícia: What about her? What did she say after she got the toy?

Washington: Cláudia didn't let (me play). The chair I gave to her (Gabriela).

Letícia: And she didn't let you play.

Washington: Even after I gave it, she did not let me.

Letícia: Even you giving it...

Washington: I'm not playing, not even of little car neither of anything.

Letícia: Nor of little car neither of anything.

Washington: There are only things without wheels (referring to the red box).

On the 'recess-with-toys' days, teachers dumped toys on the patio floor, and the children ran towards the pile and desperately grabbed a toy. On that occasion, Washington only managed to secure a toy chair. As he said, there were no 'things with wheels' left in the red toy box. This resulted in his being unable to play cars with the boys. He tried giving the chair to Gabriela, often a more welcoming play partner, but Cláudia barred him from entering play. He stood at a corner by himself watching the other children play. He sounded very sad, particularly when he talked about the children not letting him play, about not playing 'of anything,' and about not playing because he did not have a toy.

Children's quest to exclude others seemed influenced by their strong desire to play with a toy. Children's anxiety during play could be related to their daily experiences of uncertainty over access to resources, and for the most part, their fear to end up

‘without anything,’ as described by Maria Luísa. The consequence of ‘ending up without anything’ could be not playing at all.

An Interrupted World

Although Helena tried hard, and sometimes seemed to perform miracles as she responded to the children, as the manager of the teacher-centered format she constantly interrupted children, greatly impacting children’s play. Earlier I noted Daniele’s account of *the* teacher’s interruption of play: “The aunt took the play dough away at the hour we (the children) were doing it (the party). The aunt ‘ordered’ us to do tic-tac-toe.” As Daniele indicated, children’s world of play was an interrupted world. Daniele’s use of the term *mandar*, or order, implies that children considered the teacher’s redirection of play an act of power. Daniele also described how the teacher dominated children’s play activities by telling them to do something else, or, in some cases, interrupting engaging play episodes such as the play dough party. During the wooden toy episode, Maria Luísa finally secured a turn after twelve minutes of wait, complicated negotiations, and forceful acts to grant her access to the toy. She had barely started playing when Helena, without addressing her, simply removed the toys from her hands and, using Daniele’s words, ‘ordered the children to do’ a memory game.

The following excerpt of my observational data illustrates several factors involved in the process of interruption of children’s play: the significance of play activities to children; their collaborative play; their grief with the disruption of play; and their resilience to reconstruct play after interruption. It also illustrates the teacher’s multiple roles of manager of resources, disrupter of, and also accommodating supporter of play.

When Matias, Lucas and Luís Otávio heard Helena say that she was “going to give play dough,” all three of them smiled broadly. Matias shouted, “Let’s make a

big snake again.” The boys made big snakes often, pooling play dough pieces. As they waited at their table, they talked about their snake. When Helena handed them the play dough, Lucas gave Matias his share, and Luís rolled his on the table. Lucas went around the room gathering more play dough. Matias worked hard and quickly. Soon, the two snakes were as long as the table. The boys seemed very happy and engaged. They rolled, laughed, talked, compared the two snakes, and commented on their sizes. A while later, Daniele reached from a nearby table for a piece of their play dough. Matias moved her hands away. All three boys refused vehemently to give her some. Daniele called Helena. Helena said, “Give a little piece for the girls; they don’t have any.” She broke a piece of the snake out. Lucas and Matias burst out crying. They sobbed, genuinely sad. Helena said, “So, it is like this now; since you are crying, I will take it away.” Lucas quickly got the remaining snake and put it inside a plastic bag, shattering it. He whimpered, “We had given a piece to Gabriela S., that’s why we got more.” Matias snatched a piece of play dough from Luís O. who at first looked angry and then laughed playfully. Lucas whacked Luís’s snake, destroying it, and then Luís started to cry. Helena, with her usual even voice, continued to explain, “Your table is the one with more play dough; we don’t have enough play dough to give one for each of you.” Matias replied, “But the play dough was divided.” Helena, sweeping the floor, said, “This is how it is: the girls did not have any, and this table had the most, you have to give.” Matias and Lucas continued to argue with the teacher. Helena, moving away from them, cut the conversation short with a convincing tone, “Now, go do it, instead of complaining.” Lucas gave Matias the play dough from the bag, and they started rolling the snake again. Soon Matias and Luís had long snakes. They tried to join them into one snake, but it did not fit on the table. Lucas suggested, “Let’s do (it) on the floor; look, this way we can.” They moved to a corner on the floor. Helena said, “Not on the floor, guys; everything is going to be dirty.” They pleaded, “Please aunt, let us.” Helena agreed and cleared a little corner for them on the floor.

Lucas, Matias, and Luís O. played as they waited for the teacher to tell them what they would play, and continued to play when they learned that Helena had chosen play dough. Waiting on their table, they seemed already embedded in their pretend-playing about the big snake. When Helena handed in the play dough they continued to play, laughing, talking, and rolling the dough to build their two great, big snakes.

The children exuded a powerful energy during play, a combination of the pull of their busy bodies and their imagination, predisposition to explore, and eagerness to play. All this tremendous energy had to fit or be funneled into what seems to me an impoverished experience: playing sitting down on tables, with a little bit of play dough,

and without means to further explore. Still the children seemed greatly disposed to play, until the teacher interrupted play and broke the snake, gravely disrupting play.

What Helena saw as a piece of play dough, the boys considered the head or tail of their great, big snake. The teacher was not insensitive to children and their play. She reasoned with the boys and explained why they had to share or ‘give’ their play dough to the girls. Later she supported their play, breaking the format to allow them to work on the floor. However, she failed to fully appreciate the value and the meaning of play to the children.

While Helena’s interruptions of children’s ‘official’ play impacted children, her interruptions of ‘unofficial’ play seemed even more severe. Unofficial play was what Helena called “out of time” activities. As so, they were marginal to the teacher-centered format plan, a breach of the teacher order. While the teacher seemed to see children’s unofficial play as illegitimate actions vulnerable to curt interruption, the children seemed to consider the play they initiated play inherent to their lives at the *creche*. As Cláudia said, children played all the time. Helena also seemed to accept that unofficial play was inherent to classroom life: children would play, for instance, as they waited for her before, during, and after the official activities, often developing quite elaborated play activities. However, the underlying understanding was that the teacher would interrupt play, calling children back to the official world of the classroom. The result was a dynamic of children ‘always’ playing and the teacher ‘always’ interrupting play. Above all, this dynamic further exposed the volatility or, even, haphazard ness of life at the *creche*. Interruption could happen anytime and at any point. Inside play was marked by children’s long waits, lack of control of restricted resources and systematic interruptions. Play was also marked by frequent conflicts, which I discuss next.

Children's Tension and (Physical) Conflicts during Play

Children's fights, especially the physical fights over materials, were routine at the *creche*. The children cried, shrieked, grabbed, ran from attacks, attacked, kicked, slapped, and called the teacher to intervene and ensure that they kept the materials. These fights were another form of interruption of children's play. A relationship between the teacher's interruptions of play and children's conflicts seemed to emerge in the classroom. In the play dough episode, after Helena broke up the snake the boys first cried and then turned against each other. Matias grabbed a piece of Luís's snake, and then Lucas smashed it, causing Luís to cry. In the wooden toy episode, Maria Beatriz and Cláudia engaged in a fierce fight after Helena interrupted the wood toy game and introduced the memory game. Cláudia slapped Maria hard on the face, while Maria gave Cláudia a grinding pinch. In both these episodes there seemed to be an underlying tension during play.

The following vignette illustrates the intensity of children's tension and anxiety during a 'freer play' activity that I offered to supervise for fifteen minutes when Helena felt sick and other adults were busy. Caroline, the coordinator, came in the classroom and told the sixteen present children that Helena was sick and they would "just play." She made a few trips to get toys from the storage room, dumping them on the floor. Immediately after, most of the children were fighting over the toys:

Luís Eduardo seemed totally out of control. He grabbed toys from other children, kicked children who tried to take his toys, and even kicked and scratched my assistant, when she kept him from snatching a toy from another child. I could hear my assistant yelling at Luís Eduardo while I physically held Paulo Henrique and Gabriela Matos apart to prevent them from attacking each other. As I separated them, I called over to Gabriela Santos and Maria Luísa, who were slapping each other because of a few Lego pieces. I noticed that Lucas Mateus and Washington were starting a fight by the blackboard. Slowly Cláudia, my assistant, and I started to solve the most serious conflicts, engaging children in play as we provided them

with a play space and toys. For instance, starting with Luís Eduardo, who seemed to be the most difficult child, I brought a few train-track pieces and Legos close to the sink wall and started to build a train track with him. He started to play, pretending that the car he was holding on to was a train. Then I brought toys to a different corner, half under the table, and engaged Paulo Henrique and his cousin Gabriela Matos, two 'problematic' children who hit a lot. Nevertheless, conflicts continued to erupt. Soon after Luís Eduardo had settled down, Edu came and grabbed a piece of his track. Luís went into a rage. Edu ran, and Luís charged after him. I stopped them and asked Edu to give the track-piece back. He refused, and I offered him to exchange Luís's toy for another, but he did not give it up. Edu held on to the track-piece, and Luís stroke at him again. Cláudia, my assistant, came over and helped separate them. She took Luís away to look for another train-track toy, while I attempted to talk with Edu, who still refused to give me the piece. Slowly and with our help, the children formed little playgroups, but every now and then a conflict marked play. Maria Beatriz and Rejane joined Luís H and helped him build his train track. After Washington tried to grab one of the track-pieces, the three children moved to a corner under the table and created a little niche with two coats. Gabriela Matos and Paulo Henrique still played together, halfway under the table. Cláudia, Daniele and Maria Luísa, experienced players, had no problem pretend-playing 'little house' by the corner at the classroom entrance. They used Helena's green tape to decorate themselves and the dolls. I chose not to disturb them by taking away the teacher's tape. Edu was sort of parallel playing close to the other boys, Washington, Lucas, Luís O. and Davidson, who were playing with a train track and some odd vehicles at the corner by the hall to the other classroom. Gabriela S. built a camera with Legos. She sat facing the wall with Lego pieces inside her legs. Periodically a child would take one of her Lego piece from her. At those times she shrieked very, very loudly, revealing a sort of desperation or utmost frustration. Meanwhile, Marcela found a cardboard box and created a beautiful little pretend house under the table, by the shelf. She draped the classroom's hand towel over the table to further stage and maybe seclude her play. Later I found Matias sitting at the office floor, with red tape on his face. He was 'of *castigo*.' He had slipped out of the room with one of the teacher's mask-tapes and disobeyed Jacqueline when she told him to stop. I had no idea he had left.

Fights erupted all over the classroom. As they disputed their claim to a toy, children became frantic and hostile to one another. Yet, with adults' supervision, they seemed to settle down.

The potential for conflict seemed to lay dormant ready to be ignited by the tension between the teacher's actions and children's desire to play. Such tension often leads to children's impulsive and almost ferocious fighting. For instance, during the Lego episode, Rejane crawled between the wall and the table where Washington sat, picking

up Legos from the floor. Washington whacked her head repeatedly with a Lego piece. During the wooden toy episode, Luís sat next to Cláudia and watched Daniele play. Cláudia lifted her close-fisted right hand high above her head and brought it down with all her might on Luís's hand resting on the table. These aggressive actions were situated in a pedagogical context where children seemed to feel great anxiety about getting toys, keeping them and being allowed into play.

Fear that play would be disrupted was a constant and integral part of play. Children seemed to view other children as threats to their chances to play and thus, they consistently 'guarded' their toys, acting to protect them with their bodies and by positioning themselves in the classroom. Children's routine attempts to protect their toys from being snatched away were an important indication of anxiety during play. During a 'freer play' episode, Marcela and Davidson worked as a team to 'get' and 'keep' toys. Helena dumped pretend toys and props on the floor, and Marcela ran back and forth from the toy pile to a corner where Davidson waited and held the toys she amassed. Marcela told Davidson to *vigiar* or 'guard' a photographic camera, a little pillow and mirror she had been able to 'get.' Marcela's concept of 'guard' illuminates how children seemed to be most anxious about sustaining their control of toys and resources. They faced the wall, hid under the table or in a corner and guarded toys between their legs or under their shirts. They also changed places or 'moved play.' The girls moved their 'house' when they pretend-played during recess. On occasions, when a child approached them, one of the girls would suggest, "Let's move." They moved so often that they seemed to incorporate the theme of 'moving' in their pretend play. Helena acknowledged children's protective behaviors. On the occasion she held the two boxes of Legos under her arms before 'giving play,' she told the children to play 'right,' adding, "Nobody needs to be

under the table.” The following excerpt from my observation of ‘freer play’ further illustrates how children protected their play:

Paulo Henrique smiled happily as he played with his favorite toy, a small plastic horse, and a toy house. Making horse sounds, he pretended the horse galloped around the house and then came in to eat. He opened the house roof and put the house inside, and then took it out for another ride. As I observed, he suffered at least three ‘attacks.’ In the worst one, Maria Beatriz, Gabriela, and Daniele loomed over him trying to snatch his toys. He leaned forward, covering the house and the horse with his body and yelled really loud. Soon after he moved next to Marcela and Rejane who were playing house under the table. Maria Beatriz knelt down and grabbed Marcela’s doll. Marcela fought to keep it, but lost the doll to Maria’s superior strength. Marcela then moved to the wall to her left, carrying a plastic soccer game table she had been able to secure. She picked up a piece of cardboard from the floor and sat facing the wall, the toy between their legs. She put the cardboard over the toy, apparently to further hide it from view.

Children’s fear that they would be ‘robbed’ of their toys and thus of their play seemed to both fuel and be fueled by children’s fights both to get and keep toys. The constant conflicts around toys seemed to create defensiveness, hampering group play. As illustrated by the following incident, a potential play partner was often seen as a potential attacker or ‘robber,’ or as threat:

Lucas Mateus faced the wall on the corner between the teacher’s shelf and a table. He played with a few plastic figures between his legs. Luís Eduardo came behind him, and Lucas literally panicked, bending over his toys and yelling frantically, “No, no, no, no, no.” Luís pulled Lucas by his arm, trying to turn Lucas to face him while yelling back, “I will play with you; I will play with you; I will play with you.” Finally Lucas appeared to actually hear him, turned around a little, and accepted Luís’s offer to join him in play.

Lucas’ reaction is an indication of the underlying tension that I observed during certain playtimes. Children seemed to experience an apparent desperation or a feeling of extreme anxiety, which transformed regular negotiations of play into intense confrontations. Although the fights seemed to be over the control of toys, more significant was the underlying issue of control of play:

Cláudia, Marcela, Gabriela Santos, Daniele, and Maria Luísa dressed up on the day Helena brought the pretend props, their voices loud and excited. They busily tried on clothes and arranged each other's hair and jewelry. Davidson came by, and Marcela said, "Davidson is not playing." Cláudia confirmed, "Don't let Davidson play." Davidson seemed to accept their refusal and left (later he joined them, becoming Cláudia's boyfriend in the play). Washington came in and asked Gabriela, "Can I play with you guys?" He took the purse Gabriela was inspecting and helped dress Maria Luísa up, saying, "Put it on her (shoulders) like this." Gabriela arranged the purse and continued to dress Maria Luísa up, apparently signaling her acceptance of Washington joining play. Washington left to get a stethoscope he had hidden under a chair. When he walked back, he tried to get a brush from the pink plastic dresser where Marcela sat, brushing her hair. Marcela yelled very loudly, "Do not get it, no." Washington replied, "I also am playing." She responded, "No, you are not." Washington said, "Gabriela let me." He dropped the brush and moved closer to Gabriela. Maria Beatriz and Rejane, who had ended up without dresses, came to check me out. I pointed to Marcela—elaborated hair arrangement, red purse, high heels—and asked who she was. Rejane answered, "She is the owner of the play."

The play interactions above are not exclusive to Helena's classroom. Paley (1992) describes incidents where children played bosses and 'owners' and, like Marcela, held the 'right to play,' thereby accepting and rejecting players. Yet, children seemed to have developed a 'readiness for conflict' in the classroom that greatly affected their ability to play together, apparently intensifying their disputes over the ownership of play. Rarely could children create sustained play with a toy that captured their imagination.

In this section I have discussed the various impositions on children's play. The way that the teacher 'gave' toys was, in itself, symptomatic of the children's lack of control of the process of play. The children played within the limits of what the teacher had chose for them. These narrow limits were most evident on the occasions that Helena brought an individual toy or book to a group of children, handed small handfuls of Legos or small play dough amounts, and dumped toys of the floor. The children waited for long periods, and were often denied toys if they made *bagunça*. They were also frequently interrupted, in a sense never knowing when the teacher would 'order' them to do

something else. As a result, children fought systematically to control their access to toys, and ultimately, control their play, often excluding others. These impositions on children's play meant that children's growth and development through play was infected with antagonistic conflicts and tensions that seemed to stifle their natural ability to play. While the children were encouraged to play, the well-intentioned pedagogy implicitly sanctioned fighting and antagonistic behaviors that became part of the normalcy of children's play routine.

The 'Happy-wave' during Inside Play

In this chapter's introduction, I noted Daniele's account of play. As Daniele indicated, children seemed to enjoy play, despite the tensions among them and the impositions of the teacher. This section focuses on the 'happy-waves' during play that reveal children's collaboration and apparent pleasure.

"Little House" and "Busy Street"

On the occasion described below, Helena brought a handful of used adult dresses, some women shoes, necklaces, purses, a much-prized plastic dresser, and other props for 'playing house.' Then she made a 'street' with masking tape on the classroom floor for 'playing cars.' While a few conflicts ensued at the beginning, particularly over the few prized dresses most children seemed to enjoy playing together:

Helena joined the boys sitting on the floor. Maria Luísa accidentally stepped on the street and Helena told her, "Maria Luísa, you are walking in front of the cars; look here, the light is red, and you have to cross here, in front of the cars." Daniele and Cláudia joined Maria Luísa, and the three girls seemed to have great fun crossing in the middle of the cars being pushed by a line of boys. The boys responded accordingly, yelling and playing the horn excitedly as the girls transgressed. Marcela remained playing house. She painted Gabriela S.'s hair with a Lego. She called Davidson, "Hey, Davidson, aren't you playing with us?"

Davidson continued to play cars. Marcela, using her fingers, pretended to put rollers on Gabriela's hair. Gabriela gently caressed the head of the baby doll on her lap. Helena told the children playing street, "My car broke; I have to take it to a mechanic." Davidson said, "I'm a mechanic." "Me too," said Lucas, pretending to fix her car. At this point Daniele was on the dresser's chair, and Marcela pretended to brush and then dry her hair. Maria Luísa sat close by, holding her baby. Gabriela helped Marcela. With a Lego, she pretended to apply make-up to Daniele's face. Holding a small stuffed dog, Cláudia walked around the girls. Helena sat close to Maria Luísa on the floor and told her, "I can start doing the manicure. Do you want me to do it?" Maria Luísa nodded yes, and Helena painted her nails with a nail polish brush. Gabriela pretended to paint Daniele's nails with the Lego piece, while Cláudia arranged her hair. The boys and Rejane expanded the car play to the other classroom. They ran back and forth the two rooms making loud car noises. Cláudia took out the big wooden numbers from its box in the teachers' shelf. She sat on the floor making zigzag movements with them. She placed them in order and counted them aloud, her little dog sitting at her side. She put the little dog on top of the numbers and started fumbling with him. I asked what she was doing, and she said, "I'm operating on the little dog." I asked what was the problem with her dog, and she said, "It's not mine, it's hers," pointing to Daniele. I asked again what was the problem and she said, "He was run down by a car." Davidson came by and attempted to grab the wooden pieces, but Cláudia quickly rebuked him. She collected all numbers and left towards the girls saying, "I'm done. He is better, but you have to be very careful." She put the little dog and the wooden pieces on the nearby shelf. She picked up the dog and sat at the dresser chair. Gabriela brushed Cláudia's hair. Daniele asked Gabriela, "Miss, miss, can I borrow it?" Gabriela smiled politely and handed her the brush.

Gabriela and Daniele's friendly exchange over sharing a brush radically contrasts with Lucas' screaming when Luís approached him to play. Unlike the conflict-ridden experiences that I described earlier, children's play in the above episode seemed relaxed and fluid, allowing for sharing and cooperation. Marcela's invitation to Davidson to join in play is an indication of the playful climate. Children's play seemed more elaborate than the interrupted forms of play I described earlier. With Helena's help, the children expanded the original pretend themes of 'street' and 'little house,' creating variations such as 'running into the street' and 'having manicures.' The intermingling of girls and boys in play is noticeable. First, girls joined the boys' car games, taking on the role of the

pedestrians and traffic controller. Later, the car theme resurfaced in the ‘little-house’ play with the dog’s car accident.

A short excerpt of a ‘little-house’ play episode illustrates the complexity of girls’ pretend-play during the happy waves. During a ‘toy-day recess,’ Marcela, Gabriela S., Daniele, and Cláudia went into the classroom and took refuge there with a few dolls and other toys. Going inside the classroom during recess, against the teacher’s rule, ultimately represented an attempt to protect play from interruption, a strategy that seemed to work well for them. Play went on undisturbed for about twenty-minutes:

Cláudia played with several little stuffed dogs. Someone said they were dirty. Cláudia reacted saying, “It’s a lie; I will give them a bubble bath.” Marcela said, “They are going to be shedding hair.” Cláudia replied, “They will not; I have a flea shampoo at home. No, (we) don’t even have to buy, because he is full of fleas.” Michelle and Marcela tried to fit a few combs inside a handbag. Cláudia started pretend-crying. Daniele turned to her with a very stern expression and said with an angry voice, “Now, you stop crying.” Cláudia looked up at her ‘mother’ and asked, “And the bandit? (We) have to get the bandit.” She pretended the dog was attacking someone. She enacted a struggle, making barking sounds and pretending to be the dog, said, “(I) bit him.” Daniele said, “No Cláudia, this one doesn’t bite.”

Because inside play was constantly interrupted, children seemed to have few opportunities to fully develop their play and refine a story line. I observed during ‘little house’ play a great deal of toy manipulation such as pretending to dress up, to feed babies, and to move to a different house. Cláudia’s attempts to enact the bandit plot provide a glimpse of the potential of children and girls’ narratives during pretend-play.

Play Synergy: When a Very Big Play Dough Snake turned into a Necklace

The example below is one of the most harmonious play episodes I observed. It illustrates children's conversations, cooperation, and sharing during play and highlights the sense of belonging to the classroom community.

Helena sat at a corner correcting homework while the children built with their little pieces of play dough. I observed Matias and Lucas who eagerly started planning making a bit snake as soon as they learned that the teacher would 'give' play dough. Davidson refused Matias suggestion to make a snake too, saying, "Not me; I'm going to make a bowl of eating." While they molded the play dough, the three boys talked about bowls of pepper, pretended to be strong and yelled like Tarzan. From her seat, Helena, with a good-natured tone of voice, asked them to be quiet. At a nearby table, Daniele, Marcela, and Maria Luísa had made elaborated play dough words. Cláudia stopped by with Henrique, from the other classroom, and the girls read the words for them spelling out the letters, "h, i, t, u, a, l, o, p." They talked animatedly about what they wrote. Marcela told me she made her name and started to spell: "a, h." She asked me to film her 'name' and 'read' it aloud: "o, b, h, c, u, o, a." Children circulated freely around the room. Gabriela S. went to sit close to Cláudia. Lucas stayed away from his table for 11 minutes. He spent stood by Helena, watching as she corrected his homework, and played around, showing his play dough snake. He jumped up and down laughing at Luís O., who played running and falling down. Helena asked them to go back to their tables.

Below I describe Matias and Lucas' big snake play:

Lucas returned to his table and stood by Matias. He gave his snake play dough to Matias, who made a big, common snake. Eventually Lucas helped Matias build, attaching little pieces to the snake. Washington joined their table, rolling dough while standing by Lucas. Henrique stopped by. The boys worked happily, smiling and commenting on the size of the snake. Followed by Lucas and Washington, Matias showed the snake to Helena. Holding it in front of him, Matias, still followed by the boys, continued showing the 'big snake' around the room, talking loudly, until Helena told Matias to return to his table. The snake broke and they returned to the table, resuming their animated play. Washington and Matias measured their snakes, and Lucas jumped around them. Matias said, "Wait, nobody mess with this point, (we) have to be careful." Washington said, "Mine and Matias' will be the most big." Matias said, "I will help you, is that O.K. Washington?" Marcela and Gabriela Matos came over to see the snake. Marcela said, "Let's see which one is the 'more big'?" Washington said, "No, we are still playing. Mine is O.K., isn't it Matias?" Matias answered, "Yeah. Nobody touches this point."

They continued commenting on the snakes, helping each other roll the play dough.

Eventually they stood up and walked around the table. Children in the classroom came to

visit them. Gabriela M. looked at the snake, saying, “Oh Matias, the aunt said that it’s not to mix (play dough colors).” The boys paused briefly but continued to play. Matias and Lucas worked on one snake and Washington on the other. They rolled them parallel on the table, and often compared sizes. As Matias helped Washington he said, “Don’t touch it; nobody messes with mine.” Washington responded, “And mine too; this here is mine.” Matias responded with a big smile, “(It) is of us [sic]; its ours; it’s everybody’s.” Matias’s affirmation of the collective ownership of the snakes indicates the cooperative and joyful climate of their play. As the snakes grew, so seemed the children’s pleasure:

Looking at his snake almost as long as the table, Washington exclaimed, “Our Lady (Virgin Mary).” Matias said, “Can’t touch this point. (We) have to get more play dough, ask Gabriela right there.” Washington responded, “Don’t even think. Get a piece from Gabriela?” Gabriela, holding a small piece of play dough, broke a piece and gave it to Lucas. Matias, smiling and using a convincing tone, asked her for more, “Give me, only a little piece; it’s not a big one, no.” Gabriela S. said, “Mine finished; it’s finishing; I already gave one.” Washington’s snake, parallel to Matias’s, was still a little shorter. The boys worked together to make it bigger. Matias, followed by Lucas, showed his snake around the room. Gabriela S., sitting at the table, played with her play dough. Maria Beatriz stopped by. Daniele showed Gabriela her play dough letters on a flat disc. Washington, holding his snake by one end, showed it around the room. Daniele slapped it, breaking it into pieces. Lucas laughed and picked up a little piece; Gabriela helped Washington pick up the rest. Offering Washington her remaining play dough, Gabriela said, “Take everything Washington, I gave you this little piece.” She told the boys she had given Washington a piece. Matias asked Washington, “Do you want to make yours more small [sic]?” Washington said, “More big [sic].” They talked and worked. Gabriela rolled her play dough for Washington saying, “You can wait, and I will make it (*pode deixar que eu faço*); I make it (for you); (it) has to come until big.” Washington seemed to be having difficulties rolling his snake. Gabriela offered, “No, you can wait that I am making a big one, an enormous. It’s even getting to here” she pointed the end of the table. Lucas said, “It’s going to fall....” Matias called, “look at mine.

They talked about Maria Luísa’s play dough creation. Matias said, “Look at Maria Luísa’s. It’s full of little figure cards I gave her.” A lively conversation ensued where each one brought her or his own perspective. Matias, whose father appeared to sell

different merchandise in the nearby *Morro* (shantytown), talked about selling cards, buttons, and kites. Lucas wanted to know why he did not give him cards, since he was Matias friend and had given Matias his play dough. Washington talked about how his father's car was full of eggs, probably referring to his father selling eggs from the grandfather's farm. Gabriela discussed prices with Matias and said that her mother went to a supermarket. They continued talking and rolling. Lucas mostly watched.

Lucas asked, "Why didn't you give them to me Matias?" Matias responded, "Because I forgot." Lucas asked, "At your house, there are many cards?" Matias said, "There are many cards; I am selling some cards, some pop corn, some lollypops." Gabriela asked, "How much is it?" Matias, responded, "One *Real* and seven *Reais* (equivalent to U.S. \$.30 and \$2). Gabriela Santos said, "My mother goes to a supermarket." Matias said, "One *Real*; I am selling a soccer button game and other buttons too." Washington said, "My father has a car all full of eggs. All full, all full, all full." Matias responded, "My father has one all full of kites, and I am selling a big bunch of kites." Lucas asked, "Give to me, Matias."

The boys compared sizes of the two snakes. Washington took a little piece of play dough from Matias, who at first said "no," and then changed his mind, letting Washington keep it. Having smoothly survived a potential crisis, play continued on an increasingly harmonious note:

Washington, smiling broadly and helping Gabriela roll his play dough, "mine is more, mine is more, mine is more." Matias, holding his snake up, "mine is very much, big much; Washington's too; I'm selling to you; I'm paying fifty *Reais* for you." They continued to talk, smiling, making big gestures, standing up to highlight a point, and sitting down again. Gabriela worked with concentration. She said, "Washington's snake looks like it is true; (it) looks with the head. (Just one) mouth and Washington's tongue and then it becomes true, isn't it Washington?" Washington nodded. Matias said, "If Washington's break..." Gabriela responded promptly, "I will not let it break because my strength is big. Now it's the head. Do you want me to make the head?" Matias touched Washington's snake, which was almost as long as the table. Washington pushed Matias' snake over saying, "Oh no Matias, move over, you are bothering my snake." Matias yelled, "Hey, watch my snake." He picked it up and showed it around.

At 10:06 a.m., forty-one minutes after the boys started playing, Helena put away the homework folders. Some children helped her cleanup. Meanwhile the boys and Gabriela continued to play. Henrique asked Matias if he could play. Washington paraded his snake around the room. Henrique attempted to take a piece of play dough. The children reacted but recovered from this and other minor conflicts: they continued to play and allowed Henrique to join them. In turn, Henrique let Washington play with a little car he had brought.

Washington played with the car on the table and then over a piece of play dough, as Gabriela finished his snake. At 10:13 a.m. Gabriela wrapped the long roll of play dough around Washington's neck. I asked Washington, "What is this around your neck?" He said, "A necklace." I asked, "A necklace? Wasn't it a snake?" Gabriela answered, "Yes, only that we (made) a necklace."

The children collaborated and sustained play for almost one hour. With an apparent ease, they shared and seemed to enjoy complex play experiences with very little intervention from the teacher. Twice Matias summarized the synergy of their play, first when he affirmed its collective ownership (the snakes are "everybody's") and then when he affirmed its equality (the two snakes were equally big). It is interesting to note Gabriela's contribution to the snake play. She joined the boys at a critical moment, when Daniele had smacked Washington's snake. Her offer to help rebuild the snake brought the play back to track. She then energized the play by bringing in more play dough and her disposition to play, adding to the excitement of building even bigger snakes. She also enlivened the conversation. Most of all, though, she essentially changed the play experience by transforming the snake into a necklace. With great ability and quietly (I did not hear her), she convinced Washington of that significant mutation. Her contribution was a great example of the enriched play when boys and girls joined together.

In sum, these play episodes I discussed illustrate children's potential to construct sustained, shared, and happy play at the *creche*. Children's sharing and the way they moved around the room in fluid playing groups during the play dough example contrast sharply with other anxious play instances. The general climate of the classroom seemed positive, with children happily creating something with their play dough.

Children's Experiences of *Bagunça* and *Castigo*

Thus far I have discussed the conflicts that pervaded children's play and the ways in which the teacher intervened and often disrupted play. I have also shown children's potential to construct meaningful and rich play experiences. Other critical dimensions of children's experiences included *bagunça* and *castigo*. Both were central constructs of children's representations of their experiences at the *creche*, and also, at the *Sabiá*.

Children referred often to 'making *bagunça*' and the teacher 'giving them *castigo*.' At the same time the teacher referred often to the children's *bagunça* threatening them with *castigo*. The correlated dynamics of children's misbehavior and teacher's punishment pervaded life at the two centers during the happy and the sad waves. Several vignettes I noted so far are simultaneously about children engaging with official activities and about making *bagunça*. In this section I describe children's *bagunça* and teacher's *castigo*.

Children Make Bagunça

Both adults and children used the term *bagunça* as a synonym for 'out of time' play, disobedience, mess, misbehavior, lack of attention, and disruption. Being *bagunceiro(a)* (*bagunça* maker) meant the opposite of being 'little good' and 'little

quiet.’ Since children did not seem to actually be (able to be) quiet and were ‘always playing,’ often they were ‘making *bagunça*.’ There was a fine line between children’s ‘always playing’ and ‘making *bagunça*.’ For example, during one transition from the *trabalhinhos* to inside-play Cláudia and Gabriela Santos, with their arms around each other, laughed loudly and skipped together, crossing the classroom back and forth. Their exhilaration seemed to stem in part from playing and also from transgressing the classroom rules.

The meaning of *bagunça* varied and was mainly shaped by three factors: (a) when it occurred; (b) the degree of the transgression; and (c) the adults present. Therefore, *bagunça* could have a lighter or heavier connotation depending on the circumstances and its degree.

The teacher and children’s perceptions of the gravity of the *bagunça* seemed to depend upon the ‘time of *bagunça*,’ i.e., when it occurred. For instance, in the skipping example during the transition from the *trabalhinhos* to inside-play, when Helena returned to the classroom with toys from the office, she laughed at the two girls’ *bagunça* and told them to sit down. When children showed similar behaviors during the *trabalhinhos*, Helena usually considered their actions ‘out of time’ *bagunça*, and thus, disruptive. Often on those occasions she would tell children to sit down or she would ‘not give them toys.’

Bagunça also represented a continuum of behaviors from disorder to transgression. The nature of the *bagunça* depended on where it fell on the continuum. For example, the teacher seemed to consider children’s pretend play at the table as they waited for the *trabalhinho* acceptable *bagunça*. However, when children’s play and conversations disrupted the activity and presented a refusal to ‘be quiet,’ the teacher viewed them as less acceptable forms of *bagunça*. Yet other forms of *bagunça*

symbolized more serious transgressions, for instance, when children openly disobeyed and obstructed the routine or when they hit and fought. At the extreme end of the *bagunça* continuum lay open defiance of the teacher and destructive behavior. The ‘worst’ or gravest *bagunça* involved Paulo Henrique’s conflict with a different teacher and resulted in him breaking a table and a glass door panel.

Often the entire class ran around, played, and yelled, refusing to participate and therefore, making what Helena and the children often called “too much” or “lots of *bagunça*.” These terms meant serious disruption of the activity, and usually involved repeated fighting and, sometimes, generalized chaos. On one occasion Helena said that the class made “so much *bagunça* that it was impossible to do the Father’s Day cards.” The term ‘too much *bagunça*’ also referred to individual children who made ‘lots of *bagunça*’ or were *bagunceiros*.

The third factor that determined the nature of *bagunça* was the particular adults present during the incident. This point is rather significant because at the *creche*, when the children were outside of the classroom they were no longer under Helena’s sole supervision. Other adults would assume responsibility for their behavior as well and interpret children’s transgressions differently. For instance, D. Celina, Thaís’s mother, expected total quietness and obedience from children. The first six-year-old class teacher and her substitute, the first three-year-old class teacher, the first cook and janitor seemed similarly intolerant of children’s *bagunça*. Helena, Thaís and Caroline were more flexible. Hence, the presence of adults during *bagunça* determined how children’s actions would be interpreted.

Next I discuss two excerpts of my observations during transition times, a description of a chaotic and conflict-ridden case of *bagunça* and a more peaceful example

of a 'happy' *bagunça*. While my analysis of these two instances help explain *bagunça*, it also highlights two paradoxical and much relevant aspects of life at the *creche*: (a) a volatility or haphazardness I described for example when I supervised 'freer play,' and (b) a certain spontaneous 'chaotic order' during convivial times of 'benign' *bagunça*.

Haphazard Bagunça: Playing, Fighting and Competing

At times transitions were very chaotic in that children seemed to end up out of control and often fought violently, as illustrated by the vignette below that focuses on Davidson. I describe a routine situation during a 20-minute transition where he and other children roamed around the room looking for something to play as they waited for the teacher to end one activity and prepare for the next. At first, Davidson and his friends successfully developed an 'out of time' play. The vignette illustrates the teacher's ambivalence about children's play/*bagunça*. Helena accepted that the children played during this time and simultaneously warned them that their play was 'out of time,' as she prepared the class to return to the official activity:

At 10:05 in the morning, eight children were still finishing the *trabalhinho*. Henrique, as he often did, wondered into Helena's class. As usual he brought a toy, this time, a domino game. Edu, who also rarely engaged in the regular activities, started playing on the floor with Henrique. They played parallel to each other, each with a bunch of domino pieces. Henrique pretended to eat a domino piece. Meanwhile, Helena sat at a child's table, receiving the papers from children who finished or answering questions. Having handed in his paper to the teacher, Davidson tried to sit at her lap. Edu came by Davidson, holding a handful of domino pieces. Davidson tried to grab some, but Edu turned his body away and hid the toys. Helena told them to go sit down and wait at the table. Davidson asked Edu, "Let's play 'of' these things?" Raíssa walked by and grabbed a few pieces, but Edu quickly took the pieces back. Helena, who had gone to check another table, came back at the same time that Daniele approached the boys. She also tried to grab pieces from Edu. Helena reproached her with an even voice, "Oh, Daniele, it was Henrique who brought these here." Daniele dropped the pieces on the floor and sat down. Davidson, picking up the pieces, said to Edu, "Let me give the little pieces." They sat on the floor by Henrique. Davidson piled all Edu's pieces on the floor and started dividing them. Paulo H. came by and

Davidson told him he could not play, but Paulo stayed. Davidson said, “Edu, let’s make a little house, I’m already making mine.” Edu said, “I will make a revolver.” Their play was constantly interrupted by attempts from the children, whom, without activity, roamed the room. Every now and then Henrique, Davidson and Edu wrestled among themselves over pieces, but they continued to play. Paulo H. managed to get a few pieces as well. Edu asked Davidson to build him a house and Davidson started to do it. Gabriela S. sat by Henrique, and he asked, “Hi, make a house for me?” She agreed and tried to get pieces from Davidson. Helena walked by and said, “You are doing this, but the others have not finished yet.” Gabriela tried to get pieces from Edu, who yelled really loud. Daniele came by again and grabbed about ten pieces from the other children for Matias. Again Helena, who was passing by, saw Daniele’s grabbing and said with her usual good voice, “How does the madam come like this?”

Davidson managed to join Edu and Henrique’s play. However, their play became increasingly prone to interruption by the other children. As more children attempted to get the domino pieces, the playing children’s anxiety seemed to rise, resulting in recurrent fights. Chaos marked the end of the domino ‘out of time’ play:

Davidson, Gabriela S., Edu, Henrique and Paulo H. fought over the pieces, punching, kicking, and slapping each other. Henrique shrieked very, very loudly. Helena returned, knelt down, and started putting the domino away saying, “Henrique, what is this? You came here and now started fighting, yelling? Put this (domino) away.” Her voice seemed to reflect indignation, however, it was not rude or loud. She left soon, and the domino box she had brought to clean up the pieces remained on the floor. Henrique fought with Davidson over the box saying, “I’m the one putting in the box.” Davidson climbed on top of the nearby table and punched Henrique’s head really hard. Henrique punched him back. Davidson sort of fell down to the floor. Quickly recovering he grabbed the box from Henrique, and they wrestled. The box fell apart, and they blamed each other. Davidson went to tell Helena. She returned with him and said, “We only have to put it together again, there is no problem.” Helena fixed the box and left again to attend other children. Davidson wrestled part of the box out of Henrique, who, again, let out extremely high shrieks as Davidson and Paulo H. tried to fit the box pieces. Helena came back fast, “Let go, Davidson. What is this Henrique? Now I’m the one going to put this away.” She reassembled the box, picked up the domino pieces, and told the children to go to their tables. Henrique left the room. Davidson sat down and slumped over the table, chin on his two arms. Edu sat down and covered his eyes with both hands. Gabriela picked up a magazine from the shelf. Davidson told Helena, “Just a minute, O.K.?” and left for the bathroom. Helena took the magazine from Gabriela saying, “Let’s stop getting things that are not the time.” Gabriela started to jump around the room.

Children ended up fighting uncontrollably. Helena intervened, gradually separating the fighters from each other, collecting the toys, and ordering the children to go sit down (a sort of *castigo*). Children's play, at first an acceptable form of *bagunça*, rapidly became unacceptable as it turned into fighting. While the transition time lengthened, the children became increasingly agitated:

At 10:19 a.m. the transition continued. Three children were still doing the *trabalhinhos*. Helena picked up materials, straightened the room, and pushed the tables to the corner. Without a clear activity, the children did different things. Some lay down on their tables, others talked, and some ran around. Henrique came back with another toy—a little train with little colored wooden letters and numbers on the sides. He sat with Davidson, Luís O. and Edu. Henrique refused Davidson's attempts to play, so Davidson grabbed the train from him. Henrique resisted, pulling the train apart. Helena came to the table and said, "Oh, Henrique you bring things from the other class, and the children also will want to take them." She fixed the train and left. Henrique rolled the train on the table. Luís O. tried to get it, but Henrique hid it behind his back. Luís punched him hard. Davidson also punched Henrique a few times on the face, head, and torso. Marcela, Edu and Paulo H. came and stood by Henrique, eyes on the train. Henrique yelled. Helena returned saying, "What is this, oh Henrique, go to your room." He walked towards his classroom but sat on the floor by the corridor entrance and played with the train. Davidson walked in Henrique's direction saying aloud, "I will give him a punch on his little buttock," which he did. Henrique punched him back, and Davidson left. Helena, still organizing the tables, told Henrique to stop. Henrique returned to the table where Davidson and Edu sat, joined by Maria Luísa and Daniele. Maria Luísa, Davidson (standing) and Henrique (on Davidson's chair) played together with the train. Maria Luísa sort of organized their play, counting and then spelling the letters. The other children helped Helena put the tables up. Davidson, Maria Luísa and Henrique continued playing. Maria Luísa decided to help with clean up and took Henrique's chair away. Davidson stood up and hit his chair on the floor making a lot of noise. Helena came and told him, not yelling and not clearly angry, but with a strong tone of disapproval, stronger than before, "What, what is this? You go sit there (at the floor) and be quiet; you are very *teimosão* (big disobedient) today, what is this?" He started crying and hid behind the entrance door, where he cried really hard. Several children went to see him. Helena told them to leave him alone and come sit down for circle. A few children followed her and positioned themselves on the floor. She did not tell them yet what they would do next. Several boys fought—Luís O. and Lucas de Farias punched each other and so did Luís Eduardo and Luís O.

At 10:26 Helena was on the floor trying to organize circle. She took the train from Henrique, but he grabbed it back. Paulo H. pressed the door against Davidson, who was still crying. Helena told him to stop. Davidson told Paulo H. to stop and,

sniffing, went to sit with the cook who was picking beans at a table right outside the classroom in the patio.

Without an official activity and available resources and materials to structure children's time, the children 'fended' for themselves, i.e., they seized the moment and developed their own activities. Children were determined to play and to find others to play with. However, their search was aimless and haphazard as illustrated by Davidson's frantic attempts to play with Henrique's toy. Children's attempts to play were unpredictable both in form and consequence. In a sense, their natural boundless energy when unstructured produced unnecessary anxiety and conflicts. Davidson's banging of the chair symbolizes children's exasperation during these volatile, unpredictable times that often led children to compete fiercely and often, physically, for resources.

The whole transition was marked by certainty within uncertainty. It was uncertain what they were going to play and for how long they were going to play. It was uncertain whom they were going to play with, and it was uncertain at what point the teacher would intervene and stop their play. It was certain, however, that the teacher would interrupt when they met some threshold of noise, violence or conflict. This threshold too was uncertain.

In sum, a routine of certainty within uncertainty marked children's experiences at the *creche*, most manifestly during transition times. The complexity of children's experiences is reflected in the fact that, despite the conflicts and anxiety children seemed to experience, children seemingly had more freedom during these periods. Children's sense of freedom is most evident during the 'happy' *bagunça* periods, I discuss next.

Benign Bagunça: Convivial Disorder or Chaotic Order

My descriptions of the *trabalhinhos* and of play have included examples of ‘conviviality’ at the *creche*. ‘Benign’ *bagunça* was a convivial experience, often permeating children’s official and unofficial activities. Several vignettes illustrate *bagunça* episodes when children broke the rules and talked and played happily with little conflict. The teacher seemed to accept these *bagunças*, and the children seemed to see them as part of their life at school, as illustrated in the vignette below:

At 10:05 Helena left the room to put away materials from the *trabalhinhos*. Sitting on the floor by the decoration wall, Matias, Lucas de Farias looked at magazines they had just used to cut and paste letters. Davidson, Edu, and Maria Luísa read a book together. Luís O., a little further from them, also read. The children had taken the books without permission. Earlier Helena had told them to put them back. Helena returned and continued to clean up. Daniele helped her very effectively picking paper scraps from the tables and floor, and gathering the papers from those who finished. Helena said, “Ah Daniele, you are helping a lot, that’s great.” Cláudia joined them. Marcela opened the water register and, with Maria Beatriz, Gabriela S., and Rejane, played with water. Helena walked by after several minutes and with a smile said, “Ah, ha! You are playing; I will close up here.” Helena got a broom from the kitchen and swept. Matias, Lucas, and Rejane asked her to sweep, and she just continued her work. Soon Maria Beatriz and Rejane came in with two brooms they also got from the kitchen. Helena said, “No, no,” and took the brooms away. Rejane picked up a book from the corridor shelf. She read aloud and Maria Beatriz laughed very hard saying, “You do not know how to read.” Maria Luísa, Luís O., and Davidson played house sitting on the floor by the blackboard. Maria Luísa and Luís O. caressed Davidson and he covered his face. She said, “Little son, little son; oh, he is cold. Davidson crawled away, and she held him by his shirt saying, “Baby can’t run away.’ He crouched back and said, “I’m going to be here ‘little quiet’ mom; I will.” Cláudia and Daniele gathered a one- foot high pile of paper scraps in the middle of the room floor, and Lucas threw them up. Matias joined in. They hollered, stretched their arms up above their heads and hopped happily under the falling scraps. Helena animatedly said, “Let’s see who is going to finish first; I’m faster.” Lucas and Matias quickly started helping. Maria Beatriz and Rejane, hearing Helena, joined the clean up crew. Lucas and Maria Beatriz brought the two brooms back and started sweeping. Meanwhile, Paulo Henrique and Gabriela Matos crawled under the tables and the other children played, read, or talked. At 10:20 the clean up was almost finished.

In episodes such as the one above children managed to sustain playful interactions, but the potential for chaos was real. Play could easily have ‘gone wrong,’

i.e. either sanctioned as inappropriate by the teacher or interrupted by conflicts among the children. At all times the possibility of intervention or disruption lay beneath the surface. Here, the children's play 'went right,' i.e. they played uninterrupted and happily for over 15 minutes. During the benign *bagunça* above the children created multiple activities: they read, played with water, played pretend, helped with cleanup and threw paper up.

The 'convivial times', particularly during benign *bagunça*, were most significantly marked by a certain degree of children's freedom. Embedded in the *creche*'s chaos or *zoeira* children's activities seemed loose, loud, and full of children's expressiveness and vitality. In the episode above the teacher cleaned up and most children initiated group activities around the room with some volunteering to help Helena. During those times there seemed an unhurried disorder where children were free to play and express themselves, as evident in their happily skipping around the room and throwing paper into the air. Below I further explore this mixture of unhurriedness and spontaneity that seemed characteristic of the convivial times. This quality seemed most evident on the occasions children seemed to playfully take over the adults' hegemony in a sort of collective 'pretend-like' *bagunça*.

When children took over the floor at the creche.

The following episode is a continuation of the transition described above. Helena told the children to form a circle on the floor. At first she played games with them, until the children took over:

Lucas de Farias was supposed to hide behind the door, and Gabriela S., who left the room, had to guess upon her return what had changed in the circle. However, when Lucas heard Gabriela come in, he stuck his head out, prompting Helena to smile. Davidson, his eyes still red from his previous tears, stood up and gave the teacher a hug and a kiss. In a second, about ten children were bundled around her, trying to kiss her as well. The children laughed and jumped on top of Helena and

each other. Edu jumped over Helena, who had fallen back on the floor. Helena laughing asked them to stop and then said, “I don’t mind kissing, but everybody jumping at the same time is not possible.” The children seemed to find the scene hilarious, and chaos was installed. They yelled and jumped over the teacher, falling down on top of her and each other. Repeatedly she attempted and failed to free herself. Davidson ran to me and said, “Look, everybody on top of the aunt.” The fun continued for several minutes. Slowly some children left Helena. Edu jumped over Lucas de Farias. Davidson rolled vigorously back and forth on the floor. Daniele danced. Maria Beatriz stood and Marcela sat down looking at the children. Luís O. pushed Gabriela Matos, who had stepped on him, and she pushed him back. Luís Eduardo yelled as he pushed the door against Matias, hiding behind it. Davidson crawled under the pile of tables. Gabriela S. opened and closed her legs, sitting on the floor. Helena managed to run to the door and said, apparently amused, but with a more serious tone of voice, “Now that’s enough, everybody line up here.” She yelled to Davidson, Luís O. and Edu, “Look, I don’t want anybody down there; these (tables) fall.” When the children did not respond, she pulled Luís by the arm with an unusual strength. Slowly the children washed their hands, formed a disorderly line, and then left for lunch.

At the end Helena regained her authority of manager of the classroom. Yet, the children had, quite literally, taken over the teacher and subverted the usual routine. On four occasions I observed the children pinning the teacher down. At the end of the year they even did the same with me. I find it significant that children could experience such exhilaration of emotion and action in a context that seemed so restrictive of children.

Below I describe a similar ‘subversion’ instance when children ‘mobilized’ for cake:

Most children had finished the afternoon snack and sat waiting for a second round of birthday cake a 1st period student’s mother had baked. The cook asked who wanted cake, and somebody started yelling “me, me.” Soon all the children, from the three classrooms, joined the chorus screaming “me, me, me.” The noise escalated to a very high level as the yelling children started also to bang on the tables and stomp their feet. Helena and Caroline, standing by my side, exchanged looks with me—sort of rolling their eyes, smiling, and pointing their chins at the children. Helena walked to the kitchen to help. Still smiling she told nearby children, “I am not going to give (cake) to anybody’s table this way.” After other feeble attempts to make the children stop, the adults trying to hide their smiles started handing in pieces of cake, which the children greeted with excited, almost victorious, sounds.

Children's spontaneity temporarily and playfully inverted the order at the *creche*. These experiences in a way 'magnify' the conviviality evident, for example, in the peaceful transition I described. These episodes reflected, together with a sense of children's freedom, a sense of belonging and confidence. For children to take these risks with their teacher indicates a feeling of safety. The episodes also reflected the teacher's joyful acceptance of children's vitality. Next, I continue the discussion of children's experiences, exploring teacher's *castigo*, the counterpart of children's *bagunça*.

Teachers Give Castigo

Accounts of *castigo* have permeated the discussion so far. In this section I briefly describe *castigo* as I discuss similarities and differences affecting children's experiences at the two centers.

Teacher's Punishment of Children

Different adults disciplined the children at the *creche*. The coordinators controlled the disciplinary processes and 'gave' the most serious *castigos*. Helena 'sent' the *bagunceira (o) s* or seriously misbehaving children to the office. Caroline, and depending on the gravity of the issue, Thaís, 'talked to' the child and decided on the *castigo*. They also called and met with the mothers of the *bagunceiro (a) s*. When the class 'made too much *bagunça*,' the coordinators came in the classroom, lectured the children and 'gave' or enforced the most serious *castigos*. In contrast, Sara was mostly in charge of disciplining children in her class at the *Sabiá*, deciding on punishment and contacting the parents.

At the *creche*, the most regular punishment was 'to not let children play,' particularly during recess. On one occasion, as Maria Beatriz and Rejane smacked each

other one more time, Helena said with her usual gentle, but in this case loud voice, “My goodness. It’s going to be great because I will let both of them without recess.” Other common *castigos* included forbidding the children to play and to participate in the activities, sending them to sit by themselves, and withholding or ‘not giving’ resources for the *trabalhinho* or play. Other, less common, punishments were eating alone and facing the wall. The most serious *castigo* was suspending children from classes.

The *Sabiá* curriculum focused on discipline as education versus punishment. At the beginning of the year Mariana, the coordinator, explained to me that *castigo* was against the school’s pedagogical goals and thus, that teachers at *Sabiá* did not give *castigo*. Sara discussed with the children the classroom rules in the first weeks of classes. The children dictated and then ‘signed’ the rules writing letters of their names or making a drawing on the large paper-mural that remained at eye-level in the classroom wall. The rules the children dictated included “no hitting, no spitting, no biting, no pinching, no throwing water, and being affectionate.” When Sara told misbehaving children to sit next to her, she explained that she was not ‘giving *castigo*’ but “asking them to think.” She often invited children to reflect on their *bagunça* and how it affected others. She discussed the more serious discipline issues with Mariana, who gave advice and intervened on occasion, helping in the discussion with a particular child and her/his parents.

As the school’s financial problems mounted and both the long time pedagogical coordinator and secretary left, the situation changed. Sara began to express a growing struggle with discipline issues and consequent feelings of isolation. She said it was “almost impossible” to discipline the children without the support she had previously enjoyed. On one occasion, she told me that she would “never yell like this,” referring to

her “impatience with the children and their *bagunça*.” Her growing distress seemed to result in the upping of *castigo*. At the beginning of the year Sara often discussed *bagunça* with the children, referring to the commonly agreed-upon rules and genuinely inviting children’s participation in the discussion, whereas towards the middle of the year she began scolding, yelling, threatening and giving’ *castigo*. As the *Sabiá*’s financial and pedagogical structure crumbled, discipline became increasingly more conflict-ridden. The inexperienced substitute hired for the last two months of school, untrained in the *Sabiá*’s practices, heavily scolded and punished the children. Her introduction of the ‘ugly’ or time-out chair symbolized the change in *castigo* methods at the school.

At Santa Rita, the coordinators and the teacher, although confessing doubts about the use of punishment, ‘gave’ more frequent and more severe *castigos* than Sara at the *Sabiá*. There were no classroom rules posted on the walls. For instance, when children hit, Helena did not refer to agreed-upon-rules. Instead, she told them not to hit, generally lectured them about not hitting, and often ‘gave’ *castigo*. Yet, Helena did not simply punished children. She often reasoned with them, explaining for example, that it was ‘ugly’ to hit a little classmate. As children continued to make *bagunça*, her reasoning would sound more like scolding. Without a word, she sometimes moved misbehaving children to a different seat in the room. Nevertheless, she often punished children.

The *creche* staff did not share a unified view of either *bagunça* or *castigo*, which seemed to lead to erratic punishment methods. Staff, such as the cook and janitor, who supervised the children in Helena’s class outside the classroom, ‘gave’ *castigos* that Helena and the coordinators seemed to find excessive. Unlike Helena, Thaís, and Caroline, these other adults heavily scolded and threatened children with harsh punishment. The third-period teacher, later fired, was particularly punitive. For instance,

she yelled at the children to shut up and, on one occasion, threatened to prohibit them to join the most important school party. She also introduced a dreaded punishment for children who disrupted naptime. As Davidson and Maria Luísa explained, she “put” children “for a long time” in the relatively dark storage room. Only in late August the transition to a staff that, in Thaís’s opinion, was “better with the kids,” was completed. Thaís, Caroline and Helena were the only who remained the entire year. As a result, the harsher scolding and *castigos* seemed to diminish.

Nonetheless, difficulties with disciplining persisted. Not “knowing what to do,” Helena and the coordinators “had to,” as Caroline explained, resort to different *castigos* and increased punishment. Thaís and Jacqueline, the *creche*’s director and coordinator, and Helena and Sara, the teachers at the *creche* and at the *Sabiá* considered discipline one of their main challenges. Both Helena and Sara told me that they preferred ‘talking to giving *castigo*’ but at times they did not know what else to do. Faced with children’s *bagunça*, both teachers increasingly ‘gave’ or ‘put’ the children ‘of *castigo*.’ If the *Sabiá* curriculum served as an important (if increasingly fading) influence, the “old time” discipline, which “requires children to be still with their shirts tucked in,” as Thaís referred to the founders’ views, still seemed to influence practices at the *creche*. While Thaís, Caroline and Helena wanted to change the old discipline format, they often seemed at a loss. As Thaís explained, Helena “really loved” the children and had “infinite patience,” rarely raising her voice. However, despite her sunny and kind disposition, Helena confessed that she gave *castigo* because she “did not know what to do with the *bagunça*, especially the fighting.”

The issue of suspension of children at the *creche* illustrates this struggle with *bagunça* and *castigo* and the resultant erratic quality of children’s experiences of *castigo*.

Often, like with the ‘starting of recess’ or the ‘starting of dressing up,’ a teacher or coordinator came up with a ‘new idea,’ which was then tried out. The apparently random and shifting *castigos* suggested by different people further reflect the overall volatility of children’s experiences. The coordinators started to ‘give suspension’ to punish and restraint the more extreme *bagunça* such as hitting and openly confronting the teacher and other adults. At some point in the middle of the year Helena told me that the coordinators “started giving suspensions.” She could not tell who had proposed the suspension of young children and why. When I returned a few months later, she explained, “We are not giving suspensions anymore.” A few days later Paulo Henrique had a fit of rage, and Caroline suspended him. Helena explained, “We started with suspension again.”

Helena, Caroline and Thaís explained the suspensions saying that the *bagunça* was getting out of control, with children fighting and resisting the activities ‘too much.’ The *castigo* was suspension ‘from classes,’ representing a traditional form of school punishment. Thaís further explained, “The suspensions are more for the mothers than for the children. They need to help; we can’t do it alone.” She further elaborated that because suspension affected the mothers personally, i.e. it forced them to stay home or find additional childcare, she hoped they would “talk to their children about behaving at the *creche*.” She concluded that “at least (the suspensions) would make the mothers stop taking the *creche* for granted.” She indicated that ultimately, the suspension of children was used as a threat, and thus, and represented a form of *castigo* for the mothers.¹⁹

Suspending pre-schoolers ‘from classes’ is a complex issue that highlights central pedagogical tensions in the lives of children, adults, and children’s families. It assumes

¹⁹ During an informal discussion of my data, Fúlvia Rosemberg pointed out that the suspension of children was a form of punishment of the mothers.

that children's nonconformity stemmed from constructs of improper parenting. Above all, it reflects the contradictions of disciplining young children to conform to a school-based model that privileges traditional teacher-directed activities.

In sum, Helena and Sara 'gave *castigo*' to restrict *bagunça* and 'make' the children 'be quiet' to engage with the official activities. Thus, *castigo* was mainly a measure to control children to conform to the pedagogical requirements. Of note in this discussion is teachers' reticence to give *castigo*. In the end, punishment was the only 'effective' tool at their disposal.

Meanings of the Sad and Happy Waves during Play

My discussion thus far suggests significant mis-encounters of the pedagogy: the children had boundless energy and endless creative potential that was stifled by teacher's actions, despite her best intentions. During inside-play, Helena remained in their roles of conductor of the activities. As a result, for the most part, children were expected to remain in their passive places of 'recipients' of teachers' actions. Children's tension and conflicts during play seemed to further reveal their struggle with their lack of agency in the *creche*. Children anxiously attempted to exert their agency by exerting control over play. It is important to note that violence was not an inherent part of children's social identity, but became inherent to their play identity. For the most part, children simply wanted to play and to learn. Children did not want to fight rather the pedagogy seemed to lead them into fighting. Children's fighting during play further reflected the pedagogy's unintended consequences: violence and conflict emerged from pedagogical practices going astray.

While on the surface children's experiences of play may seem to have been one about accessing and controlling toys, it was more an issue of how Helena constructed restricted opportunities for the children to play. She knew children needed to play, but her goals for children as active learners were much less clear. Hence, her actions were central to the conflicting play that emerged in the classroom.

Still, despite the waiting, the conflicts, and the distress, it is noteworthy that children played. The happy-waves once again reveal children collaborating and sustaining pleasurable play episodes, often with Helena's support. Children mainly and strongly wanted to play and learn. Even during the most conflict-ridden occasions, they seemed to recover and manage to play. The teacher often also helped in their recovery.

Bagunça and *castigo* were other central dimensions of children's experiences at the *creches*, permeating children's engagement with the *trabalhinhos* and their play. *Bagunça* and *castigo* greatly varied in form and intensity. I further discuss these central pedagogical experiences in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6: CHILDREN'S MEANINGS OF *BAGUNÇA* AND *CASTIGO*

There are times that the boys make *bagunça*, someone hits the other. Today there were some who hit the other. Today the aunt said, "Today Samira is not going to the patio and neither Davidson nor Rejane." And then it was that he started to fight. And then Luís 'stuck' in front of me, and then I called the aunt. Cláudia called the aunt, and the aunt spoke like this, "If you do it like this, you are no longer going to the patio." And then everybody stayed quiet, and the aunt gave the exercises and at the end gave toys.

In this chapter I first discuss how children's accounts of *bagunça* and *castigo* permeated their narratives of their pre-school lives. In the second main section I discuss what children said about their feelings and views regarding these prevalent aspects of their pre-school lives. Finally, I discuss children's views or evaluations of *castigo*.

Gabriela's story above helps introduce these themes in this chapter. Her story captures the ebb and flow of life at the *creche*: the recurrent waves of 'not being quiet,' conflicts, punishment, and 'being quiet' to 'receive' the activities 'given' by the teachers. Ultimately, the story tells how children seemed to find the conflict-ridden dynamics of *bagunça* and *castigo* central to life at the *creche* Santa Rita and also at *Sabiá*. Children translated these central experiences in central narratives, indicating that they perceived *bagunça* and *castigo* as crucial experiences in 'need of meaning' (Bruner, 1990).

I start by reviewing two key conversations with Gabriela S. and Cláudia. These conversations help portray from children's perspective how *bagunça* and *castigo* might have 'felt like,' introducing children's meaning-making of *bagunça* and *castigo*.

Children seemed to consider hitting, *bagunça*, and *castigo* central and stressful experiences, which routinely became the focus of their pre-school narratives. I asked the two girls what they liked and disliked at the *creche*, and their answers revolved around *bagunça* and *castigo*. They had ‘stayed of *castigo*’ earlier that day for harshly slapping each other over the control of a book. Both girls poignantly voiced what these experiences might ‘have been like’ for the young children in the centers:

Letícia: Gabi, what do you like the best here at the *creche*?

Gabriela: I like to play, like to do, like to play, like that nobody makes *bagunça*, like that everybody listens to the aunt like I do. And I tell the aunt and tell, and raise my hand and don’t say anything. When the aunt asks to lower the head, I lower; there are people who do not lower.

Letícia: Oh Gabi, and is there something that you don’t like here at the *creche*?

Gabriela S.: Fight with the classmates and neither to do *chatice* (annoy/bother) with them, and neither to do *gracinha* (little teasing) with then, and neither to help them to do not make mistakes.

Letícia: Do you like or don’t you like to help?

Gabriela: I like. (...)

Letícia: And why don’t you like fights?

Gabriela: Because otherwise goes to the doctor and stays everybody at the doctor without the mother. (...)

Letícia: And whom don’t you like?

Gabriela: Cláudia, she does *falta de educação* (is rude) with me; does curse words with me and curses me.

Letícia: Gabi, what is your favorite place at the *creche*?

Gabriela: The classroom and the little playground. (...) Because the patio is for us to play and the classroom is for us to do the *trabalhinhos*. (...) (conversation about what she likes to do and play).

Letícia: Is there a place at the *creche* that you don’t like?

Gabriela: I don’t like without an electric-fan, without mother and father.

Letícia: And what do you find most difficult?

Gabriela: Exercise.

Letícia: And which exercise is the most difficult, name, color...?

Gabriela: Name. And we do not *aguenta* (can’t stand) to make everything (that the teacher requires us to do), otherwise our head hurts, our ears hurt, we stay irritated, start to yell ... and when a boy yells in my ear I stay with my ear hurting.

Letícia: So you said that when it’s getting to the end of the exercise and you can’t stand it anymore, you start to get tired and start to yell?

Gabriela: No, the boys (could be boys and girls) who yell with the aunt, hit the aunt, pull the aunt. One day Cláudia came and *pa* (slap sound) on the aunt. The aunt said: “Oh, Cláudia, this hurts; you are not going to play at the little patio because you are very *sem educação* (ill-mannered).” The boys were not doing

anything and then Cláudia yelled with them, and they went away to the other classroom. Nobody stayed in our classroom any more.

Letícia: What do you think about all this?

Gabriela Santos: (I think) it's bad, think is well deserved (that Cláudia was 'of *castigo*'), and think it is lack of education (disrespectful). I don't like (it).

While Gabriela said that she liked to play and to do the *trabalhinhos*, she quickly turned the conversation to her desire 'to be good' and an earnest condemnation of fighting. Her description of obedience to the teacher is a poignant commentary on the submission of children's bodies ('lower the head' and 'be quiet') and also of children's voices ("not say anything"). It seems that only through story ('alone in the doctor without the mother') could she convey the full range of her feelings about 'not being good.'

While Gabriela said that she did not like fights because they led to a sort of disaster, Cláudia indicated that fights resulted from dissension among children and resulted in 'mad' adults, a stressful event. Cláudia talked about her feelings of anxiety around fighting:

Letícia: Clau, what don't you like here?

Cláudia: I don't like is to fight with the people, that my mother stays *brava* (mad) at me; this is what I don't like.

Letícia: Clau, so tell me, what is the place of the *creche* that you don't like?

Cláudia: I don't like to stay inside the classroom when it's stinking, and then it's too hot.

Letícia: It's hot indeed... you don't like the classroom, why?

Cláudia: I don't like is to stay inside the classroom. (...)

Letícia: Why don't you?

Cláudia: It goes happening that everybody fights. (...)

Letícia: Why does this happens?

Cláudia: Because ... the children²⁰ fight because they don't like each person.

Letícia: Who fights with you?

Cláudia: It's Gabriela, who stays mimicking me...(.)

Letícia: For example, if a new girl came to study here, and she went to your room, what is important for her to know? What would you tell her?

²⁰ Julia used the word *meninos*, which in Portuguese means boys. However, I translated it as children, because since nouns are gendered in the Portuguese language, traditionally the masculine form is used to represent both genders.

Cláudia: You have to obey the aunt Helena, because I don't like of *brava* (mad) person, no. I will even escape this *creche*, because the aunt Helena *está uma fera* (is like a beast).

Letícia: What is she doing that she is like a beast?

Cláudia: Ah, she is fighting with us, because she is not a lot like this that fights with the people who hit.

Letícia: Does she hit?

Cláudia: No, with the people that hit she puts of *castigo*.

Letícia: Oh, she fights (argues) with those who hit, I understand. How does she say, show me.

Cláudia: Hit me...

(I pretend to hit and to snatch something from Cláudia saying, "give me, give me").

Cláudia: "Aunt, she hit me..." (Using a child's voice, and then shifting to a teacher's voice) "You are going to be of *castigo* for a week," that's what the aunt said.

Cláudia's comment that "everybody fights" represents the chaos I described in the previous chapter. Gabriela's affirmation that she likes that "nobody makes *bagunça*" points to children's dislike of conflicts. These two comments reflect children's apparent strong anxiety over the dichotomy of wanting 'to be good' and 'being bad.' Although "everybody" made *bagunça*, children seemed to want everybody to be quiet. In her advise to a newcomer, Cláudia, like Gabriela, emphasized the need to obey the teacher. She also voiced her anxiety with the teacher's scolding. Cláudia further explained how the teacher 'fought' with or scolded the children who hit. As a pretend-teacher she gave a weeklong *castigo*, indicating the pervasiveness and 'naturalness' of punishment.

Both Gabriela and Cláudia established a relationship between, on the one hand, the constant *bagunça* and fighting, and, on the other, the difficulties of 'staying inside the classroom' i.e. the conflicting dynamics resulting from the teacher-control of the activities. Therefore, they seemed to situate the dynamics of *bagunça* and *castigo* in the larger context of the pedagogy that pervaded at the *creche*. While they reaffirmed their enjoyment of the *trabalhinhos*, they also indicated that they did not like 'what happened' in the classroom. Cláudia cleverly makes a distinction between liking the classroom and

disliking ‘staying in the classroom.’ Gabriela’s responses can represent a telling picture of life at the *creche*: the hot room, the long exercises that she ‘could not stand’ to complete, the noise level, children’s irritation, the conflicts and physical fights, and finally, the outcome: the teacher’s scolding and giving *castigo*. Cláudia also indicated that the routine outcome of ‘staying inside’ included *bagunça*, particularly hitting, a ‘mad’ and scolding teacher, and finally, *castigo*. Next I extend Gabriela and Cláudia’s discussion to other children who also saw *bagunça* and *castigo* as central, prevalent and troubling experiences that they disliked ‘the most.’

The Pervasiveness of *Bagunça* and *Castigo*

Ah, me first. We were making *bagunça*, but a lot, a lot, and then we stayed of *castigo* one day. We did not go to the little park, only that the aunt did not let (us take home) the invitation, the invitation of the fathers, of father’s day. And then we stayed sad, sad. On Father’s day the two classrooms won invitations, and we didn’t. Finished (Gabriela S.).

Most children’s narratives about the *creche* and the *Sabiá* centered on *bagunça* and *castigo*. Children viewed *bagunça* and *castigo* as pervasive experiences. They often referred to *bagunça* as “a lot,” “too much,” and occurring “all the time” and “everyday.” They also talked frequently about *castigo*. In this section, I discuss the pervasiveness of *bagunça* and *castigo* in (a) children’s stories about the *creche* and the *Sabiá*, (b) their pretend-play with props, and (c) their general accounts of life at the two centers.

Bagunça and Castigo: Pervasive Themes in Children's 'Stories about the School'

I regularly asked the children to tell me 'stories about the school.' Just like Gabriela's stories, children's stories were overwhelmingly about *bagunça* and *castigo* as illustrated by the following examples:

Letícia: Washington, would you tell me a story about the *creche*?

Washington: Lucas stayed pushing me on the patio; it went until I got hurt, and then I told the aunt, and the aunt put him of *castigo*. He didn't go.

Davidson: I will tell a (true) one. Do you know how the aunt fights with (scolds) me? (...) A Gabriela Matos, I think, was wanting [sic] to beat Maria Luísa. The aunt fought with her, did you understand? (...) How? Edu stayed like this and Gabriela was like this, kicking. (...) And Edu was doing like this (giving the finger) to the aunt, and then the aunt called his mother, she was going to call his mother, and he hit me. Later it was lunch, did you understand?

Letícia: Marcela, tell me a story about the *creche*, any story. Once upon a time there was a girl who went to the *creche*... It can be pretend, true, something that happened.

Marcela: Once upon a time, those girls were here, and then I will punch their heads, and they said like this, "Oh, Marcela, do you think that you are very little smart? So come here and hold me, otherwise I will give ... if you don't come close to me I will not take you to my house, to my cousins' party." That's it.

Davidson: One day (it) happened that Luís Eduardo, he lifted the table and threw it on the floor, (he) broke the table. The aunt bought a new one today. And then the aunt put him of *castigo*. It was Luís Otávio. And then he got three chairs and threw them on the floor, threw a table on the floor, (it was) Paulo Henrique. And then do you know what happened? And then Paulo broke the table and stayed of suspension. But his suspension was of almost a thousand days! And then we stayed playing with him when he came back.

Daniele: Today a woman brought some little gifts for us to take home for Christmas, but somebody are not going to win; few people are going to win because the *bagunça* is too much. Davidson is not going to win. Luís Eduardo maybe ...

Although I encouraged *Sabiá* children to tell stories about their school lives, they rarely offered a response. Instead they often retold me familiar tales, such as 'Red-hiding

Hood.’ They also sang a song, and even said that they did not know how to tell a story about the school. The retelling of tales was part of the almost daily routine during circle time. Notwithstanding, the sole story about life at *Sabiá* was a ‘story of *bagunça*’:

Leticia: Cleberson, would you tell me a story about the school?

Cleberson: The children scrawled the blackboard (...) and then they continued after the aunt turned (to the other side).

The stories of *bagunça* and *castigo*, as meaningful texts that children produced, reflected their views and experiences of ‘what happened.’ For instance, the play between Washington and Lucas, who were good friends, often ended with disputes over toys. Washington’s story serves to highlight his ‘side’ of the fight with Lucas. While Davidson responded that his story would be a true story about why the teacher scolded him, he soon deviated with an account of why the teacher scolded other children, a possibly less threatening topic. He recounted that day’s fights and then focused on the seemingly serious instances of Edu ‘giving the finger’ to Helena and the coordinators phoning Edu’s mother. When Davidson said, “later it was lunch,” he seemed to be marking the beginning and the end of a story and that he viewed *bagunça* and *castigo* as an inherent part of life at the *creche*. During recess that day, Marcela had a ‘bad’ fight over a doll during recess that day. Her pretend-story seemed an effort to ‘re-present’ what happened. “Those girls” could refer to the girls that she had earlier fought. In the story, Marcela is the one who punches. Significantly, the story allowed Marcela the possibility of mitigation (Bruner, 1990) and resolution of the conflict. At the end of the story, Marcela suggested the prospect of friendship offering an invitation to her house or cousin’s party.

Davidson’s second story is about the ‘worst *bagunça* ever’ that resulted in the ‘worst *castigo* ever.’ Again the story presents a form of resolution. He suggested that the collective, not just himself, embraced Paulo Henrique upon his return. In his telling of

‘what happened,’ Davidson also appraised the *castigo* of “almost a thousand days.” Other children, as well as Davidson, often named Paulo Henrique as someone they did not like to sit close to and did not like at the *creche* because Paulo H. hit ‘a lot’ and made ‘too much’ *bagunça*. Therefore, the affirmation of friendship involved in “staying playing” with the *bagunceiro* could indicate a statement against the *castigo*.

Daniele’s story retells the important event of a gift-bearing visitor during the holiday season and Helena’s threats of preventing misbehaving children from taking their Christmas gifts home. Daniele, like Gabriela, repeated the story line of the teacher’s restrictive view of *bagunça* and her routine threats of *castigo*. Cleberson also recounted a story of a *bagunça* that occurred when the teacher was preoccupied with other matters.

Only four children’s stories were not directly about *bagunça* and *castigo*. Two of these four stories hinted at the prevalence of *bagunça* and *castigo*. Matias told a story focused on play: “We are making a big snake; we are playing of play dough, and later of little car. And later we sleep, and then we go to the patio to play hide and seek, me, Lucas, and Paulo, and Washington, and Luís Otávio, and later nobody else.” His concluding remark seems to refer to the routine conflicts during play at the *creche*, signaling his desire to play uninterrupted. *Bagunça* and *castigo* seemed to be implicit also in Matias’s story ‘about the classroom’ below:

The aunt tells a little story, tells, we play, we wash our hands, have lunch, and we stay little quiet when we stay at the little circle; we stay little quiet at the table, we drink water, we brush our teeth.

One reading of this story is a description of the routine teacher’s requirement that children ‘be quiet’ in preparation for an activity. The story reveals how ‘to be quiet’ was as much part of the day as ‘to do the *trabalhinho*.’ Another reading of the story is a

narrative of order or a statement of ‘being good’ that was also present in Gabriela and Davidson’s stories.

While other stories ‘about the school’ offered a more diverse picture of life at the *creche*, they nevertheless included attention to *bagunça* and *castigo*. The group story below starts with a ‘canonical’ description of children’s activities, and, after my prompting, turns into a story of ‘breach:’

Letícia: So each of you tells me a story about the *creche*!

Cláudia: First you (Maria) (...) No, I will tell, I willtell! We...
Of what? About what?

Maria: We were on vocation.

Cláudia: We color, we build, we play, we make games at the patio.

Maria: We color.

Cláudia: Yes.

Maria: We make homework.

Letícia: Tell me something that happened... one day, once ...

Maria: Henrique...

Cláudia: No, not about Henrique. (Laughing laying on the floor).

Maria: Henrique pushed Matias there (pointed to place), and his (Matias) tennis shoes were slippery.

Previously I discussed Daniele’s story below, which starts with Matias’ sadness after he had just returned from ‘staying’ at the office:

Matias is by our side sad because his stomach hurts, and he stayed at the office. In the classroom the aunt sometimes gives play dough for us to play. Like for example, today the aunt gave play dough for us to play. Today during recess she gave a thing that had gas, a little stove, paint, a lot of little food, there was egg, hamburger meat, a lot of little things, hot-dog, sweet-pepper.

The overt recounting of Matias’ *castigo* seems purposeful, almost as if Daniele is setting the context of the story by disturbing the ‘nice’ narrative or the happy description of all the things that the ‘aunt gave’ children for playing. Cláudia’s ‘good’ story too is infused with *bagunça* and *castigo*:

This school is very pretty; it's beautiful. Uh, uh, this school is where adults stay to make on the computer how are the things that children do. And then you stay little good that are going to win a prize after you make the things little pretty. And then when you are finished making, you stay little good that you go home. And then play when you are little good, whoever is stubborn, is not going to play in the afternoon. (...)

Cláudia's story of her "beautiful" school, together with Gabriela's description of 'being good' and Matias' story of 'being quiet,' all point to 'goodness' and hence to disciplined behavior being integral to the regular activities in the pre-school.

Life at the *creche* for Cláudia was pictured in terms of rewards for 'being good,' which include winning prizes when making "things little pretty," going home, and being able (or allowed) to play. In the same casual tone, describing a routine fact of her pre-school life, Cláudia turned to a story of 'not being good,' introducing *castigo*. In this sense, her story suggests a dualism of the good/obedient versus bad/disobedient. Cláudia's narrative references to 'being good' and 'stubborn' captured the internalized polarization of children's pedagogical experiences at the pre-school. Her comment that children are 'allowed to play' when they are 'good' reveals a narrative of self where 'being good' or 'bad' centers on the obedience to the teacher.

As a whole, the stories indicate that children not only saw *bagunça* and *castigo* as pervasive experiences, but experiences 'in need of' narrative, that is, the 'what happened' that they chose to tell about and interpret. Children's narratives of their pre-school experiences as they describe being quiet and receiving *castigo* are connected images of their experiences. The stories may be only stories, yet, at what point do these stories become children's own world-view? Hence, children's stories raise the larger question of who the children are becoming.

In the section below, I examine how children continued to tell about *bagunça* and *castigo* in their pretend-play about school.

The Pervasiveness of Bagunça/Castigo in Children's Pretend-Play about School

When they pretend-played with the school props, *bagunça* and *castigo* themes were also pervasive. When props fell the children incorporated the unplanned action in their play as *bagunça* such as pushing, hitting, or failing to be quiet, and the pretend-teachers promptly responded with *castigos*.

On one pretend-play occasion, Cláudia seemed to have a hard time keeping the children-props standing. She pretended that the children were pushing each other and that the teacher interpreted the incident as a fight. The teacher in her story said, “Then you move over and end this fight because you can’t stay close to this boy, because he is very *chato* (boring/bad). And you move over here, otherwise he will hit you.” Cleberson created a similar narrative when he could not keep his prop from falling over. His ‘pretend-teacher’ said, “Oh, stay little quiet, sit at the circle.” The prop fell again and I asked what does the teacher say when this happened. He responded within the pretend-story frame by holding the teacher prop and pretending the teacher yelled really loud: “Sit down.” Also at the *Sabiá*, when his prop-boy kept falling over, Paulo said, “be quiet.” I asked him what the teacher would say and he responded, “put of *castigo*.”

The following play episode is a more complete example of how *bagunça* and *castigo* permeated children’s pretend-play. I used props and initiated a story of a fight over a book. Cláudia effortlessly moved towards an elaboration of the *bagunça* and *castigo* theme. As she set out the toys to play, I pretended two ‘children’ fought and one of them said, “I hit her.” Cláudia quickly turned the prop for the pretend-play teacher

towards the ‘hitting girl’ and said; “Go to your place now. (...) I am going to put you of *castigo* if you don’t stop.” Assuming the role of the girl, I said, “But she got my little book aunt. (...) It was mine, and then she got it, then I hit her.” The ‘teacher’ responded, “But you have is to ask if this little book is mine. So I will put you of *castigo*.” Cláudia repositioned the toys and then placed a boy-prop away from the others. She interweaves the voices of a narrator, a girl, and a teacher in her story:

Narrator: He was there of *castigo*... and turned that way, because the aunt did not let him turn. And then he cried.

Teacher (with a consoling voice): *Sarou, sarou* (it’s healed, it’s healed).

Narrator: And then... (Looking for prop briefcase) Oh, no! The little briefcase (we) put here; it must be.”

Teacher (in front of class): Guys, guys, we have this little airplane here oh, that I made out of paper; it’s because we are going to make this, but not him. He is of *castigo*.

Girl: This book is not hers, aunt!

Teacher: Ah, the little red book. And now there isn’t any ... you are going to be without. (Holding teacher prop, Cláudia took away the little book from prop girl).

Cláudia’s story offers rich insights, for example, her use of Helena’s language. Her second story below continues to reflect the significance of children’s narratives of *bagunça* and *castigo* during pretend-play:

Teacher: I don’t know; why did you hit me?

Girl: You don’t know; I did not hit you, not at all.

‘Teacher’ (addressing the class): She hit me.

‘Girl’: I didn’t.

‘Teacher’ (with suave voice): But do not hit again.

‘Girl’: O.K. aunt.

‘Teacher’ (talking probably to the class): The notebook was so ugly because he didn’t care; he didn’t care because did not want to.

Letícia: What is in his notebook?

‘Teacher’ (due to the voice she used, I assumed she was ‘in character’): (It) has is bad thing. He only reads thing of hitting, only this. Only reads thing of hitting.

Letícia: What about her notebook (pointing to girl); is it good?

Cláudia (nodding yes): Her notebook has a little pocket that is hers because the aunt did not let (or allow) her get it. Do you know why?

Letícia: Why?

Cláudia: Because she (the teacher) didn't let (allow). (Changing to teacher's voice)

'Teacher': Here is the little paper; here is where he is going to draw. (...) (Yelling) Put the homework away in the folders! We hold the paper like this, write like this, and then later draw, write the little letters that are high-case and low-case.

Cláudia's second story parallels the sequence of Gabriela's story from this chapter's introduction: (a) conflicts (in this case between the teacher and a child); (b) resolution, teacher's scolding; and (c) the 'giving' of *trabalhinhos*. The story offers insight into children's meaning-making of *bagunça* and *castigo*. Cláudia pretended that a child hit the teacher, apparently reliving her own experience. This experience was verified when Gabriela told me using a stern and disapproving tone that Cláudia "fought with" and hit the "aunt more than one time." I too had observed Cláudia being physical with the teacher. On one occasion, she lay down on the floor and refused to leave the classroom. She then slapped Helena on her behind. Hitting the teacher, albeit half-jokingly, was a serious breach, as Gabriela's indicated.

The story presents additional insights. The prevalence of conflicts in children's accounts is evident in Cláudia's reference to the "ugly" notebook with a "bad thing." The evaluation of hitting as 'ugly' and 'bad' reflects both children's dislike of hitting and the teacher's scolding of children who make *bagunça*, particularly children who hit. Cláudia also tells a story of teacher's control of resources as she responded to my question about the girl's notebook. Cláudia pictured the extent of the teacher's authority when she (a) brought up the issue of the teacher not allowing the girl to 'get' her little purse, (b) asked why the teacher does not allow the girl to get her little purse, and (c) indicated that the teacher's will is a strong enough reason to refuse children's access to resources, even those that belong to the children.

Cláudia interprets her experiences through story. In making meaning, she seemingly reconstructed the lived experience of hitting the teacher by inserting a harmonious resolution. Thus the story offered redemption in the form of the fictional teacher's forgiveness indicated by the understanding tone in her request that the fictional girl does not hit and the girl's agreement not to hit again.

In sum, children's stories of *bagunça* and *castigo* seem to represent a concerted attempt to make sense of these prevalent experiences, which children seem to perceive as 'in need' of narrative. Below I continue to discuss children's narratives focusing on the pervasiveness of *bagunça* and *castigo* in children's conversations with me about diverse aspects of their pre-school experiences.

*The Pervasiveness of Bagunça and Castigo in Children's Accounts of
their Lived-Experiences*

Bagunça and *castigo* were not only ever present in children's stories; they were also prevalent as they talked about their experiences at the pre-schools. For instance, at the *Sabiá*, Rivaldo's description of what the children did in the classroom indicates a view of *bagunça* as something children 'made' regularly as the *trabalhinho* or play. As he joined me one day on the patio, I asked him what the children were doing in the classroom. His response was matter of fact: drawing and hitting.

Rivaldo: (They) were drawing, were hitting. (...) Renan (is the one) who hits.

Letícia: What did you did you do after that?

Rivaldo: Drew, after made a little circle.

While children seemed to consider *bagunça* and *castigo* part of their routine, they did not seem to consider these experiences as 'canonical,' but more likely 'pervasive breach.' They repeatedly included *bagunça* and *castigo* in their depiction of life in the

classroom. *Bagunça* and *castigo* became a strong thread in their accounts about school. Below I explain this theme. First I discuss children's stories of their pre-school experiences and then focus on (a) children's accounts of hitting and fighting, (b) of *castigo*, and (c) how children greeted my return with stories of *castigo/castigo*.

During our conversations children routinely used a narrative mode to tell about their experiences. They talked about their lives at the *creche* and the *Sabiá* often through stories, as indicated by their use of a storytelling tone of voice and story elements, such as "and then." Continuing the conversation above about "drawing and hitting," Rivaldo told me about what and how much he liked to play. He then brought up a quarrel between a teacher and a student's grandmother. The story of the quarrel, a breach event, prompted a more personal story that he wanted to tell me: a tale of play, fight, and friendship.

And then (Cleberson's grandmother) *xingou* (fought with) (a teacher) close to the others, and then she said that (the teacher) could not do that anymore, and then she said she was sorry (*pediu desculpa*), and then I said that sorry does not heal. And I have something else to tell you. I was playing with Renan, isn't it? And then Cleberson damaged Renan's glasses, and then Renan hit Cleberson, and he hug me. Because Renan is my friend, isn't he? And then ... he wasn't, now he is ... and then Renan, and the boys stayed (talking) like this: "Oh, Renan, where are you going?" And then the boys *xingou* Renan, and then I was hugging him.

Rivaldo's narrative illustrates how children often changed their routine accounts, in this instance a discussion about liking to play, into story-like accounts of *bagunça* and *castigo*. A second example further illustrates this point. Here Marcela and I talked as she colored a ditto of fishes. She started telling me about how she colored pretty, then started a story about fishes, interrupted it, and finally, told a story about hitting and friendship. The Clara's boys were Marcela's neighbors, who also attended the Santa Rita.

Only the little fish that I color pretty. Only this (fish), but nobody (a different fish) will go... The Clara's boys, all of them, talked like this (*falaram assim*): "Oh, mother, all the boys are hitting me and then I cry." My mother is hitting the boys

who would be at my house. (...) Hit Luís Eduardo. Only Luís Eduardo. Later I did not hit Davidson. Davidson is my friend.

The conversations with Rivaldo and with Marcela above illustrate the theme of this chapter: *Bagunça* and *castigo* were pervasive children's accounts, or their stories about their experiences. Important to note is that the children and the teacher considered hitting and physical fights a *bagunça* punishable with *castigo*.

In the example below I asked Cláudia about her 'little classmates' at the *creche*, and she told me a story about a stubborn boy who disobeyed 'the aunt,' a more classical example of *bagunça*.

A little classmate of mine, he was at a school, his name is Lucas de Farias; he is very stubborn. And then the aunt told him like this for him to stop to talk and he stopped on the spot, only that the moment the aunt turned her face to tell us, he starts the play.

A final example that conveys the dominance of *bagunça* and *castigo* in children's accounts was a response that Gabriela S. and Davidson gave to my question of "what children can do at the *creche*:"

Gabriela: Can do, can do some things, do the *trabalhinhos* all, go to the patio, and then the mother goes and tells what the son did.

Letícia: Who tells?

Davidson and Gabriela: Aunt Helena.

Gabriela: Edu was too much... then (Thaís) called Edu's mother down here; it lasted a lot. (*Demorou muito*). And then, talked. The bus got all full and Edu...

Davidson: No, it wasn't the bus, it was here in the classroom. Because, I will speak, because Edu's mother went down there, only that Edu was getting the scissors, pencil, one little box. (...) He was putting in (the things he picked up) in his folder. (...) Aunt Helena opened it and saw everything.

Letícia: Wow, and then Helena talked to Edu's mother, right? And what did Edu's mother did?

Davidson: She talked to Edu and told him not to do this anymore.

Gabriela: Cláudia, when the aunt *manda* (orders) her to sit down, she says, "I won't sit down, I won't."

Letícia: And what does Aunt Helena do?

Davidson: Nothing.

Gabriela: Nothing. Only says this, "if you don't sit down there at your place I will call your mother down here."

Davidson: Doesn't say this.

Gabriela: Says indeed.

Davidson: Some days she says. Some days she puts (of *castigo*) there at the patio, outside, at the little toys.

Moving from a list of what she did at the Santa Rita, Gabriela shifted her account to include *bagunça* or 'bad' behavior when she began talking about 'the teacher calling the mother.' Davidson promptly provided a story of what happened—Edu had put classroom supplies on his folder and the teacher talked with his mother for a long time. Gabriela then added a second tale of disobedience and *castigo*.

Children's pervasive Accounts of Hitting and Fighting

On one occasion I asked Marcela and Gabriela what they did at the *creche* "all day long," and soon began a heated discussion of hitting:

Marcela: All day I tell everybody who stays here at the school, even... then Luís pinches everybody, hits, let me see who else, Davidson hits everybody.

Marcela (pointing to Gabriela as she approached us): She also hits.

Letícia: Gabriela hits?

Gabriela S.: (That's a) lie.

Marcela: Hits. She hit Isabel tomorrow [sic]!

Letícia: Did you hit Isabel tomorrow [sic]?

Gabriela: It was Rejane.

Marcela: Luís hits, Henrique hits, Fernando hits.

Gabriela: Jeison.

Marcela: Jeison pinches.

Gabriela: Bites.

Marcela: Bites, scratches.

Letícia: Guys, what else happens here? Gabriela, why do children come here?

Gabriela: Here, but I don't hit.

Letícia: You don't hit.

Gabriela: I have started to stop to hit.

As was common in my conversations with the children, they often changed the topic of the conversation mid-stream. Continuing the conversation above, Marcela began

to show me how she danced ballet. However, talk of *bagunça* was omnipresent. Moving from demonstrating a ballet movement, she returned to *bagunça*: “Look how Maria Beatriz does with the finger to us. And (she) gives the finger, does like this.”

Children regularly came to me to tell me about *bagunça*, particularly when severe acts had occurred, such as giving the finger and hitting:

Joana: ... He hits.

Letícia: Who hits here in the classroom?

Joana: Renan... One day Ivo hit. (...)

Gabriela Santos: Washington bit Daniel.

Letícia: And then, what happened?

Gabriela Santos: And then I told the aunt. (...) (The aunt) is going to tell the mother to stop.

Letícia: Is (Paulo Henrique) ‘of suspension’ again?

Gabriela Santos: Again, he is beating me.

Davidson: Threw the mat. Hit her.

Gabriela: Yes, bit me, pinched. I was bitten here and it bled; stayed a mark of blood on me; bleeding...

Davidson: Stayed like this, round...until getting (he drew the mark on air to show it was round).

Gabriela: Look here what he did; like this, this is the mark of the bite.

Gabriela was not only graphic in her account, she was also persistent in communicating the event to me.

Children’s pervasive Accounts of Castigo

Castigo was also a common theme in children’s tales. Like hitting, *castigo* seemed to be a prevalent experience they talked about and ‘in need of telling.’ For instance, on one occasion, Matias approached me and said, “Tomorrow I can’t come because the aunt does not let (as in allow) me.” I asked why, and he said, “Because I did not (as in refused to) dance.” On another, I asked Gabriela what she liked the most to do

at the *creche*. At first she responded that she liked to play and to make flan, but soon her tone changed. She volunteered, “Make trabalhinhas, color, make party, everything that we do that we have to do, because if we don’t, and give a little slap; (the teacher will) call the mother.”

Gabriela’s response is a vivid example of how children’s accounts of *castigo* permeated a canonical list of activities. When I asked Cláudia and Daniele what they do at the *creche*, their response was similar to Gabriela’s. First they said play, but soon they started to tell me about the *castigo* Maria Helena, the new teacher had handed out. Boisterously, they kept interrupting one another, and I could barely follow them.

Cláudia: We play. Tell there Daniele, what do we do?

Daniele: We play.

Cláudia: No, how did the aunt of the night said? The aunt Caroline or then the Aunt Denise or then the aunt Helena? Like this, says this, oh Letícia. (Pointing to blackboard).

Cláudia: Maria Helena ... aunt Helena...

Daniele: And then later they turn off (the light), and then aunt Helena ..

Letícia: So, wait a little. (Let’s) see if I understood. When it’s time to sleep, during naptime, the aunt puts the name of those who make noise on the blackboard. And then what happens?

Cláudia: The moment the aunt puts the name, she doesn’t let me go play.

From most my conversations with the children, they seemed eager to talk about *bagunça* and *castigo* and often shifted the focus of their accounts to include these themes.

Greeting Accounts of Bagunça and Castigo upon my Return to the Centers

Children’s eagerness to talk about *bagunça* and *castigo* was evident when they greeted me after I returned from a marked absence, for instance, for the second, and particularly for the third and last phase of observation. *Bagunça* and *castigo* filled their accounts of ‘what happened.’ On these occasions, the children also told me other significant news and talked enthusiastically about their work. For instance, Margo

showed me her new sandals a teacher had given her, and Cleberson told me he was going to move to a new house. Both at *Sabiá* and Santa Rita the children brought me around the classroom to show me their new *trabalhinhos*. Nevertheless, *castigo* and *bagunça* pervaded our re-encounters, as highlighted by the following example.

Letícia: What is new here at the school?

Davidson: Nothing.

Letícia: It's been a week since I came last.

Davidson: Nothing, only some fights. (...) Only hit one another.

Letícia: Who hit whom?

Davidson: Rejane hit Maria Beatriz.

The conversation below happened as I returned for the final period of observations. A group of children sat around me in the eating patio, after lunch. After Rejane said that she could not tell me about what happened and Gabriela brought up the subject of fights, the children engaged in a heated discussion. When Gabriela said that Paulo hit, he protested and hit her. I could not follow most of the conversation and only understood part of what Gabriela said, since she sat next to me.

Letícia: I stayed away for so long ... tell me something good you did...

Rejane: It's a secret.

Letícia: It's a secret, you can't tell me? So tell me something very good, very different you did.

Gabriela S.: A lot of fights ... Cláudia (I couldn't understand).

Letícia: Many fights?

Gabriela S.: Yes, there were. (She talked so fast, I couldn't understand) (...) Paulo is fighting as well.

At *Sabiá*, children greeted me with similar accounts. When I returned in June, the children surrounded me, talking at the same time. The greatest news seemed to be that Renan was not coming to school. Margarida told me: "only because today my mother was going to talk (about) that thing that he cut my arm; he put a torn on me." Sara, heard her and said, "But we already talked to him about it, right Margarida?" Several children told me Renan did not come to school "because he made *bagunça*." Ivo volunteered:

Ivo: Do you know why Renan did not come?

Letícia: Why?

Eduardo: Because he is very *bagunceiro*.

Ivo: Because he makes *bagunça*. He stayed up there (referring to the gate).

Selena: Because he climbed up there at the gate. (...)

Letícia: But what happened? Why doesn't he come to school anymore?

Selena: He is going to stay only at home.

Letícia: Who said that he is only going to stay at home?

Selena: Nobody.

Letícia: Why Ivo, why is he not coming anymore?

Ivo: Because he *está* (is) *bagunceiro*.

Letícia: But then is he the one who doesn't want to come, what is it?

Selena: No, he *está* (is) *bagunceiro*. He stays making *bagunça*.

Letícia: And what happens when he is making *bagunça*?

Selena: He went up there and stays hitting the little classmates and stays biting, Eduardo.

Eduardo: Now, I will stop to bite.

Letícia: That's great Edu that you are going to stop.

Paulo: Edu bit Cleberson.

When I returned nine weeks later, at the end of the year, even though the children did not seem to have a tale of 'great' *bagunça* such as Renan's repeated violation of the teacher's prohibition, still some children told me about *bagunça* and *castigo*:

Letícia: So, tell me what is new?

Cleberson: I will move (to a new house).

Letícia: Great! (...) You told me. (...) Tell me more stories; I'm crazy to know what is happening in the classroom.

Cleberson: The children²¹ are making *bagunça*...

Letícia: Are the children making *bagunça*?

Roberto: Everyday.

Cleberson: I'm not.

Letícia: And then Margo, do you have good news to tell me?

Margo: Rivaldo stayed of *castigo*, Paulo, and Cleberson.

Letícia: Why? What happened?

Margo: Nothing. There's a new teacher.

My question 'what happened?' might have prompted some children to talk about *bagunça* and *castigo*. As Bruner (1990) suggests, breach is the subject of stories.

²¹ Cleberson equally used the word *meninos*.

Nevertheless, that children would greet me with accounts of *bagunça* and *castigo* shows how they seemed to consider these central experiences ‘in need of’ central narratives.

Next I turn to what children said about how they felt about these pervasive aspects of their school lives.

What Children Said about How They Felt about *Bagunça* and *Castigo*

The children expressed a profound dislike of *bagunça* and *castigo*. When I asked what they did not like at the Santa Rita and the *Sabiá*, overwhelmingly they named *bagunça*, particularly hitting, and *castigo*. Only two children at the *creche* and one at *Sabiá* said they disliked napping and eating greens, but they also listed *bagunça* and *castigo*. Below are children’s answers to the question of ‘what you do not like at school:’²²

Cleberon: (I don’t like) Renan. (...) Because he hits too much./

Samira: I don’t like to hit the little classmates. /

Cláudia: I don’t like the boys who push us into the bathroom. /

Paulo: Of not hit. (...) That don’t hit me./

Eduzinho: That the boys hit us./

Cláudia: I don’t like is to fight with the people, that my mother stays *brava* (angry) mad at me, this is what I don’t like. /

Roberto: I don’t like to *brigar* (fight or quarrel)./

Daniele: I don’t like to be of *castigo* and don’t like to sleep. /

Roberto: I don’t like to stay of *castigo*./

Edu: I don’t like to be of *castigo*. Now I have stopped to make *bagunça*.

Children systematically confirmed their dislike of *bagunça* and *castigo*. For example, when I asked whom they did not like at the centers, most children answered that they did not like the children who made *bagunça*, teased, hit, and stayed of *castigo*. Two children said they did not like Thaís, the *creche*’s coordinator, because she *xinga* (scolds)

²² I grouped children’s comments pooled from several conversations in different occasions.

and gives *castigo*. When I asked whom they did not like to sit close to, children distinctly named those' who made *bagunça*:'

Washington: I don't like Lucas. He stays shoving (pushing) us and then stays teasing. /

Davidson: Yes, two people: Paulo Henrique and Gabriela Matos. I sit next to them, if I 'make *carinho*' (pat or cuddle) on them, and they only hit. I can't stand this. (It) is that they hit everybody. We make *carinho* on them, and they hit everybody. Every hour (they) hit one. One day Paulo Henrique whacked Luís Eduardo's back./

Gabriela Santos: Cláudia, she does *falta de educação* (disrespects) with me; does curse words with me and curses me./

Davidson: Paulo, Gabriela Matos and the other I didn't say. (...) Luís Otávio, because he used to be little quiet.

Letícia: And what does he do know?

Davidson: *Bagunça*. /

Maria Luísa: Nor Lucas neither Washington. Luís Eduardo or Paulo or Gabriela Matos. (...) Because they hit us. /

Davidson: Yes, (I would not like to sit close to) Paulo Henrique. (...) Hits too much. /

Rivaldo: I like Renan, but sometimes he hits me. (...)/

Ivo: (I don't like) Eduardo and Renan, because they make *bagunça*.

Paulo: (I don't like) Eduardo, because he hits me./

Edu: Paulo, because he hits me./

Cleberon: Renan who is *bagunceiro*, Cleberon... (he laughed jokingly as he said he did not like himself. I asked him why he did not like himself).

Cleberon: *Bagunceiro*./

Children's answers to the questions "whom you do not like" and "whom you do not like to sit close to" clearly convey their strong dislike of *bagunça* and *castigo*. Next I further discuss how children's accounts poignantly reveal their sadness and distress, particularly about the physical conflicts and the teacher's disapproval of their actions and the consequent punishment.

Children's Dislike of Hitting

In the conversations noted at the beginning of the chapter, Cláudia and Gabriela situated children's physical fighting within the pedagogical dynamics of teacher control.

They described how they were all extremely frustrated with restricted access to resources, the long waits and repeated interruptions by the teacher. Hence, they also described how children engaged in routine and often volatile conflicts during play and the *trabalhinhos*. Both children indicated that hitting was one of the main reasons they did not like ‘staying inside the classroom.’ Ironically, the two girls had harshly hit each other no more than one hour before our conversation. Like Cláudia and Gabriela, most children seemed to experience multiple, contradictory feelings about hitting one another. While they fought fiercely, particularly over resources, most children said that they greatly disliked fighting. Several children made pledges to ‘be good,’ saying that they did not want to fight or that they were, as Gabriela once said, “stopping” to fight. Children’s narratives of ‘dislike of hitting’ further reflected children’s fundamental desire to play, learn and interact with one another. In a way, the teacher-controlled pedagogy seemed to produce and provoke children who routinely fought and received *castigo*. Below I briefly discuss a few children’s accounts of why they fought, and then further explore their dislike of hitting.

Why Children Fight: “Everything We Get, the Girls Have to Want”

Overwhelmingly children said they fought because of disputes over access to toys or other resources. For instance, I asked Margarida what happened at the *brinquedoteca* after she and Renan fought over a toy stroller, and she said, “Renan wanted to snatch the little stroller from me. Sara did not let me (keep it). He grabbed it. (...)“He hit me; I hit him.” I asked the same question to Washington after he had a fight with Lucas. Washington said, “(Lucas) was bothering me play with the little horse.” I asked, “What did he do to disturb you?” Paulo H. said, “Hit,” and then Washington said, “He snatched them away and then said it was me.” I asked Matias the same question after he had a fight

with Lucas and he said, “He wanted to rob my balloon.” Lucas added, “Because he wanted to snatch my balloon.” On another occasion, I asked Davidson about a fight he had with Luís Eduardo over a car. The fight ended with Davidson hitting Luís really hard and Luís breaking down in tears. Davidson avoided discussing this fight, instead he played with the props to show me instances of ‘fights to get toys:’ “It’s because ... Maria Beatriz is this one (getting a play mobile girl), (she) was playing with him, and then did like this with the little cars (pretending the two toys clash). Oh no, it was Matias, Rejane. And then comes Rejane and snatches the little car of Luís Eduardo”

Children also expressed their feelings of frustration with the fighting, the resulting teacher’s punishment, and their dilemma between wanting to ‘be good’ and failing to do so. Below, Cláudia and Gabriela gave alternate explanations as to why they hit and suggested how physical fighting, particularly over resources, could be problematic for children.

Letícia: Once two children were coloring a pineapple, do you remember that (*trabalhinho*)? Two children wanted the same yellow pencil. What happens when you want the yellow pencil and other classmate has it? What do you have to do?

Cláudia: First (you) have to hit her.

Letícia: Is it like Cláudia said Gabriela?

Gabriela S.: Yes.

Letícia: But what happens sometimes when everybody wants the same pencil?

Gabriela: When (you are) done, then put on the table and the other gets it; when done then the other put on the table, and then get. (...)

Letícia: Then, I want to know, sometimes is there a fight when two children want the same toy, the same pencil?

Gabriela (loud): *DÁ BRIGA* (GIVES A FIGHT), *DÁ BRIGA*, *DÁ BRIGA*, *DÁ BRIGA*, *DÁ BRIGA*.

Cláudia: Lie, doesn’t ‘give a fight.’ Only fights with the children like who have little cars. Only with the boys.

Gabriela: It’s not. With the girls.

Cláudia: With the girls also. Only that the girls, everything we get the girls have to want too, because they are furry or then hard, the ones that are little pretty, isn’t it Luís?

Gabriela: Steal, snatch.

Cláudia: But now the aunt says, “guys, don’t do this with anybody, don’t.” Then everybody obeyed and don’t want to do anymore.

Cláudia’s initial answer, “first (you) have to hit her,” sounded like an outburst about the competition for resources. After agreeing with Cláudia, Gabriela shifted to the ‘canonical’ response of turn taking. When I rephrased the question it was Gabriela’s turn to react. In a very different tone than her previous answer, shaking her head and moving her arms, gasping, she vehemently repeated that the competition for resources ‘gives’ a fight or results in fighting. Then Cláudia retreated saying that boys fought and not girls. Soon she shifted her views, not only recognizing that girls fought, but also offering an explanation. Gabriela confirmed Cláudia’s reasons that “everything we get, (the girls) have to want too.” Using strong words, including “steal, snatch,” she indicated children’s intense feelings about fighting. She also suggested how hitting and fighting had to do with the need to ‘scavenge,’ ‘get,’ and then struggle to ‘keep’ toys that were consistently coveted by others. Cláudia ended the interchange with a contradictory comment. On the one hand she seemed to display a form of passivity reflected in an apparent internalization of the teacher’s words. On the other hand, Cláudia’s quote of the teacher and her words that “(everybody) don’t want to (hit) anymore” seemed to express a genuine desire to live peacefully, happily playing and working.

Although children often referred to the ‘rules of sharing,’ they indicated that these rules were only partially effective. This was the case even at *Sabiá*, where resources were more readily available. I asked Margarida at *Sabiá* what happened when two children wanted the same black pencil, and she answered, “the other person gets another pencil.” She added, “Bel has another,” referring to Isabel’s Dalmatian pencil holder she admired and routinely shared. When I asked if children fought over pencils in the classroom, she,

and also Isabel, readily told me they did. The next conversation with Davidson illustrates how children might see the escalation of conflicts during the *trabalhinhos*. As I played out the child who wanted to ‘grab,’ Davidson shifted from obeying the rules—“passing” the pen and “telling the aunt”—to hitting:

Letícia: Let’s pretend that Matias is using the yellow pencil and Washington wants it. What do they do?

Davidson: He waits. And then Matias passed it to me, and then I am coloring, and then I pass it on to Washington.

Letícia: Let’s pretend that you are coloring and then I snatch the pencil. What do you do?

Davidson: I tell the aunt.

Letícia: And then I say that I will use the yellow, “I want it, give it to me...” (I grabbed the pencil)

Davidson: And then I get it back. (Grabbing it back)

Letícia: And then I get it back.

Davidson: And then we fight.

Our pretend-play seems to illustrate the ‘impossibility’ of sharing and not fighting, or of ‘being good,’ despite children’s intentions. Children’s accounts highlight how the pedagogical context that forced them to fiercely compete for resources unintentionally may have taught them conflict as a means to acquire and use limited resources.

Fighting over resources and the emerging tensions seemed to strongly impact the nature and form of children’s interactions. Instead of these children experiencing harmonious play, they had to protect the toys they managed ‘to get,’ and their potential play partners were often seen as ‘play attackers.’ The complex social issue of whom ‘is allowed’ to play became much more problematic in the teacher-controlled classroom. The following conversation about a fight between Cláudia and Gabriela over a toy furniture reveals how children seemed to make a connection between access to resources and inclusion in playing, or the opposite, fighting over resources and exclusion from playing:

Letícia: But tell me one time when a fight happened. For example, yesterday, you were playing with the dresser, did it “give fight” yesterday?

Cláudia: No.

Letícia: What about that time that you were crying (Gabriela)?

Marcela: Because the aunt *xingou* (scolded) her because she beat the boys, wasn’t it?

Gabriela: Lie.

Marcela: It was, it was, it was.

Gabriela: It wasn’t it.

Letícia: But I am talking about yesterday (...) when Gabriela wanted to play with those little wood furniture toys, do you remember Gabriela?

Marcela: It’s because Gabriela was playing with the little toys, and she didn’t even let us play.

Cláudia: Oh Marcela, I will not play with Davidson anymore. Everything I get he gets.

Cláudia summarized that playmates could represent a threat to resources, which resulted in attempts at exclusion. Other children’s accounts also closely connected resource competition with decisions about who plays and the ensuing fights. For instance, Davidson seemed to add to Cláudia’s comment, explaining that the mere request “can I play” is the reason why children fight:

Letícia: Why do fights happen at the school?

Davidson: Because the boys say this, “Let me play.” These two (props) were here playing of robot. And then comes this one, “let me play.” (The other says,) “No.”

Letícia: Did they or didn’t they let the other play.

Davidson: No. And then they continued. And then I said, “Let me play?” They let. And then, isn’t it, we invented the play. I invented with her, with this one (getting a girl prop). And then, he stopped to play with her and play with me. Davidson pretended the props talked.

‘Davidson prop:’ Let me play?

‘Girl prop:’ Do you want to play with me?

And he (his own prop) said, “I do.” We played. And then we stayed playing, playing there at the patio. This is the patio, this is the classroom, is that O.K.?

Letícia: Yes. And the fight, show me the fight you told me you would show me.

Davidson: The fight? Pretend that it’s me (a prop). The fight will start, and then everybody hits (making the props hit each other).

Letícia: But why did it start?

Davidson: Because he said, “Let me play,” and then everybody (started hitting the props).

Letícia: Well, just to say “can I play” start to fight [sic]?

Davidson: Some days are like this. They go and hit one another because they hit the little cars. Start the fight...

Davidson had told me a similar story a month earlier where the question “can I play?” also resulted in physical conflicts. The original play partners said, “No,” and then hit the child, who in turn responded by hitting.

As children negotiated the crucial elements of friendships or, as Samira says, who they “would let be their friends” by letting play, competition for resources pervaded life at school and greatly affected their social interactions. Children’s accounts indicate how they seemed to view ‘doing’ and playing as turning into exasperating experiences, where, as Davidson said in a story-like manner, “and then everybody hits.” As much as children seemed to agree that they fought over resources, they also agreed they did not want to fight, as I further discuss.

“What I Don’t Like (at School) is that the Children Hit Me”

When I asked what he found ‘difficult’ at *Sabiá*, Rivaldo answered, “that the children hit me everyday.” He highlighted how children seemed to view physical conflicts as prevalent, inescapable experiences that the children disliked the most. The conflicts seemed to create distress, and at times, intense distress for the children.

Describing Paulo H. and Gabriela M.’s routine hitting, Davidson said, “I can’t stand this. It is (because) they hit everybody.” One indication of children’s feelings about hitting is their emphasis on the magnitude of hitting one another. In their description of physical conflicts the children used words such as “everybody hits,” “all the time,” “all day long,” or “every day.” Davidson described an unrelenting routine of hitting:

Letícia: Davidson, what don’t you like here?

Davidson: I don’t like ... that the children hit me.

Letícia: Who does hit you?

Davidson: Luís Eduardo, Gabriela Matos and Paulo.

Letícia: And why do children hit?

Davidson: Pretend that I am playing...(he pretends to play on the table) and then one comes and hits me, and then comes another, and then another, all day it's like this.

Like Davidson, children often described fights in details. During these conversations, they looked upset and their voices sounded grim and often intense. In the previous section about children's accounts of hitting, I noted how my question about Paulo Henrique's suspension prompted Gabriela's heartfelt vivid account of Paulo's biting. Both Gabriela and Davidson talked about their hurt of being hit. The conversation below further indicates how troubled children were about the hitting in the *creches*. Samira and Matias told me about the "*castigo* of the aunt putting" them in the baby's room "because we hit the little classmates." I asked them to explain: "what is it that makes (children) start fighting." They described the hitting, punching, and biting:

Samira: When we hit Dilson, he punches our nose.

Matias: And then our nose bleeds, and we tell the aunt that Dilson punched our nose. Paulo hits. (...) Paulo only bites us.

Further conveying their distress with the pervasive and often violent physical fighting, children said they did not want to come to or did not like the school because of the hitting. For example, on one occasion, after Marcela told me a story about how she changed from her friend Branca's school to the *creche*, I asked which school she liked best, and she responded, "Branca's. (...) Because this school is very bad. (...) Paulo hits us, that is why I don't stay here anymore. Tomorrow I will change schools."

On another occasion, as my informal interview with Roberto and Paulo was winding down and I started putting away the toys, Paulo volunteered to me that he did not like the school, and I asked him why:

Paulo: Because everybody hits me.

Letícia: Everybody hits you Pauloca?

Paulo: Yes, and then I hit them... Let me put the toys away for you.

Letícia: (...) I still don't get this thing of hitting. What happens that one starts to hit the other, why?

Paulo: Why? Because they hit me all the time, and I hit them. All the time...

Letícia: And why (do you) start to hit? What happens that one starts to hit?

Paulo: He bites and kicks like this, look.

Paulo went wild making sparring sounds and moves, enacting the intensity and chaos of children's physical fights.

When I asked children to explain what prompted them to hit they often described conflicts such as the ones Matias, Samira and Paulo described above. Paulo's answer that he hit "all the time" because he was hit "all the time" strongly indicates how some children's perception of hitting were more than pervasive, and became a crystallized, inescapable dynamic of their day-to-day experiences at the *creches*. In another words, hitting became an integral part of going to the pre-schools.

Hitting also became a distinct narrative of school, as reflected in children's comments that "everybody hits" or that they "hit all the time." This narrative was a symbolic form that represented the centrality of the experiences of hitting, *bagunça* and *castigo* and children's feelings about them. For example, in a moment of great tension, when Matias once again received *castigo* after been suspended the day before, he said that he did not come to school because the children hit him. As we talked, he slumped on the office floor, his face still smeared with recent tears. Daniele and Maria Beatriz did not refute Matias' version of why he did not come to school, but seemed to recognize, and further contribute towards the narrative of hitting:

Letícia: Yesterday you did not come to the *creche*, did you?

Matias: I didn't (come) because everybody hits me.

Maria Beatriz: Sometimes you hit too, isn't it Matias?

Daniele: You too Maria Beatriz.

Teacher's scolding and *castigo* compounded children's distress over fighting. Children often talked about hitting in connection with teacher's punishment. When I

asked Silmara what place she disliked at the *Sabiá*, she said the classroom “because sometimes the little classmates hit me. I then asked her what a new child needed to know about the school and what she would tell a newcomer, and she said, “(I was going to) say that (children) stay of *castigo*.” Roberto also associated fighting with *castigo*.

Letícia: What don’t you like here at the school?

Roberto: I don’t like to fight.

Letícia: Do you fight a lot?

Roberto: (I do) fight.

Letícia: How is it to fight?

Roberto: Fighting.

Letícia: But do it for me to see. How is it? For example, pretend to fight with me.

Roberto: Put of *castigo*. (...) The teacher.

Letícia: What happens when she puts of *castigo* ?

Roberto: She lets (of *castigo*) for a long time.

When Roberto described how the teacher ‘let of *castigo* for a long time,’ he seemed very sad, and totally drained. He reminded me of Matias on the office floor. His reference to *castigo* in response to my requests to describe fighting, is a good example of how the resulting punishment might have intensified children’s dislike of fighting. Next I focus on what children said about their dislike of teacher’s disapproval and punishment.

Children’s ‘Dislike’ of Castigo

At the beginning of the chapter I noted that Cláudia responded to my question of “what would you tell a new child” by saying, “You have to obey the aunt Helena, because I don’t like *brava* (mad) person, no. I will even escape this *creche*, because the aunt Helena stays like a beast.” Cláudia’s comment seems to refer to Helena’s scolding and the punishment she gave to Cláudia after her big fight with Gabriela. Her comment highlights significant threads of children’s learning at the *creche*: to ‘be good’ by following the teacher’s directions, ‘do things right,’ and thus, please the teacher and

avoid *castigo*. Since children often ‘failed’ to be good in the teacher-controlled classroom, the teachers’ use of *castigo* was omnipresent. As Cláudia noted, children seemed to most dislike when the teachers “stayed like a beast,” that is, when they heavily scolded and gave *castigos*.

Now I turn to a general discussion of children’s sadness with *castigo*, followed with a discussion of some children’s intense feelings about teacher’s punishment. As illustrated by the accounts of Matias and Roberto in the previous section, there were times when children seemed devastated. I explore what children said about their desire to ‘escape’ the centers. Later I discuss Cleberson and Cláudia’s revealing insights about how living with *bagunça* and *castigo* ‘felt like.’ On the one hand, Cleberson, a well-known *bagunceiro* from *Sabiá*, talked about his apparent desperation with the ‘impossibility’ of being good. Cláudia, on the other hand, offered a rare perspective into children’s voice as *bagunceira(o)s* or when they made *bagunça* hidden from the teacher.

Children’s Sadness with Castigo

The vast majority of times that children referred to being sad or crying was in relationship with fighting or *bagunça*, and mostly *castigo*. For instance, in her ‘story about the teacher’s *castigo* of not allowing children to hand in the Father’s Day cards, Gabriela Santos said, “We stayed sad, sad” because “we made lots of *bagunça*.” On one occasion, I asked a group of children at *Sabiá* to tell me about two pictures, one of a sad looking boy, sitting alone in a classroom with his head bowed, resting on his crossed arms over the table and another of a child eating alone at the *creche* patio. Roberto, Margo, and Cleberson said the children were of *castigo*. Emerson said the boy was “alone because he made *bagunça*.” When I showed Margarida a picture of a crying girl, I asked

if she ever cried at the *Sabiá*. Margo buried her face on her T-shirt pretending to cry. I asked why she cried, and she said, “It’s because Sara squeezes my arm, only one day.”

As the year progressed, children seemed to find teacher’s scolding and *castigo* increasingly pervasive and troublesome, as indicated by Davidson in the conversation below. During the last month of the year I asked him to tell me a story about the classroom. He told me a story about *castigo*. I asked him what else happens in the classroom, and he said, “Ah, one day Cláudia who is not from here (my assistant) was here, and you were filming, isn’t it? And I was crying, and then Gabriela hit me.” He then moved on to a third story of fighting. I asked him if all his stories were about *castigo*, and he responded quite resolutely: “All of them (my underline), because I only remember the days of *castigo*.” Although Davidson does not refer to being sad because of *castigo*, his three stories were unhappy tales filled with crying, hitting and punishment. At times children expressed feeling overwhelmed by these dynamics they deeply disliked and yet, were a prevalent part of their lives. Some children expressed a desire to ‘go away,’ to ‘escape,’ and to ‘go home.’

Children’s Desire to ‘Go Away’ Because of Castigo

Cláudia said that she wanted to “escape the *creche*” because of Helena’s *castigo*. In the same way, several other children said that they did not want to come to school and that they did not like the school, or wanted to leave the school. In the first episode below, Rejane and Maria Beatriz, who were on the periphery of the popular girls’ group and often ‘fought’ with them, said they did not want to come to the *creche*:

Rejane: I don’t want to come to the *creche*.

Letícia: You didn’t want to?

Maria Beatriz: I didn’t want to come to the *creche* because the *creche* is *chata* (annoying).

Letícia: Why didn't you want to come?

Maria Beatriz: I am relieved (*ainda bem*) that I will go to a school.²³

Maria Luísa: It's because the aunt stays thinking that she makes *bagunça*.

Letícia: Is this right?

Rejane: I will not come to this school any longer.

Maria Beatriz: Me neither.

Rejane: Because I will turn this (six) did you understand? (...) I will change.

Maria Luísa, apparently with great assurance, further explained the reason why Maria Beatriz did not want to come to the *creche*. She did not refer to a single incident between Maria Beatriz and Helena, but to a systematic process of *bagunça* and *castigo*, or 'of' the teacher 'staying thinking' that Maria Beatriz was *bagunceira*. Therefore, Maria Beatriz rejected the *creche* because of the teacher's constant scolding.

Matias articulated an important relationship between *bagunça*, crying (or sadness), *castigo*, and his desire to go home. I explored this particular conversation in my discussion of children's narrative thinking. I asked Matias to tell me about his 'balloon' (or suspension), and he responded with a sad story about a gas balloon where a boy's balloon blows up and the boy falls down the roof. Later he talked about his suspension.

Matias: Ah, (I got suspended) because I was crying.

Daniele: It's because he made *bagunça*.

Matias: Because I wanted to go away, home. Do you know why I didn't come? Because I was sick, everyday.

Letícia: What happens when you make *bagunça* at school?

Matias: The aunt does not let me come.

Again Matias looked extremely sad. His voice was low and trembling, and he laid his head down several times. Despite my hesitance to 'interpret' children's stories literally, I see Matias' balloon story as a parable of his experience of *castigo*, which helps us understand 'how it felt like.' His sad story of *castigo* is part of children's common narrative of *bagunça* and *castigo*. Like Matias, several children said they or their friends did not come to school because they were sick, not because they were of *castigo*. Even

²³ Maria Beatriz and Rejane, among other children, would leave the creche at the end of the year to attend public school.

Daniele, who challenged Matias' narrative above, on another occasion shared the common narrative saying that Matias was sad because he was sick when he had received *castigo*. Matias said that he was suspended because he was crying. Confronted by Daniele, he confessed that he made *bagunça* because he wanted to go away or home. His responses resonate with his story, suggesting a great sadness and confusion, and a desire for the apparent safety of home. He highlighted children's feelings of being overwhelmed with their experiences of conflicts and punishment. Again, he placed his account firmly in the common narrative ground by asking and responding to his own question that he did not come to school because he was sick, not only that day but "everyday."

Children's narrative connections between being punished and being sick are troubling. Roberto also talked about wanting to go away from the school. Led by Renan, a group of boys ran to the *Sabiá* gates. They had been doing this for several days; Sara's response was scolding and taking away their recess. Then Renan stopped attending school. On the day before we talked, Roberto had being of *castigo* once again for running to the gate. On the following day when I arrived at the *Sabiá* I found Sara reprimanding him and other kids. Soon later we talked, and Roberto looked very sad, about to cry:

Letícia: What happened that you look all serious and sad, with your hand on your face like that?

Roberto: It's because I wanted to go away.

Letícia: You wanted to go away? Away where?

Roberto: Go home.

I asked if Sara had told him something or if he had had a fight, but he did not respond and asked me to play with the *brinquedinho* (Playmobile set). We then talked:

Letícia: Are you Renan's friend?

Roberto: No.

Letícia: No, who is Renan's friend?

Roberto: I don't know.

Letícia: I am not seeing Renan here anymore...

Roberto: He left the school.

Letícia: Did he? Did he tell you something?

Roberto: Because the aunt stays only *xingando* (scolding) him.

Letícia: So, he said this, that he was going to leave?

Roberto nodded affirmatively.

Letícia: And does the aunt *xinga* somebody else in the classroom or only Renan?

Roberto: Only Renan.

Letícia: Did she ever *xinga* you?

Roberto: No.

Letícia: If she did, what would you think?

Roberto: I would go away.

Letícia: *Xingar* is upsetting, isn't it? I remember when I was a child. And children make *bagunça*, isn't that right? Do you make *bagunça* Roberto?

Roberto nodded affirmatively.

Letícia: What do you do?

Roberto: I stay without recess.

Letícia: But what do you do that you stay without recess?

Roberto: I stay running from the teacher.

Letícia: You stay running up there ... I learned about that story ... Why do you run up there?

Roberto: Because it's for me to go away.

Letícia: But you told me that you liked the *Sabiá*. Do you still?

Roberto nodded yes. (...)

Letícia: So if you could choose, where would you stay (home or at the school)?

Roberto: At the school.

Roberto's explanation of Renan's 'leaving' the school paralleled Maria Luísa's explanation of Maria Beatriz's desire to leave: because of the teacher's 'staying scolding' and continued *castigo*. He did not seem to want to say directly that he also wanted to go away because Sara scolded and punished him, but expressed his own desire to leave the *Sabiá*. Interestingly, he said he liked the pre-school and preferred to stay there than at home. I understood then that the children's running to the gate had a symbolic meaning: the running away was both a *bagunça* and an enactment of the children's actual desire to leave, to go away, "to escape" as Cláudia said. When Roberto explained why Renan stopped coming to school, he said, "Because the aunt stays only scolding him." The 'only' is another indication of how children seemed to feel or might have experienced *castigo* and scolding as pervasive, 'too much,' so much that some of the more

bagunceiros could not stand it and either wished or pretended to run away. Hence, ‘escaping’ the school to escape *castigo* became part of children’s narrative of pre-school.

Different children probably felt differently about their experiences of *bagunça* and *castigo*. A conversation with three very well behaved girls offered insight into the feelings of children who were not *bagunceiras*. I asked Silmara, Ruth, and Isabel what they disliked the most at the *Sabiá*. Silmara said, “I don’t like to be of *castigo*,” and Isabel added, “Me neither.” Ruth said, “I like to see music.” When I asked if she liked to stay of *castigo*, she quickly said, “Not me, I don’t like.” I then asked if they have ever stayed of *castigo*, and the three girls responded that they have not. Ruth summarized, “Me never also.” Even though they had never stayed of *castigo*, the three girls still found it the least desirable experience they had in school. Their responses denote that even those children who did not make ‘too much’ *bagunça* and were not of *castigo* ‘all the time’ and ‘everyday,’ experienced distress with the conflicting dynamics of misbehavior, hitting, and punishment.

Cleberon, a *bagunceiro* from *Sabiá*, shared many insightful views on his pre-school life with me over the year. In the next section I discuss two conversations with him that help further explain how children might have experienced *bagunça* and *castigo*.

A Bagunceiro Who Likes “Everybody to Be Quiet”

Cleberon spoke about the contradictions of ‘coming’ to the *creche*. In the episode below, I asked him about an earlier incident when he kept throwing his classmates’ backpacks on the floor and Sara told him to sit down next to her:

Letícia: What was happening at the classroom when Sara was telling you to sit down on the chair? What did you do?

Cleberon: I made *bagunça*.

Letícia: Is that *bagunça* ?

Cleberon: Yes.

Letícia: What *bagunça* did you make?

Cleberon: I threw the little classmates' backpacks (on the floor). (...) And then I ran...

Letícia: Tell me something, do you like to make *bagunça*?

Cleberon: No.

Letícia: But you make *bagunça*...

Cleberon: I stay of *castigo* of everything... (...) Because I do of everything.

Letícia: Of everything what?

Cleberon: *Bagunça*.

Letícia: Remind me, what is *bagunça*?

Cleberon: Throw backpack...

Letícia: Cleberon, when you make *bagunça*, what does the aunt do?

Cleberon: I have to sit in the *castigo*.

Letícia: To sit in the *castigo*? And what did she tell you?

Cleberon: That I had to stay of *castigo*. (...) And Renan also. (...) He ripped the thing (*trabalhinho*)...

Letícia: Besides making *bagunça*, do you like the school?

Cleberon: Does.

Letícia: If you could stay in another place instead of coming here to the school, would you go?

Cleberon: No, only here. (...)

Letícia: What do you like the best here at the school?

Cleberon: To stay here outside.

Letícia: And to sit at the little table?

Cleberon: (I) like. (...)

Letícia: When you come to school, do you come happy, wanting to arrive, or do you come sad?

Cleberon: Happy.

Letícia: How are you happy, coming to *Sabiá*, show me?

(He smiles widely, walks briskly, swinging his arms, with a cheerful expression)

Letícia: Like this? How wonderful... Cleberon, did you ever stay sad here at the school?

Cleberon: I don't stay (sad).

Letícia: You don't stay sad?

Cleberon: When he is of *castigo* he stays (sad)...

When Cleberon said that he “stays of *castigo* of everything” because he “does everything,” he seemed to communicate the dual feeling of resignation and despair with the ‘impossibility of being good,’ which resulted in his being repeatedly scolded and punished. His candid description of his *bagunça*, even though he did not like to make *bagunça*, suggests that he could not help himself, for example, when he threw backpacks

on the floor. During most of our conversations, Cleberson told me that he liked the school. Like Roberto, when Cleberson said he disliked the school, he revealed his dislike of *bagunça*, hitting, and *castigo*. On the occasion above, he told me he preferred the *Sabiá* to any other place and enacted his happiness coming to school. It is very significant that he shifted to the third person when he referred to his being sad because of *castigo*. It is as if he had to shift to story, and to someone else's account, to acknowledge his feelings. His smiling face when pretending to come to the *Sabiá* and the 'otherness' of his sadness about *castigo* powerfully exposes the contradictions of his pedagogical experience.

The next episode further indicates Cleberson's distress with *bagunça* and *castigo* and his struggles with being quiet and following the teacher's instructions. On another day that was difficult for him, I asked why he came to school and he said, "For me to study and for everybody to be little quiet." Shortly after, when I asked what he did not like at the school, he restated his dislike of *bagunça* and a very significant 'wish' that he continued to refer to during the rest of the conversation: that "everybody be very (my underline) little quiet."

Cleberson: I don't like that make *bagunça*. I don't like to eat greens, I ... yes, I want that everybody be little quiet, very (my stress) little quiet.

Letícia: Who do you like at the school.

Cleberson: I like Joana who moved to another school, only who is little quiet I like.

Letícia: Whom don't you like?

Cleberson: Of (those) who make *bagunça*.

Letícia: Who does make *bagunça*?

Cleberson: Renan, Paulo and Eduardo.

Letícia: Which part of the school don't you like?

Cleberson: The classroom.

Letícia: Why?

Cleberson: Because I don't want...

Letícia: What?

Cleberson: Because the teacher yells.

Letícia: Pretend that you are the teacher, how does she yell?

Cleberon: She gets brava. (...) Yelling.

Letícia: Imitate her.

Cleberon (yelling): BE QUIET.

In our first conversation Cleberon answered that he liked recess best or “to stay outside.” In our second interaction, although previously he said he liked to “stay at the table,” he gave a strong answer that he did not like the classroom. His answers indicate his desire to avoid both the conflict-ridden chaos of *bagunça* and *castigo*, and most of all, the scolding and the yelling of the teacher. His pledge to ‘be quiet,’ and thus to ‘be good,’ and against *bagunça* and the *bagunceir(a)os* echoes Cláudia’s story about the school: ‘we are little good, and then the aunt let us play.’ It is also very similar to Gabriela S’ comments that I noted earlier in this chapter:

I like to play, like to do, like to play, like that nobody makes *bagunça*, like that everybody listens to the aunt like I do. And I tell the aunt and tell, and raise my hand and don’t say anything. When the aunt asks to lower the head, I lower; there are people who do not lower.

Children’s accounts above are narratives of distress, or what children said when they ‘could not stand it anymore.’ On these occasions, the children sounded exhausted and desperate to avoid the pervasive ‘disorder.’ Their narratives indicate a longing to play and live in peace. They also reflect an understanding of the pedagogy expectations: to be quiet means, to ‘be good,’ ‘do right’ or, as Cláudia said, “to obey,” and thus, to submit the body and, also the voice. Also significant here is that children seemed to struggle with a painful recognition of the impossibility of ‘being good’ and ‘being right.’ Cleberon’s insight captures the tensions and contradictions of children’s lives. On the one hand, he reveals children’s potential and openness to life and learning. On the other, it reveals a distress with failing to be quiet and then “being of *castigo* for everything.”

The Bagunceira’s Voice

Children struggled simultaneously with their desire to ‘be good’ and their recognition of their ‘failure’ to ‘be good.’ So far I have presented children’s distress with *bagunça* and *castigo* in relation to their quest to being good. In order to illustrate this complex struggle I discuss two conversations with Cláudia. While Cláudia’s perspective was less prevalent among children, her insights reveal being *bagunceira(o)* as a form of children’s agency. Cláudia’s conversations illustrate how children chose to make *bagunça*. Cláudia verbalized how *bagunça* was something children did and how their doing was contained by and related to an adult’s order:

Letícia: How is it here at the *creche*?

Gabriela: Ah, very cool. Everyday we play.

Cláudia: We play at the patio.

Gabriela: Today we are going to play, everyday we are going to play, the teachers, they...

Cláudia: They only allow those who stay little quiet at the classroom. We stay little quiet, only that the moment the aunt goes there to get something to play, we make *bagunça*. ... Stubborn boy stays alone.

Here, Cláudia interjected Gabriela’s rosy description of life at the *creche*. She explains that only those who stay quiet during the *trabalhinhos* are allowed to play. Her interruption of Gabriela’s canonical account and her almost playful and mischievous reference to making *bagunça* when Helena left the room provides an alternative voice and representation of children’s relationship with *bagunça*. Still, Cláudia did not ignore the distressing aspects discussed in the previous section. As she mentions that “stubborn (disobedient and/or *bagunceiro*) boy stays alone,” she reveals her understanding of the somber consequence of making *bagunça*. Her comments suggest how children understood the power dynamics of *bagunça* and *castigo*: *bagunça* was something children did in a context where adults used *castigo* to control them, and the children learned to make *bagunça* when the teacher seemingly was no longer wielding control.

In the next conversation this perspective of the *bagunceira(o)s* is further discussed. Here, Cláudia teaches Gabriela S. how to avoid *castigo* by hiding hitting from the teacher. They had a fight with Matias over a coloring pencil during the *trabalhinhos*, and Cláudia told Gabriela to hit Matias' head to get the pencil. Helena overheard Cláudia and saw Gabriela slap Matias. She scolded the two girls and said that she would not give them toys. As they waited at the empty table, I heard Cláudia teaching Gabriela how to grab and hit "hidden from the aunt," and I asked her what she said:

Cláudia: I was telling Gabriela that when she was (hitting Matias)... hidden from the aunt; and when the aunt turned towards her she would pretend she was lowering the head for the aunt.

Letícia: Were you explaining to Gabriela how do to things without the aunt seeing? (...)

Cláudia: When the aunt does something with someone else, then the other person has to tell to a little friend because she teaches you.

Letícia: How is that?

Gabriela: The little classmate would hit her, and then she would say this, "Oh, aunt, Gabriela M. hit me." And then the aunt would put off *castigo*, turned to the wall.

Letícia: Why are you not getting toys?

Cláudia: It's because we were playing, isn't it? When we stopped, me, Gabriela and Matias...

Gabriela: I was hitting on the head ...

Letícia: Whose head?

Gabriela: No, I was laying down (resting the head on the table), and then ... and he did not give to us.

Cláudia: No, because she stayed laying down, right? We were laying down then, when we stood, now, then, the aunt did not give.

Letícia: And did she say something? (I meant to ask what did the teacher say)

Cláudia: She said like this, "Oh, aunt, are you going to give to us?" What did you say to the aunt, Luís?

Gabriela: "Are you going to give to us?" And then she said, "No, maybe."

Cláudia: And then I said that if we would be little quiet we would, and then I said that if I called a nutty (crazy) for everybody, nobody would be disturbing me.

Once again Cláudia raised the issue of power in the *creche*. It seems as though she appropriated the adult's strategy to control children's bodies—"lower the head for the

aunt”—and used it to benefit of *bagunceira(os)*. She affirmed that children have to teach their “little friends,” or other children, to develop strategies to avoid *castigo*. When I asked for more information, Gabriela did not seem to understand what Cláudia was saying or tried to change the subject by telling a hitting and *castigo* story: she said that she would call the teacher when someone hit her, and the teacher would give a *castigo*. When I asked why they did not have toys, Gabriela started to tell me she had hit Matias, but soon changed her response. She seemed to quickly adopt Cláudia’s lesson, once again changing her story. Instead of her hitting Matias to take the pencil from him and pretending to lay down, she said that she was lying down, and then Matias refused to give her and Cláudia the pencil. Interestingly, Cláudia joined in to further remove any reference to the conflict and created a new story: they lied down, they stood up, and then the teacher refused to give them toys. Here they continued with their mantra of promising the teacher to be ‘little quiet’ in order to ‘get’ the toys. However, at the end, Cláudia seemed to undermine the narrative of the ‘good child’ and to invoke culturally dominant images of the ‘bad-guy’ and the “crazy man,” apparently to end a stressful account.

Cláudia and Gabriela’s comments above indicate how they seemed to be learning to manipulate relations of power in ways that benefit children. Their shifting stories offer an interesting window to children’s meaning-making of their *bagunça* in a pedagogical context that led to children’s misbehavior. Cláudia’s comments in particular suggested that becoming *bagunceira(o)* is a form of survival in a way, whereby children are no longer a passive recipients, but rather an active participants in the classroom power dynamics. Hence, in this section I have shown the presence of a distinct narrative at the *creches* that revealed how children became active agents in the *bagunça* process. In this way, they became *bagunceira(o)s*.

Conflict and Distress: Children's Feelings about Bagunça and Castigo.

Children desired to learn, to play, and to be with other children at the *creches*. Yet, *bagunça*, hitting, and *castigo* became an integral part of going to the *creches*. Children's comments reveal their struggle with their desire to 'be quiet' and their recognition of their failure to 'be quiet.' Children's narratives revealed a profound distress with their conflict-ridden routine. They also revealed how *bagunça*, hitting, and *castigo* became distinct narratives of children's pre-school lives and experiences.

Despite their overwhelming dislike of *bagunça* and *castigo*, 'making *bagunça*' seemed to become their last resort, perhaps their only escape of the passivity required from them (Dewey, 1938). Gabriela and Cláudia's comments highlight the problematic aspect of the meanings children constructed of these experiences: they reveal children are learning to "put seeming ahead of being" (Dewey, 1938, p.62) Ironically, children were subverting their own growth and potential. As they learned to be *bagunceira(os)*, they became active participants in their own miseducation or 'non-learning' (Dewey, 1938).

What Children Said about their Views of *Castigo*

In this section I discuss how children viewed and evaluated *castigo*. Children expressed different opinions. Most talked about *castigo* being wrong and excessive, particularly with regard to the prohibition of play. Some said it was 'right.' Several children said it was necessary, and that they would 'have' to give *castigo* if they were the teachers. One child, Roberto, offered an alternative narrative to *castigo*. I first discuss

children's comments about the 'wrongness' of the *castigo* by taking play away, and then I focus on their views of whether *castigo* is right or wrong.

The prohibition of Play: An "Ugly" Experience

Suspending recess by prohibiting children's play represented a severe form of *castigo* that the children seemed to find particularly distressing. My conversations with Washington and Daniele, and Cláudia and Gabriela S. about the suspension of recess at the *creche* resulted in one of the most heartfelt criticisms that children made of *castigo*.

On this occasion, the children were given the *castigo* of not playing outside for one week "because of the *bagunça*." The director, Thaís, walked into the classroom and began lecturing the whole class. This incident occurred at the end of the second week of classes after the winter vacation. It was the culmination of two tense weeks for both children and adults "because of too much *bagunça*," according to Helena.

The previous week Helena had given the 'Father's day *castigo*' that Gabriela S. described. She said that the children had to sit silently facing the teacher, while she confiscated the cards the children had made for their fathers. After a particularly noisy and conflict-ridden Friday morning, the coordinators decided to suspend recess: they confessed they did not know what else to do. The following Monday I talked to the children about it:

Letícia: Are you going to have recess today?

Daniele: Maybe.

Letícia: Will (you) have (recess) Washington?

Washington: (We) will have, maybe.

Letícia: Why maybe?

Daniele: Because we are making too much *bagunça*; and then everyday we are not going there (to the patio), but only in the afternoon.

Letícia: But you are making too much *bagunça*, but what does this (not having recess) has to do with *bagunça*?

Daniele: The aunt did this.

Letícia: What did she do? What did she tell you?

Daniele: Said that we had to stop making *bagunça* ... we didn't do it.

Letícia: You didn't stop? Washington, will you tell me also why maybe you will not have recess.

Washington: Because yes.

Letícia: Did aunt Helena talked with you last Friday?

Washington: No.

Daniele: It was Thaís.

Washington: She said like this, that if we make *bagunça*, we are not going to the playground, to not go play, to not do anything, to only go stay inside the classroom.

Letícia: What do you think about this?

Washington: I think it's ugly.

Letícia: What is ugly?

Washington: To stay inside the classroom.

Daniele: It's boring, very *chato* (not fun, boring).

Daniele spoke with apparent resignation about being prohibited to play 'because they did not stop making *bagunça*.' She remarked about the gravity of the *castigo*, and said that they would not have recess "everyday." Washington sounded despondent when he retold Thaís's admonishment and prohibition of children's playing at recess. For him, not playing meant "not doing anything" and "only" staying inside the classroom, which meant sitting down to do the teacher's activities. He suggested that the *castigo* of not playing represented 'making children be quiet.' I said to him, "Washington, Helena had told me that there would not be recess anymore because everybody had made too much *bagunça*." He responded, "Had made too much *bagunça*...now the child arrives, goes straight to the table to sit down." He indicated that the actual *castigo* was to 'stay inside the classroom.' While Daniele said that it was boring, Washington indicated that the suspension of recess was wrong. For him, the *castigo* was "ugly." Here, he seemed to consider the *castigo* from an ethical perspective. Children used ugly in opposition to being right, good or pretty.

In my conversation with Gabriela S. and Cláudia, Gabriela started telling me about the previous *castigo* 'of' the Father's-Day cards. As with Daniele and Washington, their demeanor and tone of voice indicated a serious conversation.

Letícia: What happened at the *creche*?

Gabriela S.: We, isn't it? (We) were doing a *trabalhinho*, and then the aunt put us of *castigo*, everybody turned towards her with Father's day card. Then we did not get (the cards), we stayed of *castigo*, and the aunt stayed looking at us in a chair.

Letícia: And did Thaís talk to you as well?

Gabriela: No, did not talk.

Cláudia: I remember at the ballet day. (...)

Letícia: Today is going to have recess [sic]?

Gabriela: Today will have.

Cláudia: Yes.

Letícia: Well, but Daniele told me that maybe it was going to have [sic].

Gabriela.: (It) has, today has, every single day it has.

Letícia: But are you going to recess?

Cláudia: No, the aunt Helena said that nobody is going to recess, ha, ha, ha! (pretending to laugh)

Letícia: Why?

Cláudia: We made too much *bagunça*, ha, ha, ha!

Letícia: And what do you think of not having recess?

Cláudia: I think it's very sad.

Gabriela: It's very *sem graça* (without grace as in not fun).

Cláudia: We cry. We stay sad. We sing a song of sad. We are, can feel sick.

Cláudia's mocking laugh when she referred to Thaís's lecture seemed filled with her unhappiness. Cláudia described with vehemence the sadness of not playing, and then added that they (children) "are, can feel sick" when adults take play away. Here she engaged an emerging collective narrative of *castigo* and being sick. Her account seems to symbolize children's meanings of *castigo*, particularly of being forbidden to play. Cláudia suggests a progression of children's feelings about being prohibited to play: crying, staying sad, so sad that is like singing "a song of sad," and being sick. Cláudia's pretend play with props that I noted earlier, reflects similar themes: when the teacher puts the child of *castigo*, the child cries, and then the teacher consoles her as if she is sick, saying, "*Sarou, sarou* (it's healed, it's healed)." Her comments further reveal the meanings of the narrative of *castigo*/being sick. Cláudia's shift in meaning from children "are sick" to "can feel sick" with *castigo* is notable. Cláudia indicated that being sick became a collective narrative because children felt sick because of the punishment that

they received. Even ‘being sick’ could have multiple meanings for children. However, this narrative indicates a departure from being an active participant in the classroom.

Washington, Daniele, Cláudia, and Gabriela S. expressed how *castigo* was “ugly,” or just wrong, especially in relation to being prohibited to play or suspended from classes. Next I discuss children’s views of *castigo* focusing on their answers to two questions I posed: (a) if *castigo* was right or wrong, and (b) what they would do if they were the teachers.

Is Castigo Right or Wrong?

Most children answered that *castigo* was wrong. However, if they were teachers they would, as Cláudia said, “do the same thing our aunt does,” that is, give *castigo*. The following conversation, continuing the discussion of the prohibition of recess with Cláudia and Gabriela S., illustrates well children’s dilemma about *castigo*. Agreeing with Washington, Gabriela and Cláudia said that *castigo* was “bad,” but they “would have to” give *castigo*.

Letícia: Do you think it’s right to have *castigo*?

Gabriela and Cláudia: No.

Letícia: What do you think of *castigo*?

Cláudia: We think that it’s very...

Gabriela, whispering to Cláudia: Bad.

Cláudia: Bad.

Letícia: What about making *bagunça*, is it right?

Cláudia: We think that it isn’t.

Gabriela whispers.

Cláudia: We don’t like to make *bagunça*.

Letícia: And what if you were the teachers?

Cláudia: We would have to stay (*ficar*) of *castigo*. Would make the same thing that our aunt does.

The children disliked *bagunça* and often strongly disapproved of *castigo*. Yet, when I asked what they would do if they were the teachers, they seemed to reproduce their experiences at the *creches*. Cláudia’s notion of ‘having to stay of *castigo*’ means

that if she were the teacher she would ‘have to give *castigo*.’ Her comment indicates that Cláudia and Gabriela did not seem to see an alternative to teacher’s punishment, and therefore, to *bagunça*. Maybe it is not surprising that they did not offer alternatives because they never seemed to experience any alternative. Other children like Davidson at the *creche* and Cleberson and Isabel at *Sabiá* also referred to this notion that the teacher ‘has to give *castigo*.’ They also would punish if they were teachers. Even Renan, the notorious *bagunceiro* at *Sabiá*, said that if he were the teacher he “would put of *castigo*:”

Letícia: What about *castigo*?

Edu: I don’t like to be of *castigo*. Now I have stopped to make *bagunça*.

Letícia: Renan, what do you think of *castigo*? ... Do you think it’s right?

Edu: I think it’s right.

Renan: I don’t think it’s right because it’s wrong.

Letícia: Why is it wrong?

Renan: Because we make *bagunça*.

Letícia: What do you think should be done to people who make *bagunça*?

Renan: Spank.

Letícia: Do you think it’s right to spank children who make *bagunça*?

Renan: No.

Edu: Slap on the face especially this one here gives.

Eduzinho: I don’t give.

Edu: Neither do I.

Renan: It was not a slap on the face.

Letícia: Let me ask you Renan, if you were the teacher, what would you do to a child who made *bagunça*?

Renan: (I) would put of *castigo*.

While Edu echoed children’s common desire to stop the cycle of *bagunça* and *castigo*, he also said that *castigo* was right. Renan seemed to struggle with his views of *castigo*.

Some children, like Cláudia, Gabriela, and Washington, affirmed that *castigo* was wrong. On one occasion when Davidson and Gabriela discussed Paulo Henrique’s new suspension, Gabriela firmly expressed her disapproval: “It’s wrong, it’s wrong, it’s wrong. (...) Because there is too much suspension; now he is going to be six days.” However, like Renan and Cláudia, children often responded how if they were the teachers

they would ‘give *castigo*.’ Although some children said that *castigo* was wrong, some indicated that they expected it from the teacher.

Roberto at *Sabiá* was the only child who gave a different answer to the question of what he would do if he were the teacher and children made *bagunça*. We talked at the open cafeteria, where he ‘stayed of *castigo*’ during recess. I asked him what happened when he ran to the gate, and his response was a ‘sad story’ about falling in a river. Bel joined us. I asked her and then Roberto: “Do you think it’s right or wrong to stay here (of *castigo*) during recess because they ran up there? If you were the teacher, would you put them here (of *castigo* in the cafeteria) or let them there (play at recess)?” Bel simply responded, “*Castigo*.” Roberto said, “I would go to the beach with them.” We faced the swimming pool, and probably the sight of the water inspired the images of the river and then the beach. Roberto expressed through story how he experienced *castigo* and an alternative to *castigo*. The scary image of ‘falling in a river’ might represent his experiences of trying to escape the *Sabiá* and being punished. The teacher who, instead of giving *castigo*, takes children on a desirable adventure is a noteworthy alternative.²⁴

Interestingly, this sole non-*castigo* answer was a narrative form. Narrative seemed to permit Roberto to envision alternatives to the reality of *bagunça* and *castigo*. His response may be seen as an expression of his wishes for an alternative to the sadness and conflicts of *bagunça* and *castigo*. I wish I had further explored Roberto’s response with other children. This narrative might have elicited story-based conversations about alternatives to *castigo* closer to children’s thinking.

In sum, children seemed to have complex views of *castigo*, which seemed to reflect their conflict-ridden experiences. Their comments reveal a general and profound

²⁴ Going to the beach was a wish several children expressed.

dislike of *castigo* combined with great distress with this prevalent experience. Yet, children did not seem to feel so unequivocally about *castigo* being right or wrong. Some children, like Washington and Gabriela, affirmed with great power that *castigo* was ‘ugly’ and wrong. Yet, others seemed to debate between finding *castigo* wrong and excessive, and at the same time, saying that teachers ‘had’ to give *castigo*. Renan’s comments illustrate children’s struggle with the issue. The notorious *bagunceiro* at the *Sabiá* seemed reluctant to say that *castigo* was wrong, but said that *bagunça* was wrong. He would give *castigo*, and maybe spank, if he were the teacher. Hence, with the exception of Roberto, the children who answered my question did not envision an alternative to *bagunça* and *castigo*. They repeated the familiar and represented what they had experienced.

Bagunça and Castigo: Children’s Life-Stories at the Creches

It is significant that almost all stories about school, including the pretend-play stories, were ‘of’ *bagunça* and *castigo* and that children insistently brought up these issues in our conversations on their own account and were insistent on telling the full story. The children placed *bagunça*, hitting, and *castigo* in the center of their interpretations of their experiences at the *creches*. In this way, children’s narratives and accounts of *bagunça* and *castigo* became distinct or central narratives of pre-school. While it seems important to be careful not to interpret children’s stories literally, when the vast majority of the stories that children told are about *bagunça* and *castigo*, these issues clearly become important to identify as central features of their life-story at the *creches*.

Bagunça and *castigo* were not only prevalent themes in children's stories, they were also pervasive in their general accounts of their pre-school experiences. Children systematically included *bagunça* and *castigo* in their depiction of life at school. For example, as they talked about what they were doing, whom they liked, and how they experienced the day, they talked about *bagunça* and *castigo*. Even though children talked about their *trabalhinhos*, their play, and their friends, most of their accounts of their pre-school lives centered on 'bad behavior' and punishment. Yet, *bagunça* and *castigo* were not a norm that children seemed to embrace readily.

Children seemed profoundly distressed, and often devastated, by these experiences. Here I am reminded of Matias' crying, Davidson's banging his chair on the floor in apparent desperation, and children's violent fighting during the often volatile and unpredictable times they experienced. Children's distress is evident in their narratives of escape of the *creches*. It is even more evident in their narratives of *castigo* and being sick. The children represented themselves and their friends as 'sick' when they received *castigo*. Such meanings are very problematic, especially when in their narratives of school children are relatively rarely players, storytellers, builders, or creators.

Children's comments indicate that, on one hand, they saw their obedience as a condition to a peaceful pre-school life: as Cláudia said, the teachers "only allow those who are little quiet in the classroom" to play and join the activities. The requirement to 'be quiet,' and how it meant 'to be good,' was recurrent in children's narratives of pre-school at both centers. On the other hand, children's accounts indicate that the children recognized the 'impossibility' of being good. As a result, they seemed to struggle profoundly with their *bagunça* and the teacher's *castigo*. Like Gabriela and Cleberson, they wanted 'everybody to be quiet' and, at the same time, they acknowledged that

‘everybody made *bagunça*.’ Despite their desire to play, learn, and interact with one another and the teacher, and to ‘be good’ and not make *bagunça*, these were young kids living in a pedagogical context that failed to engage them. Children’s narratives as *bagunceira(o)s* further highlight the miseducation represented by the experiences of *bagunça* and *castigo* (Dewey, 1938).

Paradoxically, children’s complex narratives of *bagunça* and *castigo* further reveal children as active meaning-makers. In a sense, they radiate with children’s potential and richness. For instance, Washington and Gabriela’s criticism of the ‘ugly-ness’ of teacher’s punishment reflect the authority of young children’s voices.

CHAPTER 7: CHILDREN’S MEANINGS OF *MANDAR*

In this chapter I further discuss children’s meanings of *mandar*. These meanings, particularly those that express views of adults and of what adults do, suggest how children are constructing their sense of self and other at the *creches*. Children’s use of

mandar raises significant questions about their agency and subjectivity, i.e. how they see themselves and how they see adults.

The verb *mandar*, as I have discussed, means “to be in charge” and “to tell to do something.” Often in children’s accounts, *mandar* requires more than being in charge, it means ‘being in command’ or ‘giving orders.’ Ruth and Silmara’s comment below that the teacher can spank children because she *manda*, is an important example of the meanings that children constructed about their place in the world:

Letícia: Whom don’t you like?

Bel: Renan and Edu.

Letícia: Why?

Silmara: Today Renan stayed all the time kicking under the table.

Ruth: I don’t like Renan.

Letícia: If you were teachers what would you do differently?

Silmara and Ruth: Don’t know.

Letícia: And if the children made *bagunça*, what would you do?

Silmara: Put of *castigo*.

Ruth: Spank

Letícia: Is that so? And can a teacher hit the children?

Silmara: Yes (...) because the teacher is who *manda*.

Letícia: Children do not *manda*?

Silmara: No.

Ruth was perhaps the quietest child in Sara’s classroom. Her statement that teachers spank misbehaving children denotes a problematic understanding of teachers’ and learners’ actions and roles. This is especially problematic since physical punishment was never administered at the *Sabiá*. Children’s meanings went beyond teachers telling them what to do to include the teacher ‘commanding’ their actions and activities.

At the very end of the school year, Cláudia asked me a critical question that raised the issue of children’s agency. On that occasion, I typed observation notes on my laptop at the eating patio, while she waited nearby for her mother to pick her up. She seemed to watch me work with great intensity and then asked: “Letícia, who *manda* in you ...

because of this computer for you to work the hours...? And go home...? How...?" In her effort to understand my work, Cláudia's main concern seemed to be with who did *manda* or was in control of me and of what I did. Her question seemed to reflect her own experience and interpretation of her school life. Her question also indicates how their educational experiences appeared to deeply impact children's understanding of their place in the world. In the same way, Ruth and Silmara expressed views of themselves as people whom teachers *mandam* or 'command' in a way that suggests that they are coming to see themselves with little power or agency. Silmara further indicated that the counterpart to "teachers are who *manda*" is that "children are who do not *manda*."

I divided the chapter in four main sections: (a) Who *manda* in children's learning, (b) Teachers *mandam* by 'giving-castigo, (c) Children's views of power, particularly during play, and (d) Children's views of continuity and change. In a sense, my discussion here is more circular than in the previous chapters. To address the complexity and significance of children's meanings, I overlap the same themes in my discussion, particularly in the first sections. I present different and related perspectives of the same issue that children seemed to view that teachers are 'who-*manda*' at the *creche* and in children. I conclude with children's powerful criticism of their experiences.

Who *Manda* in Children's Learning?

Cláudia's question indicates that children seemed to view their experiences, and also the experiences of others, from the perspective of the teachers 'being in command' of their actions. Children indicated that teachers are 'who *mandam*.' In this section I first review children's comments that the teachers *mandam* in their learning. I then examine how children's passive views of the 'giving-teacher' resulted in their views of themselves as recipients of teacher's actions.

Teachers Mandam in (or Are in Charge of) Learning

In chapter four I discussed how children ‘learned about learning.’ A common thread in that discussion was children’s view of the teacher ‘in charge of’ or mandando in the educational process. Children’s doing was marked by a concern with what the teacher mandou (ordered) them to do, suggesting that the ‘right way’ of doing and learning was the ‘teacher’s way.’ Children said that they learn ‘what’ the teacher manda ‘the way’ the teacher manda. For instance, Matias said that children studied or learned ‘the things’ they were “allowed to” by the teacher while Cleberson said that they received homework “because the teacher manda.” I asked Cleberson why this was the case, and he responded, “Because she wants.” Margarida also explained that they did number exercises “because Sara mandou (commanded).” Cláudia further affirmed children’s lack of ownership of their learning as she described in her pretend-play story that the child would study, “whatever that the aunt is going to talk there at the blackboard.” I probed her further, and she said, “Later I will see what the aunt is going to choose.”

When I asked children what grown-ups ‘do’ at the creche or the school, some answers indicated how children seemed to view themselves as passive recipients in their learning, while they seemed to view teachers as agents of their learning. For instance, Davidson, at the creche, answered, “(They) learn us to read and write, a lot of things.” On one level his statement could be interpreted as ‘adults teach children.’ On another level, his statement could mean that teachers ‘learn children.’ In the same vein, Roberto, at the Sabiá, answered, “They makes [sic] the classes.” Once again, his words could be interpreted as the teachers preparing the lessons. However, in light of the repeated commentaries provided by children that they see the teacher mandando or ‘in command’ of the learning process, his response may mean that teachers have ‘ownership’ of what he called the classes.

There are many accounts that help to reveal that children seemed to view that teachers ‘learned them’ and ‘made the classes’ or, in other words, that they mandam in children’s learning process. I have discussed children’s views that the teachers ‘give’ both the *trabalhinhos* and play, and how these views suggest a passive role on the part of children. Among others, Matias and Cláudia’s comments that children learn what the teacher ‘allow’ them to learn, further highlight how children might see themselves as learners. The concept of teacher’s ‘allowance’ reveals children’s views of their powerless role in the educational activities. In a sense they needed permission to play and to ‘work.’

Previously I discussed how children talked about two inherent and related roles of the teacher-who-manda: giving the activities (including play), and giving castigo. Next I further explore children’s views about the teacher’s role of ‘giver of the activities.’ I discuss how children’s comments reflect their positions about self, other and their world.

The ‘Receiving-Child’: The Counterpart of the ‘Giving-Teacher’

In the teacher-centered classrooms the teacher who manda is first of all the ‘giver.’ Having explored in more details the one of the teacher’s roles of giving the *trabalhinhos* and play, I briefly discuss two accounts that illustrate how children often talked about their experiences from a perspective of who ‘receives’ from and ‘follows’ the teacher.

On one occasion, Daniele and Gabriela described the beginning of the school day to me. Daniele disagreed with Gabriela that they had circle time everyday and said, “Lie, we don’t do little circle; we stay sit [sic] at the table, and then we ... and then the aunt rolls off (as in ditto machines) exercises for us, and then she goes and gives toys, and then she does a lot of things for us. She does a lot of things, see Gabriela? Later she rolls off the homework.” When I asked Cláudia to describe the best day she had at the creche, she used similar language: “Ah, the best day is that ... she does many things. She gives

many things to us. There is a thing that she gives that is a bag full of candy, a little ball with ball paper plus a chocolate inside.”

Daniele and Cláudia’s language exposes the ‘absence of children’ in children’s accounts. The only child’s action that Daniele described is to sit. Her pause before she shifted the narrative to what the teacher does ‘for them,’ suggests that it is difficult for her to articulate a description of the circle time from the perspective of what children do. Cláudia made a similar pause before talking about the ‘giving teacher.’ She took this image of the teacher further, describing a literal gift of candy. In a sense, children’s accounts indirectly portray children as passive recipients of teacher’s ‘donation.’

The teacher’s roles of ‘giving the activity’ and ‘giving castigo’ were closely related. The teacher’s castigo ultimately enforced children’s engagement with the activities. Next I discuss children’s comments that giving castigo ‘is what teachers do,’ further exploring their meanings that the teachers ‘are who manda.’

Teacher’s Mandam by ‘Giving Castigo’ or What Teachers Do Is to ‘Give Castigo’

Children seemed to view or experience *castigo* as something that adults did in much the same way they saw *bagunça* as something that children did. *Bagunça* belonged to children, as Daniele clarified in a conversation with Rejane, and Maria Luísa. I asked them what adults do at the *creche*, and Rejane said *bagunça*. The girls laughed heartily, and I asked what was so funny.

Daniele: That adult makes *bagunça*.

Letícia: Don’t they?

Daniele: No, they don’t. We are the ones who make *bagunça*.

As Cláudia explained to Henrique during a fight over toys, teachers ‘gave’ *castigo*, i.e. they punished and scolded (or ‘fought with’) children. Henrique grabbed Cláudia’s toys. First they just yelled loudly at each other, without words. Then they talked:

Cláudia: You *não pode* (can't, is not allowed) to fight with me.

Henrique: But you are fighting with me.

Cláudia: But you can't fight with me; no you can't; you are not the aunt.

Children routinely talked about the teacher giving *castigo*. Significantly, when I asked what adults do at school, most children responded that they 'give *castigos*,' while fewer children said they 'give the *trabalhinhos* or play.' Like Cláudia above, they expressed how they viewed 'giving *castigo*' as exclusive to the teachers' role.

When I asked 'who *manda* at school?' almost all children answered with "the teachers." Children's accounts often combined or established a close connection between punishing and 'being in charge,' indicating that children seemed to see *mandar* as the teacher's overall function and to 'give-castigo' as an inherent and crucial role of the teacher-who-*manda*. Emerson explained how teachers *mandam* by giving *castigo*:

Letícia: Who *manda* here at the school?

Emerson: The teachers.

Letícia: How?

Emerson: Who make *bagunça* (is) spanked of *castigo* (*apanha de castigo*).

Letícia: Who does hit? (*quem bate*)

Emerson: Who hits, and then I tell Luana. And then now we stopped to *discontar* (retaliate).

Letícia: Show me; for example, I hit you...

Emerson: And then who hit us and then we hit.

Letícia: And (is there) much hitting in the classroom?

Emerson: Cleberson is hitting me. (...)

Letícia: What do grown-ups, adult people, do here at the school?

Emerson: Nothing.

Letícia: Nothing? What about Luana? What is she?

Cleberson: (She is) *brava* when the children make *bagunça*. I don't make *bagunça*. I don't make any *bagunça*.

Letícia: And what do the teachers do?

Emerson: (They) put of *castigo*.

Emerson contemplated the interconnections among *bagunça*, *castigo* and *mandar*: the teacher *manda* by punishing the misbehaving children. Cleberson's responses might indicate why children said that the teacher 'has' to give *castigo*. They seemed to

recognize not only the purpose but also the ‘need’ of *castigo* in the teacher-centered classroom. Below I include other children’s accounts of what adults ‘do’ at the centers:

Letícia: You know what adult means, don’t you? Grown up people. What do adults do here?

Gabriela: Aunt Thaís (the coordinator at SR) comes ... and the aunt does not let us play at the patio, and then aunt Helena says like this, “Oh, Paulo do not hit the boys,” only that he keeps hitting. After he fights with Luís. Luís slapped him. And then Gabriela Matos goes and comes to blows with Luís. And then the two stay sit of *castigo*. This is what adults do.

Letícia: When you are here (at the patio during recess), what does the teacher do?

Cleber: Stays there, *vigiando* (spying) us. (...) For us not to make *bagunça*.

Letícia: What do adults do here at the *creche*?

Samira: Put us of *castigo* when we hit the little classmates; put us in the baby’s room.

Matias: One day they put me there.

Gabriela’s words ending her story suggest how ‘punishing children’ is a central theme of children’s narratives of ‘what adults do.’ Although some children responded to my question with references to the *trabalhinhos* and teaching, several children indicated the teacher’s main role of *castigo*-giver. Children’s comments that teachers *mandam* **because** they give *castigo* and that teachers **have** to give *castigo* indicate that they see *castigo* as a defining teaching function, next to ‘making’ the classes.

Who Manda? Children’s Views of Power, particularly during Play

Cláudia’s question highlighted how children often talked about “ who *manda*.”

When I asked Margarida what the teachers ‘do’ at school, she quickly responded, “They *mandam* at the school.” In the episode below Davidson clarifies how:

Letícia: Davidson, Cláudia asked me who *manda* in me. Who *manda* in you?

Davidson: My father and my mother.

Letícia: And here at the school, is there anyone who *manda* (in you)?

Davidson: Aunt Helena. She *manda* in me and in her children (boys). She has a nephew.

Letícia: *Shemanda* in what?

Davidson: For example, if we are here playing, she says, “Go to the classroom, children!” And then I stop, turn, and go.

Davidson did not seem to hesitate with his response to the question of ‘who *manda* in you?’ His prompt response indicates children’s familiarity with the idea that the teacher *manda* “in her children.” His explanation of how the teacher *manda* is short and clear: She tells ‘her’ children what to ‘do,’ and they obey. Potentially, his is an account of *castigo*. Had he not ‘obeyed’ Helena’s ‘order’ to go inside, probably the story would include *castigo*.

I started the conversation below asking Cleberson if someone ‘*manda* in him,’ without specifying at the school. Like Davidson, he named the relative closer to him, his grandmother. These two answers that children could see teachers’ authority in the same way they saw parental authority. I then asked Cleberson ‘who *manda* at the school,’ and he named Sávio, the school-keeper. Unlike the *creche*, the *Sabiá* housed the pre-school, two elementary grades, and functioned as a community center. The children recognized other adults besides the teachers as authorities at the *Sabiá*. For instance, the lot-owner and the school-keeper lived at the *Sabiá* grounds. Sávio held multiple responsibilities in all activities and was an important disciplinary figure at the *Sabiá*. I then asked Cleberson directly if the teacher *mandam*:

Cleberson: There are that stay here (pointing to Sara’s table); the children don’t.

Letícia: The children don’t?

Cleberson: The children *manda* is on their toys. I *mando* on my little toy there at my house.

Letícia: It’s important what you told me. The teachers *mandam* in what?

Cleberson: In the classroom.

Letícia: And the children *mandam* in the toys.

Cleberson: Yes, (in) ours.

Letícia: Ad when you are playing of little house and of little car, who *manda*?

Cleberson: (We) *manda* too.

Cleberon explained ‘who-*manda* in what’ and ‘who does not *manda*’ at the *creche*. When I first asked him if the teachers *mandam*, he pointed to Sara’s desk, a symbol of the teacher’s authority and the place from where she *manda* or directed most activities. He also made the distinction that the teacher *manda* in the classroom, not at the school. Like Davidson, Cleberon indicated that she did *manda* in the classroom or in ‘her’ children. He concurrently volunteered that children did not *manda* at school. He also raised the significant issue of who *manda* at play, making the point that children **only** *mandam* in their own toys and discriminating between *mandar* in the toys at home and at school. It is noteworthy that he said that the teacher *manda* in children’s pretend-play, although he added that children “*mandam* too.”

Cleberon’s comments indicate the significance of children’s sense of teacher’s power in the making of their experiences. The example above suggests that when children talk about *mandar* they go beyond saying that teachers, as their responsible adults, are generally ‘in charge.’ Instead children seem to be highlighting fundamental issues related to the use of the teacher’s power. This is even more evident by the fact that children’s views echoed each other’s, as illustrated by the three examples below:

Letícia: Does anybody *manda* in you here?

Margo: *Manda*, the teacher.

Letícia: How does she *manda*.

Margo: She *manda* like this, “Go make a Xerox copy,” and then I make.

Letícia: And you, do you *manda* in somebody?

Margo: *No*.

Like Cleberon, Margarida said that teachers *mandam* in the children, and that she did not *manda*. Like Davidson, she explained how the teacher *manda* by telling children what to do, giving an example of her favorite activity: to make copies at the office.

Letícia: Who *manda* here at the school?

Renan: The owner.

Letícia: What owner?

Renan: Ah, the owner of here, who lives here.

Letícia: And the teachers?

Renan: *Mandam* also. *Mandam* in the classroom.

Letícia: And the children *mandam* in what?

Edu: In nothing. (...)

Letícia: Edu, who *manda* in the toys?

Renan: The owner. Sávio is who *manda*.

Letícia: But when you are playing there at the *brinquedoteca*, who does *manda*?

Renan: The teacher.

Like Cleberson, Renan also affirmed that the teacher *manda* in the classroom, while the owner of the school-lot *manda* at the school. He also seemed to share Cleberson's views of who *manda* at play. We faced the playground equipment as we talked. When I inquired about who *manda* in the toys, he apparently assumed I referred to the 'playground toys,' as we say in Portuguese. This might explain his response that Sávio *manda* at the toys. When I asked about children's play at the *brinquedoteca*, he, and then Emerson in the last episode below, gave the same response then Cleberson: the teachers *mandam* at play at the school.

Letícia: And when you are playing there at the *brinquedoteca*, who does *manda*?

Emerson: Luana, the teachers.

Children seemed to view that teacher's command in their lives also included being in charge of their play. Children's comments convey their lack of ownership and of power, in their play, a context in which children typically have much control. To further explore how children seemed to situate themselves and the adults at the *creches*, I continue the discussion of children's views about ownership of play.

Who Manda at Play at School

Previously I addressed how Cleberson, Renan, and Emerson affirmed in different conversations that the teacher *manda* at the school toys. Cleberson said that the teacher

manda at play at school. He added that children also *mandam*, at least in part, in their pretend-play. Margarida explained how children *mandam* in their play:

Letícia: Who *manda* on the *brinquedoteca*?

Margo: When we play it's I [sic].

Letícia: You? And Luana, does she *manda* here at the *brinquedoteca*?

Margo: *Manda*.

Letícia: And who *manda* on the *trabalhinho*?

Silmara: We.

Margo: We and Luana.

It is difficult to know if other children would agree with Margarida that children *manda* at play.²⁵ Margo was one of the most active and independent children at *Sabiá*; she was at the same time the teacher's main helper and the only girl in Sara's list of the worse *bagunceira(o)s* in her classroom.

Margarida's insight that children *mandam* 'as they are playing,' or during the act of playing, resonates with Cleberson's affirmation that children 'also *mandam* during' pretend-play. They indicate that children might feel that they are in charge of play when and where they are engaged in 'their play.' The same could be true for the *trabalhinhos*, as Silmara and Margo also indicated above. When children are working on the activities the teachers 'gave them,' they seem to gain ownership over their doing, and the work, as play, becomes 'theirs.'

The comments that children feel partly in charge of play and the *trabalhinhos* might or not reflect most children's views. For instance, Edu said that children *mandam* "in nothing," and several children volunteered that the teacher *mandam* and the children do not. Still, children's shared narrative of schooling suggests that other children might have agreed with Cleberson and Margarida's distinction that teachers *mandam* at play

²⁵ I wish I had further explored the theme of 'who *manda* at play,' especially at the *creche*. At *Sabiá*, children played more autonomously. It is possible that the children at the *creche* experienced even less ownership of play than those who talked about it at the *Sabiá*.

and *trabalhinhos*, but that children *mandam* **during** play and **during** the *trabalhinhos*, that is, when they are engaged with or in the process of playing and working.

Children's comments discussed in this section further convey the complexity of issues of power and agency. On one hand, Margarida and Cleberson's views that children **also** *mandam* at play indicate that children might have viewed themselves as at least partly active regarding their play and *trabalhinhos*. On the other, these comments serve as caution against simplified views of children's passivity. The constraints children encountered greatly affected, but did not impede their play and their enjoyment of play. It is possible that in the same way, children recognized such constraints, but they also recognized, at least in part, their agency in play. Next I discuss children's views about what adults and children should do differently at the pre-schools.

Children's Views of Continuity and Change at the *Creches*

Here I discuss children's responses to my question 'what adults should do at the *creches*.' Many children did not respond to this question. The few who did offered bright insights about children's interpretations of their experiences. Margarida's response indicates children's difficulty in considering change at the *creches*. Yet, Daniele and Gabriela's responses reveal children's articulation of a strong desire for change.

Margarida focused on what children, not teachers, should do differently. Both, her misunderstanding or reinterpretation of my question and her response to it, speak about how children come to see themselves:

Letícia: What do the grown-ups should do (here at the school)?

Margo: Help the mother to clean the house.

Letícia: And here at school?

Margo: Help the teachers.²⁶

Letícia: How do you think that children could help the teachers?

Margo: Do what he (teacher) *mandar*.

²⁶ She used the masculine form, *os professores*, even though all teachers were women.

Margarida apparently misunderstood my question, hearing what children, not teachers, should do, an important question I regret not asking. Most likely she reinterpreted my question in light of the familiar experience of teachers telling children what they should or had to do. Such misunderstanding or re-interpretation might help explain why few children answered my question of what adults should do differently regarding children. Children were not encouraged to think from the perspective of actors or subjects, as indicated by Margarida's answer that they should "help" adults both at home and at the school. She added that children should help teachers by obeying them or doing "what (they) *mandar*." It is possible that Margarida simply gave me 'the right answer' or the canonical one. Even though, her response that children should help teachers by obedience echoes several children's comments discussed so far.

Unlike Margarida, Daniele and Gabriela offered two strong children's voices criticizing teachers' actions and bidding for change: teachers should let children play more and not scold or *xingar* children. Daniele's first answer seemed quite clear, and by the way that Maria Luísa promptly joined in her questioning of Helena's unfulfilled play promises, probably reflected children's shared views: teachers should let children play instead of "always stay" doing the *trabalhinhos*:

Letícia: So, you told me what the adults do here at the *creche*, now I would like you to tell me what they should do at the *creche*.

Daniele: They should let we play, because we always stay playing of exercise, never that the aunt let's we play. Everyday she promises that she will play of something and do not fulfill her promises.

Maria Luísa: She also said that (she) was going to play of 'caldron' with us and did not play nothing.

Letícia: Of what?

Daniele: Of the witch's caldron. The aunt Helena was going to put a caldron and make an enormous circle, and then she is going to put... and the friend of the person has to take everything, then after starts everything again. (...)

Letícia: Are there rules here at the *creche*?

Daniele: What is rule?

Letícia: *Combinados*, things that cannot and can do.

Daniele: There are. The aunts are who make the things, make the exercises at the hour that has to make; has to play at the hour; has to make the thing at the hour; after is what go make the other things.

Letícia: And the children, do they say what is that have to do/make?

Daniele: No. The aunt is to stay *mandando* on us. It's not we that stay *mandando* on the aunt, what about that? (indicating surprise).

Letícia: If you were the teacher, Maria, what would you do differently here? (...) To make it more *legal* (fun, cool) for the children.

Maria Luísa: I don't know.

Daniele: When they asked to go to the patio, I would go, but would do the game/play that I wanted. And then I would already have attended their will/wish²⁷ (*feito a vontade deles*), and then later, when already had finished (the *trabalhinhos*), I would let them play on the slide, on the swing, but don't make too much noise... I would *mandar* them to make drawings on the floor...

Daniele's remarks reflect the complexities of children's interpretations and of interpreting children's views I pointed out in the previous section. First, we hear the power of children's voices. Daniele identifies a crucial aspect of what teachers should do differently: she is adamant about children's desire and, I would say, right to play. Her claim that teachers "should let" children play because she "never" allows them to play is quite fierce and, yet, moving. She expresses children's apparently profound dissatisfaction with their play experiences when she says that the teacher **never** allows children to play because children are **always** doing the teacher-centered activities.

In contrast with her powerful claim and vehement advocating, her language denotes children's passive position. Daniele responses focused on the teacher's promises and actions. She reaffirmed the teacher's commanding role, for example when she describes how the teachers "are who make the things, make the exercises at the hour that has to make; has to play at the hour." She also highlighted that children do not *mandam*. Daniele's response to my last question further suggests how she seemed to be making sense of school, and particularly, of the 'position' of adults and children. I previously discussed how Helena argued with the children that they could not do what they wanted

²⁷ The literal meaning of the expression *fazer a vontade* is to 'make the will.' In the context of Daniele's response it means to attend children's wishes or will.

at the time they wanted. She was concerned with “what would happen if children got their will.” In her account of what she would do if she was the teacher, Daniele seemed to reproduce her teacher’s arguments, capturing their fundamental nature of a traditional view of power. For instance, she said that for children to decide what they do, and thus, for children to somehow be subjects of their actions, they would be *mandando* on the teachers, a laughable idea. This response seems to reproduce Helena’s comments previously discussed about the teacher’s need to control children’s doing, otherwise she would not only lose control of the class but also risk the very authority of her teaching role. Daniele affirms the teacher’s power twice saying that she would agree to children’s requests to play outside, “but” (a) she would be the one choosing the game they play, and (b) that she would “let them play,” but not “to make too much noise.”

Furthermore, Daniele’s affirmation that “and then I would already have attended their wish (or made their will)” addresses a subtle element in teacher and children’s power relationships: a daily ‘bargain’ between teacher and children’s will. Daniele apparently opposes play (children’s will) to the *trabalhinhos* (teacher’s will). The flexible teacher, ‘who allows children to play,’ exercises her power and ‘gets’ what she wants (*vontade*), but also makes concessions to children’s will. In turn, the children attend the teacher’s will. Daniele’s comments about the teacher ‘making children’s will’ by ‘letting’ them play further indicates children’s view of play, and perhaps the *trabalhinhos*, as a ‘concession,’ something the teacher ‘gives’ to them.

Five-year-old Daniele could not offer an alternative to her familiar knowledge of the teacher-who-*manda* and ‘gives’ and the passive child. However, she did not simply reproduce the familiar, or accepted it. She strongly criticized the teacher for restricting children’s play. She advocated for a favorable balance to children, bending the scale towards children’s will versus the teacher’s, so that children could play.

To Daniele’s claim that children wanted to play, Gabriela Santos added that children wanted adults to stop scolding and telling them to be quiet “all the time.” She

shifted from an enthusiastic description of the *trabalhinhos* adults make “for” the children, to a vehement call for change in the pedagogy:

Letícia: What about the grown ups? The adults do what here at the creche?

Gabriela: Make *trabalhinhos* for us. *Trabalhinho* to color, *trabalhinho* of plant, *trabalhinho* of Baby Jesus, *trabalhinho* of [sic] put on the wall, of everything.

Letícia: What the grown ups should do at the *creche*?

Gabriela: (They) should not do things that *xinga* (curse, scold) us, that we don’t do little circle right, that *manda* us be quiet.

Letícia: So you think that the grown ups should not *xingar*, is that right? Something else?

Gabriela: The adults could not get poor neither *xingar* children, and neither say, “Oh, children, stay quiet.” The adults *xingam* (curse, scold) us.

Gabriela S. spoke for her group, referring to the collective ‘we’ and to ‘children.’ She powerfully summarized the pedagogy where teachers *mandam*: the teacher-centered activities required the control of children’s bodies and their doing. She described the *trabalhinhos* the teacher ‘gives,’ how teacher tell children that they are not doing ‘right’ and tell them to ‘be quiet.’ Gabriela captured both her joy with the ‘teachers’ *trabalhinhos*’ and the stress of the dynamics of *bagunça* and *castigo*. On one hand her words reveal the benign aspects of the ‘teacher’s giving:’ the activities she creates for children. On the other, they reveal the not so benign aspects of the ‘teacher’s commanding:’ teachers *mandam* children to be quiet, to do right, and punish them when they are not. Her remarks remit us back to children’s experiences in the classroom, especially their exasperation when they were no longer able to ‘stand’ the conflicts and the ensuing *castigo*. Gabriela vividly described children feelings of overwhelm with the teacher’s scolding engaging a strong narrative image to reflect one of her apparently greatest fears: that “adults get poor.”

Gabriela made two compelling arguments for change. First she asked that adults stop to *xingar* (scold) and to punish children. Second, she asked that they stop to

controlling children to do the ‘excessive’ activities. Daniele demanded that teachers let children play more, instead of ‘always’ making the exercises. Together, they criticized and asked for change of core pedagogical aspects: the teacher-centered activities, lack of play, the requirement that children ‘be quiet.’ and the ensuing *castigo*.

Children’s Passive Meanings and Active Meaning-Making

Cláudia’s question about ‘who *manda* in me’ symbolizes children’s efforts at understanding power and authority. Her question is about the position of adults and children. Together with other numerous accounts of *mandar*, it reveals children in the process of understanding the pedagogical expectations of their passivity. It exposes a crucial aspect of the ‘miseducation’ of children (Dewey, 1938): how children seemed to be constructing views of themselves as people who are not in charge, or do not *mandam* and to view others and the world from that perspective.

Yet, children’s ‘miseducation’ reflected in their passive accounts does not mean that children live in a powerless blank or that they interact robotically with a pedagogy that fosters their passivity. Cláudia’s question, Cleberson’s comments, Daniele and Gabriela’s arguments are all examples of children’s meaning-making at the *creches*. Children are keen interpreters, and at times, insightful critics, of their lived experiences.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

LIVING AND LEARNING IN TWO *CRECHES* IN BRAZIL: UNDERSTANDING ECONOMICALLY-POOR YOUNG CHILDREN'S MEANINGS OF PEDAGOGY

One of the essential tasks of the school in its role as center of the systematic production of knowledge is to work in a critical way on the intelligibility and communicability of things. It is therefore fundamental that the school constantly instigates the students' inherent curiosity instead of softening or domesticating it. It is necessary to show the students that the practice of a merely ingenuous curiosity affects their capacity to "discover" and becomes an obstacle to a truly rigorous examination of what is "discovered." Yet it is important that the students take on the role of "subject" in the process of production generated by their own encounters with the world to avoid becoming simply a receptacle of what the teacher "transfers" to them (Freire, 1998, p. 111).

Freire's pedagogy of freedom is a view of education that gives prominence to the process of becoming and a conception of the learner as a rich meaning-maker. This construct of becoming is concerned with how children live in the moment and how their human potential is exercised and nurtured. Therefore, children's processes of becoming from a Freirean perspective are not shaped by a normative view of who children should be as adults, which suggests that children are incomplete and have deficits, and that there is one path to growth and maturity. Moss and Petrie (2002) problematize views of children as 'futurity.' Instead, children are "vital, strong and creative, themselves social agents and citizens, living their lives in the here and now" (p. 88). As Malaguzzi (1993) argues,

“in any context, children do not wait pose questions to themselves and form strategies of thought, or principles, or feelings. Always and everywhere children take an active role in the construction and acquisition of learning and understanding. To learn is a satisfying experience, but also, as the psychologist Nelson Goodman tells us, to understand is to experience desire, drama, and conquest. (...) Once children are helped to perceive themselves as authors or inventors, once they are helped to discover the pleasure of inquiry, their motivation and interest explode” (p. 60).

Malaguzzi affirms the significance of adults’ active role in children’s learning: “the way we get along with children influences and motivates them and what they learn” (p. 61).

Dewey (1938) talks about educational experiences in a similar way. He argued for a view of experience as educative, when it promotes growth and, thus, is generative of further experiences, and miseducative, when it might halt future growth. Ultimately, we can think of educative experiences as those that foster the learners’ roles as ‘subjects’ and that motivates children co-construction of knowledge. Critical here is a recognition that children’s pedagogical experiences influence their process of becoming.

In this chapter I further reflect on the range of experiences and the various meanings of pedagogy of the young children in the Creche Santa Rita and the Associação Educacional Sabiá. My discussion acknowledges that these meanings and experiences are situated within the complexity of these children’s lives, individually and collectively. The agency of rich children and their process of becoming as they engage with the pedagogical experiences are central to my efforts to review children’s experiences and meanings. Therefore, I focus on the relationships among children, teachers and knowledge, and children’s agency in these relationships.

As I present my discussion of pedagogical practices in the two centers my goal is to provide an understanding of children’s experiences and perspectives. In noting this point, I do not want to devalue Helena and Sara and their work with young children.

Teacher's actions, and children's perspectives, are all 'conditioned' by the micro and macro social-political context in which they were produced.

In this conclusion, I build upon my analysis in the previous chapters and explore the following themes: (a) the miseducation of children, or how the pedagogy 'taught' submission and passivity, yet children were agents who actively created a place for themselves at the *creches*; (b) the paradox between children's active and shared meaning-making and the passivity reflected in their accounts; and (c) children's strong voices and critique of the pedagogy. I first discuss children's pedagogical experiences and then their meanings about these experiences. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications of my study for research and further educational policy.

Children's Pedagogical Experiences at the *Creches*

Teaching Submission: The Miseducation of Children

The pedagogy at the *creches*, particularly at the Creche Santa Rita, can be interpreted as undermining children's exercise of freedom as learners. For the most part, it required that children be passive and obedient, and that they conformed to the teacher's norms and authority. The 4- and 5-year-olds in the two classrooms 'had to' 'be quiet' and 'be good' to 'do right.' The *trabalhinhos*, particularly at the *Creche* Santa Rita, reinforced rote learning of traditional, school-based content. Even though most children seemed to actively engage with the activities, the *trabalhinhos* failed to engage children's meanings in the process of knowledge construction. In this sense, these activities were often 'meaningless,' neither supporting nor engaging children's rich narratives. Instead, for the most part, they required children to submit their voices, bodies, and creativity, to

follow the teacher's directions in order to learn the 'right way.' In sum, the so-called educational activities were 'miseducative' in a Deweyan sense (1938), stifling children's co-construction of knowledge and often resulting in distressful experiences for children.

Control of Children: Restricting Children's access to Materials and Resources

One of the most powerful episodes in my study is Cláudia pretending to draw on empty air after Helena consistently refused her the red crayon. Cláudia's enactment of drawing without a crayon symbolizes the restriction of children at the *crèche*, representing the limited opportunities for children to learn and play that the teacher constructed. Her empty, but active hands provide an image of the pedagogy dictated by and centered on the 'teacher-who-*manda*-and-gives.' Cláudia could not have the red crayon because Helena did not 'give' the coloring activity. The teacher's consistent restriction of children's access to simple and available resources resulted in a pedagogical pattern of limitation of children. As I discussed, Helena, a sensitive teacher, secured yellow pencils for the ripe-pineapple, handed in little play dough, and, one time, 'gave' one book to the whole class.

The teacher's restriction of children's access to resources seemed more a question of control of children's actions than of lack of resources. Helena seemed to block children from wielding power over their pedagogical experiences. Her actions suggest that allowing children to wield power would undermine her authority as a teacher. Helena's concern touches, as Brady (1995) argues, the central point of the banking system of education. Freire (1978) claims that in traditional education "the teacher

confuses the authority of knowledge with his own professional authority, which he sets in opposition to the freedom of the student” (p. 58).

Control of Children's Bodies

Such opposition to children's freedom was most evident in the teachers' attempts to control children's bodies. In a way, pedagogical practices seemed 'aimed' at submitting children's bodies, particularly at the Santa Rita. Children's routine of waiting for the teacher to 'give play' illustrated by the Helena's requirement that Rejane stop playing with the long awaited wooden toy, 'to watch' and 'wait for a turn' in the teacher-directed game of memory is a vivid example of how the pedagogy seemed to oppose the freedom of children's bodies. The pedagogical requirements that children be 'quiet' and 'good' remind me of Walkerdine's writing (1991). She discusses schools' increasing role in taming children. For her, the domestication of children's bodies and emotions reveals the 'sanitation' role of schools.

The pedagogical requirement that children 'be quiet' resulted in attempts to normalize the unnatural (Foucault, 1980), that is, to contain 4- and 5-year-olds' active and energetic bodies in order to 'program' them to learn (Jacob, as cited in Freire, 1989). Helena's controlled distribution of toys, the limitation she imposed on children's play, and her routine resort to *castigo*, all highlight the pedagogical process of controlling children. To a great extent, the pedagogical goal was for children to 'be quiet' to 'do' the activities.

Children's Agency: Drawing on Air

When Cláudia pretended to draw, she laid her head down as her eyes followed the writing-like movement of her raised hand. Cláudia was finally quiet: she had stopped 'trying to get' the crayon and waited without 'making *bagunça*.' Her body language indicated both, defeat and a tremendous resilience. On the one side, her enactment of coloring represents children's prevalent experiences of restriction. On the other hand, it represents children's agency.

Cláudia's act symbolizes most children's 'inquietude' inherent to their richness and learning disposition. Often children did not conform blindly to the directions of the *trabalhinhos*. Children's desire to learn seemed to drive them to constantly seize opportunities within the constraints of the pedagogy. Children's constant attempts to 'get' books in both classrooms illustrate how children were relentless in their efforts to create a place for themselves in the *creches*. Children's active transformation of the limited *trabalhinhos* further illustrates children's agency. Children attempted to 'work together' instead of 'learning alone.' They also enhanced the activities through simple acts, such as copying their names several times on the ditto page.

A second powerful image of children and how they encountered the pedagogy is Cleberson's enactment of how he 'came to school.' Despite his sadness with *bagunça* and *castigo*, Cleberson came to the Sabiá with a smile, his head up, and a full gait in his walk. He came as a subject, a human being who desired to learn. His pretense of 'coming to school' can be seen as one representation of children's presence and subjectivity.

Children's Struggle over Resources: Fighting for Agency

Cleberson's sadness with *bagunça* and *castigo* contrasted sharply with the image of him coming to school. His distress highlights significant unintended consequences of the pedagogy: conflicts and physical fights. Like restriction, these became prevalent children's pedagogical experiences.

Fear, for instance, that they would not access resources or that play would be disrupted, was a constant part of children's lives. I have discussed in chapter 5 how children seemed to have developed a 'readiness for conflict' that greatly affected their ability to interact with each other. Rarely could they create sustained play with a toy that captured their imagination. Fighting and antagonistic behaviors seemed to become part of the normalcy of children's routine. It is noteworthy that violence was not an inherent part of children's social identity, but seemed to become inherent to their identity as learners.

Children's often-intense fights over resources and toys further indicate how violence and conflict emerged from pedagogical practices going astray. Davidson's agonizing wait for the yellow-pencil to color his ripe-pineapple illustrates how the pedagogy seemed to lead children into fighting. These conflicts reflect children's distress. They also indicate children's struggle with their lack of agency or better, the pedagogical requirements that constrained their agency. Children attempted to exert their agency by exerting control, for instance of play and the *trabalhinhos*.

For the most part, children's pedagogical experiences produced tensions that have to be situated in the larger context of teacher's control of resources and of children. Freire (1998) argued for a view of learners as agents "who take the role of 'subject' in the process of production" (p.111). In this sense, the 'red crayon,' the 'yellow pencil,' extra books, the Lego toys, the wooden toy or the play dough color might have taken on a

larger meaning for children: they could represent the means for children to exercise freedom as learners. Children seemed to need these resources in order to exert their right to 'produce' and to express themselves as subjects able to create. Ultimately, the fights for resources seem to reflect children's struggle for agency in the form of basic control in the process of their learning.

Beyond Limiting Children: The Impoverishment of Children's Experiences

The above discussion raises questions about the quality of children's experiences. It is important to consider the implications of Helena's systematic restriction of children's access to simple and available resources for their learning. This question becomes even more significant in the children's socio-economic context. I question to what extent the pedagogy reflected the historical practice of 'poor' education for the poor in Brazil. In a way, a 'poor pedagogy' for economically poor children produced impoverished experiences.

Clearly the 'impoverished' pedagogical practices led to the 'impoverishment' of children's experiences at the *creche*. The teacher's control of resources seemed to deprive children. As a result, the children seemed to 'experience poverty' as learners, or their pedagogical experiences seemed to 'make them poor.' In this sense, children's fights and attempts to seize resources could be interpreted as a reaction to these experiences of impoverishment. Children seemed to experience great anxiety during classroom activities, particularly about getting resources, keeping them, and being able to do the *trabalhinhos* and to play. They also seemed to learn conflict and exclusion. Yet, maybe the most important message here is that children fought to exert their agency: they wanted to learn, to play and to construct knowledge with each other and the teachers.

Misencounters of the Pedagogy: Bagunça and Castigo

Children's *bagunça* and teacher's *castigo*, marked a significant pedagogical disconnect. On the one hand, *bagunça* seemed to reflect children's eagerness and energy in a pedagogical context that failed to engage them. On the other, *bagunça*, and *castigo*, seemed to lead to a significant 'waste' of children's potential and energy.

The children often made *bagunça*, despite their wishes to 'be quiet.' *Bagunça*, in a sense, became the outlet for children's great energy as they attempted to create their places in the teacher-centered pedagogy. At times, children seemed happy in their own world, doing the *trabalhinhos*, playing, developing friendships, telling stories, in sum, actively interacting with one another and with the pedagogical content. At times, *bagunça* degenerated into an unruly and disruptive process where children became almost destructive. Children's *bagunça* was intimately connected with the teacher's *castigo*. Punishment seemed to be the teachers' strongest "*argumentos de autoridade*" (authority arguments) (Freire, 1970, p. 78), their last resort to ensure their pedagogical goals.

Children's Volatile Pedagogical Experiences

Children's opportunities to learn and play had an erratic, and often chaotic quality. A number of factors seemed to combine to create a sense of volatility, and even haphazardness, during children's pedagogical experiences.

My discussion of Matias and Eduardo's experience of 'not-knowing' how to complete the highly structured activities highlights this aspect. One of children's most distressful experiences seemed the powerlessness of 'not knowing' in the context of the

structured *trabalhinhos* that required them to ‘know how to do right.’ Often children seemed at a loss when, like Washington, they made pineapples with dots instead of ‘V’s.

Children also spent long periods without an official activity and available resources to structure their time. They usually ‘fended’ for themselves as they waited for the teacher’s directions and resources. Inevitably conflicts seemed to emerge during these times, and inevitably the teachers seemed to resort to punishment.

Teachers’ constant interruption of children contributed to the inconsistency in children’s pedagogical experiences. Helena and Sara could not escape their roles of manager of the *trabalhinhos*, inside-play, and, ultimately, of children. They ‘had’ to constantly pull children into the official activities. I described how the result was a dynamic of children ‘always’ seizing opportunities and ‘always’ playing, and the teacher ‘always’ interrupting children’s interactions. There seemed to be an underlying understanding that the teacher would interrupt children, calling them back into the official world of the classroom.

Here, I want to remember Matias, Washington and Lucas’ tears after Helena broke a piece out of their much-prized snake. This caring and flexible teacher, who was concerned with providing children with varied play activities, failed to understand young children’s meanings of play and to view children as subjects engaged in play. In a sense, in instances like the one above, she seemed incapable of actually seeing children’s play.

Hence, interruption, particularly of children’s narratives and interactions, was an inherent consequence of the pedagogical practices. The teacher’s interruption of children’s “out of time” activities was particularly severe. Because child-initiated initiatives were marginal to the teacher-dictated ones, they were, most of the time, invisible in the classrooms and thus repeatedly disregarded and invalidated.

Finally, ‘erratic activities’ at the Creche Santa Rita added to the haphazard nature of children’s lives at the *creche*. The coordinators and the teacher seemed to struggle with the process of counteracting the *creche*’s tradition of ‘keeping’ children. At that time, they had not constructed a clear alternate view of *educação infantil*. As a result, pedagogical practices lacked consistency. I have discussed in chapter 3 how the *trabalhinhos* were often disconnected from children’s meanings. The coordinators and the teacher often focused on ‘finding activities’ instead of promoting educative experiences for children. Educational practices seemed erratic. For example, the institution of outside recess, a common practice in most of the *creches*, was the result of one teacher’s suggestion, and it was repeatedly threatened. The way Helena planned, and later did not sustain, opportunities for children to dress-up and the contradictory suspension of children from ‘classes’ further illustrate the inconsistent pedagogical practices at the Santa Rita.²⁸

It is difficult to convey in writing the complexity of children and teachers’ interactions at the centers. For example, it is important to note that the teachers’ ‘disregard’ of children’s initiatives, although prominent, did not preclude many occasions when Helena and Sara acknowledged children’s actions and conversations. Playful, ‘out-of-time’ interactions between the teachers and the children also represented prominent threads of life at the centers.

Children’s Wellbeing

Children’s experiences were multidimensional, situated in the messy realm of human relationships and human connection. The children experienced conflict and

²⁸ Comparatively, children’s experiences were more stable at the Sabia. Sara’s teaching seemed anchored on a established, less tentative pre-school routine.

distress; yet, they seemed to experience wellbeing at the *creches*. Children's playfulness, an important learning disposition, indicates a sense of wellbeing (Carr, 1988). As they actively created their place at the pre-schools, the children shared a rich world of narrative and play. Intense narrative actions marked children's happy conviviality during the *trabalhinhos* and inside-play, particularly during the periods of 'benign *bagunça*.'

The three vignettes of conviviality within disorder I discussed in chapter 5 are significant. They are examples of 'undomesticated' experiences that coexisted with the limiting practices that tended to dominate children's experiences. They illustrate how although officially children were required to be quiet and contain their bodies, at times they seized freedom. They also highlight the teachers' flexibility and caring engagement with the children. During these convivial benign *bagunça* times the children seemed to experience the exhilaration of 'being in charge,' and their immense energy and liveliness was manifested in the classroom.

It is noteworthy that children could 'take the *creche* and the teacher over' at the Santa Rita. These experiences reveal children's sense of connection in the *crèches*, reflecting their sense of wellbeing stemming from their relationships with adults and other children. For Malaguzzi (1993), the founder of the Reggio Emilia program, "relationship is the primary connecting dimension" of that pedagogy. He continues to say that "however, (the relationship is) understood not merely as a warm, protective envelope, but rather as a dynamic conjunction of forces and elements interacting toward a common purpose" (p. 15). Unlike at Reggio Emilia, at the *creches* there seemed to be a disconnect between the purpose of the pedagogical experiences and children's relationships. Yet, 'undomesticated' pedagogies that draw from children's boundless

energy, curiosity, and narrative ability might not be actualized without the sense of connection children seemed to experience at the two centers.

Children's Meanings of their Pedagogical Experiences

Children's Narrative Thinking at the Creches

As I conclude my discussion of children's meanings of their pedagogical experiences, I feel a renewed urgency to learn more about how young children engage with life narratively. Matias' story about the 'balloon,' or his suspension from the *creche*, highlights "children's narrative approach to life" (Paley, 1990, p. 17). Matias interpreted his *castigo* 'through story.' It is noteworthy that Matias' story was supported by and situated within a shared narrative among the children. In sum, the children seemed to share a collective narrative realm in their efforts to make-meaning of their lives and their pedagogical experiences.

However, the pedagogy failed to engage children's meanings, often silencing and ignoring children's narratives, which were then constructed in the margins of classroom life. For instance, children's problematic stories about 'being sick' when they received *castigo*, were not acknowledged by the teachers while I observed. Although often hidden, children's narratives remained an active and vivid aspect of children's lives. Here, I am reminded of the children marveling at the moon during circle time. Spontaneously, most children lay down on the patio floor to appreciate and understand the presence of the moon during daylight.

As in the episode above, children were 'always' actively interpreting their world 'through narrative.' My study offers only a window into how children constructed

meanings in the two classrooms. In sum, it highlights how children constructed meanings ‘their own way’ and how they seemed to do so collectively.

‘Children Don’t Manda:’ Children’s Meanings of Passivity

Cláudia’s question about ‘who *manda* in me’ symbolizes children’s efforts at understanding power and authority, an active concern of children in the two *creches*. Cláudia exposed a crucial aspect of the miseducation of children: how children seemed to be constructing views of themselves as people who are not in charge, or do not *mandam*, and, most importantly, to view others and the world from that perspective. I doubt that children at the Reggio Emilia’s schools or at Paley’s kindergarten would ask ‘Cláudia’s question.’ Even when children generally agree that teachers are in charge, I do not think that they would systematically make a point that teachers *mandam* and that children are not in charge of ‘anything.’ My study reveals how children’s meanings of their pedagogical experiences were shaped by their particular kind of learning experiences.

At the same time that children’s accounts of *mandar* are particularly indicative of children’s passive meanings, they also reflect children’s active and collective meaning-making. Furthermore, children’s meanings of *mandar* are blunt renderings of the pedagogical expectations. For instance, children’s comments that ‘what teachers do is *mandar*’ identify a crucial pedagogical aspect. The children uncovered how teaching centered on teachers ruling children and their learning. On quite a different note, children’s meanings of what teachers should do differently represent compelling arguments for change. Gabriela Santos and Michele expressed her will that teachers stop telling children to ‘be quiet’ and punishing them.

The Paradox of Children's Meanings: Passive Views and Active Meaning-Making

Children's meanings of their pedagogical experiences are paradoxical. In this sense, they serve as cautions against 'block' or simplistic interpretations of children's meanings of passivity. Children's comments about 'who *manda*' in play are helpful here. On the one hand, it is startling that children would say that the teacher *manda* in play. On the other, children's accounts indicate the complexity of children's meanings of power. Margarida and Cleberson pointed out that children have ownership of play **during** play or when they are in the act of playing. Other children suggested that they might feel the same way about the *trabalhinhos*.

A complex paradox seemed to emerge from children's meanings of their pedagogical experiences. On the one hand, children's narratives reflect children's lack of agency. On the other, they reveal children's highly developed ideas and sensitivity. Such paradox is not dualistic. Instead, it suggests an intricate relationship of multi-dimensional experiences and perspectives. First, the children interacted with and actively transformed the pedagogy that fostered their passivity. Second, at the same time they seemed to learn passive meanings, they actively constructed meanings of their experiences, their world, and themselves. Third, even when they indicated that they see themselves as people 'who do not *manda*,' children raised powerful voices. Washington's criticism of the 'ugliness' of teachers' *castigo* to prohibit children to play vividly illustrates this point. Fourth, children seemed to make-meaning of their experiences collectively. For instance, their like-interpretations of 'who *manda*' further indicate the emergence of a shared narrative of schooling and of how children situate themselves in their pedagogical lives collectively. Finally, children's meanings were not only passive, as I discussed in Chapter 6. Some children sharply criticized the pedagogy. It is noteworthy that Davidson,

Gabriela S., Cláudia and Daniele objected to the restrictions imposed by the pedagogy requirement of ‘being quiet to do the *trabalhinhos*’ upon the seeming natural expression of their bodies. They identified central issues, indicating that the activities were ‘too much’ and that they wanted to play more. I further explore children’s paradoxical meanings next.

“We Do Whatever the Teacher Allows us to Do”: Meanings of Learning

Maybe it is no surprise that children seemed to have a narrow interpretation of learning and expressed such passive roles in the learner-teacher relationships. Despite the teachers’ flexibility and interest, ultimately the pedagogical activities imparted a power relationship in which children seeming to be learning expectations to ‘do’ what teachers ‘ordered’ and ‘allowed.’ As they followed the instructions of the *trabalhinhos* and learned ‘the things,’ children learned about learning: they actively constructed meanings of learning and knowing as well as of how one learns. Children’s passive roles as they learned seemed to lead to children constructing limited meanings of learning.

When children talked about learning, they represented it as following the teacher’s meanings. Even though they seemed eager and proud to learn, their experiences did not seem to encourage them to make learning and the product of learning their own. While talking about ‘what they did,’ children often removed themselves from their accounts of their experiences. In some instances, the teacher’s actions seemed to represent children’s actions as they learned, and not the children’s. Children seemed to be learning to create their invisibility.

Children's Views of Banking System of Education

Children's accounts of what and how they learn are powerful narratives of lived-experiences. Children offered situated and personal accounts of their learning about learning. It is unsettling to hear the children themselves describe in so many ways how they are learning passivity and obedience, as when Gabriela S. conveyed her distress with *bagunça* and the teacher's scolding, and then vowed to 'be good.' In that conversation about what she liked best at the *creche*, she poignantly expressed the pedagogical requirement of the submission of children's bodies ('lower the head' and 'be quiet') and also of children's voices ('do not say anything').

Children spelled out Freire's (1970) banking system of education. They addressed all the 10 tenants Freire outlined in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. For example, they said that the teachers "make the classes," and they have to 'be quiet' and learn to 'do right.' When they talked about how the teacher 'gives' the *trabalhinhos* and play, children indicated how they see the teachers as 'donors' or 'givers' of knowledge. Their teacher-centered accounts indicate how they see clearly that the teachers are those who act, while they 'have to be quiet' to learn a static and 'right' way. Children's meanings that the teacher *manda* in learning and they 'study' 'whatever' she 'chooses' and 'allows' raise important questions about their experiences and their learning.

"Without Mother and Father": Children's Critique of the Pedagogy

Yet, children's accounts were also multiple and complex. For instance, they were permeated with children's excitement about learning, playing, having friends, and relating with the teachers. They also revealed children's ability to 'marvel at the moon' or their sparkling vitality about learning and playing at the *creches*. In addition, few but

significant accounts represented the meanings that children actively constructed for themselves, such as children's views of learning how to read and of 'helping the little classmate' to learn. Further, in children's accounts of learning we also hear powerful voices articulating problematic views about their education.

Passive and narrow meanings were not the only meanings children expressed. Some children objected to the "normalization of the unnatural" (Foucault, 1984) inherent to the pedagogy. They critiqued the pedagogical requirement that young children 'be quiet' to learn. Gabriela S. was an important voice in highlighting how the pedagogy led to fighting, yelling, and the containment of children's bodies. Children also questioned the pedagogical requirement that they 'learn alone,' as well as the teachers' use of *castigo*. Furthermore, some children strongly criticized the excesses of the *trabalhinhos* and expressed their contradictions with the 'difficult' activities and the lack of play, particularly at the Santa Rita. Gabriela Santos argued vehemently how children "could not stand to make everything." Her narrative image of being "without mother and father" when discussing the activities is a powerful representation of what does it mean for children to 'be good' to do 'everything' the teacher *manda*.

Children's Life-Stories at the Creches: Bagunça and Castigo

The pervasive narratives children told clearly suggest that *bagunça* and *castigo* became central features of *their* life-story at the pre-schools. The teacher-controlled pedagogy seemed to produce and provoke children who routinely made *bagunça*, fought and received *castigo*. The children seemed to consider hitting, *bagunça*, and *castigo* central and stressful experiences, which became the focus of their narratives of life at the

creches. Children's prevalent stories of *bagunça* and *castigo* came to reflect their meanings of 'what happened' at the *creches*.

Although *castigo* and *bagunça* were pervasive, they were non-canonical and highly charged experiences, because they involved deviation from 'good' and punishment. In this sense, they required narrative's ability to both tell and interpret (Bruner, 1990, p. 80). Ultimately stories can be viewed as fictions, and as such, open to interpretations. Yet, children's stories of their experiences are meaningful texts (Nicolopolou, 1996) that are both about children's experiences and indicative of children's interpretations of these experiences. Children's accounts are valid lenses to understand children's experiences and *their* interpretations of these experiences. In sum, their accounts are legitimate representations of their meanings of school.

Understanding and Being Understood at the Creches

Bruner argues that narrative gives "meaning or 'structure' to experience" (1990, p. 90) and represents efforts at understanding and also at being understood. In their pervasive and complex accounts of *bagunça*, hitting and *castigo*, children further convey a startling understanding of the pedagogy and a poignant effort at being understood. For instance, children argued that they fought 'because' of resources and related how their experiences of conflicts affected their 'being with' their friends. Children also expressed their distress with a pedagogy that seemed to provoke fights and 'make' them into *bagunceiros* and 'hitters.' In a sense, children **had** to make *bagunça*. Cleberson could not 'be quiet' at his table; he threw the backpacks on the floor. Gabriela could not longer wait for the yellow pencil; she hit Davidson.

Children's accounts illustrate this apparent 'impossibility' of 'being good,' despite children's intentions, and the meanings of this contradiction for children. Roberto and Cleberson, among others, expressed children's mixed feelings about 'coming' to the *creche*. Feelings of despair with 'staying of *castigo* of everything' because they 'do everything,' as Cleberson said, transpire in children's accounts. Children's narratives of distress, or when they 'could not stand it anymore,' indicate children's longing to play and live in peace. At the same time, they also seem to reflect children's struggle with a painful recognition of the impossibility of 'being good' and 'right.' In chapters 4 and 6 I noted that children represented themselves and their friends as 'sick' when they received *castigo*. Such meanings are very problematic, especially when in their narratives of school children are less notably players, storytellers, builders, or creators.

Learning Bagunça and Castigo

Children's pervasive narratives of *bagunça* and *castigo* do not simply mirror experience. They reflect children's own interpretations of their experiences, and also, their active learning about self, other and the world. A crucial question is what these experiences represented for children. Children's comments highlight significant threads of their learning. Children seemed to be constructing notions about their lives, for instance, about 'good' and 'bad,' about where they stand, and about power relations.

For instance, children seemed to be learning that 'being good' or 'being bad' centers on their obedience to the teacher. In Cláudia's story about her 'beautiful school,' children are 'allowed to play' only if they are 'good.' Yet, children's quest of 'being good' was continually undermined. The pedagogy itself, the nature of adult-children relationships, and the prevalence of discipline and punishment all worked against

children's efforts to 'be good.' Children's accounts about fighting over resources indicate how the pedagogical context imposed a need for them to 'scavenge,' 'get,' and then fight to 'keep' resources consistently coveted by their friends. The objective conditions Helena and Sara created in their classrooms unintentionally provoked and created a fertile ground for conflicts. As a result, despite their vows to 'be good' (and despite their teachers' disposition and best intentions), children seemed to be learning conflict. It is noteworthy that they seemed to be learning conflict together with submission.

Children's Roles in their Miseducation

Children's 'narratives of distress' with *bagunça* reveal children's deep contradictions with the pedagogy. But these were not the sole narratives to indicate children's meanings of their experiences. Cláudia and Gabriela's comments about when children chose to make *bagunça* reveal *bagunceiro(a)* as a form of children's agency, or children as active agents in the *bagunça* process. This much less prevalent perspective is significant because it provides insight into other ways that children learned about themselves in the *creches*: Cláudia and Gabriela were learning to hide their *bagunça* from the teacher, and in doing so, to manipulate relations of power in ways that benefit children. The concern here is that the pedagogy could be leading children to actively participate in their miseducation.

Critical Questions: Rich Children, Empoverished Pedagogies

My study is one representation of children's pedagogical experiences and meanings of pedagogy in two *creches* in Brazil. This representation reflects my way of

‘looking at’ and listening to children raised in poverty as social actors with a voice of their own (Moss and Petrie, 2002).

The dual images of Cleberson’s smile coming to the *creche* and the ‘otherness’ of his sadness about *castigo* can be seen as a powerful representation of the ‘mis-encounters’ of the pedagogy at the *creches*. I am deeply concerned with these dual images. They bring to light the richness of children and the extent that pedagogical practices can influence children’s lives.

Here, I do not want to promote views of children as weak and poor, and particularly as victims of adults, particularly teachers. Instead, Cleberson is a vivid representation of children’s richness and agency. His walking to the *creche* is an image of his strength and of the strong children in the two centers. I hope that my study allows the children to be seen in this way, as “active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live” (Prout and James, 1997, p. 8).

Therefore, my study contributes to the discussion of how we see young children. Moss and Petrie (2002) argue that, “our construction of childhood and our images of the child represent ethical and political choices, made within the larger frameworks of ideas, values and rationalities” (p. 55). Previously I have discussed how views of the child are generative of pedagogies and policies. An open discussion of adopted views of the child, in particular of children from poor families in developing countries, seems to be necessary when considering policies, pedagogies and provisions for children.

The question of ‘who do we think children are?’ is closely related to another question asked also by Moss and Petrie (2002) in their debate of new understandings of children’s services: “What do we want for our children?” (p. 4). My study offers insight

into children's complex meanings and processes of meaning-making, or how they co-constructed knowledge. Cleberson's distress brings to light children's often narrow and conflict-ridden experiences in the centers. It also highlights children's problematic and contradictory processes of becoming at the *creches*. I am particularly concerned with how children could be constructing their worlds and their identities from the perspective of submission. I am also concerned with how poor views of poor children might promote impoverished pedagogical practices and miseducative experiences for economically poor children in Brazil. When we 'see' children as rich human beings, the issue of the extent that educational practices can betray children's potential (Malaguzzi, 1993), particularly the potential of young children raised in poverty, seems to become more prominent and in need of urgent exploration.

To further the discussion of the rich child in countries like Brazil where the vast majority of children live in poverty is an urgent matter in my opinion. What does it mean to view young children as rich social actors in a context where children live in material poverty and suffer substantial disadvantages? What do we want for our children in the complex context of our developing countries? Children's powerful voices and meanings in my study offer poignant arguments for pedagogies that are educative for young children and that support children's roles as full agents in their learning. This discussion of pedagogies is not and cannot be separated from the critical questions that need to be asked about what we want for our children (Moss and Petrie, 2000), for all children, and therefore, also for children raised in poverty.

Implications for Further Studies and Policy

Further research needs to explore what it means to be a young-child in early childhood centers in developing countries such as Brazil. This research might focus on young children's meaning-making processes and how these processes are situated in particular cultures. Additional research may focus on significant dimensions of children's lives, such as social-class, gender, and racial and ethnical background.

My study suggests that methodological issues are particularly significant in communicating with young children. Researchers may also explore new methodological approaches stemming from new understandings of how young children think, feel, and relate to their world.

I started my study with the concern raised by Brazilian researchers and educators about the existence of discriminatory pedagogies for the poor, or the question of 'poor education for the poor.' My study offers a window into the complex life of children raised in poverty in Brazil, and it reveals the vibrant, engaging and energetic nature of the children at the two *creches*. My study also reveals that the children were not only in the process of receiving an education, but also of constructing knowledge and forming their identity as they learn. The question of who children are, of who we want children to be and to become, and how can education support such goals is critical. These issues are complementary because of the intrinsic relationship between being, becoming, learning, and teaching.

In light of my study, policy-makers may need to ask the critical questions framed by Moss and Petrie (2002):

- Who do we think young children are?
- What do we want for them?

These two questions have a particular significance in Brazil and other developing countries where the majority of children live in poverty. They remind us of the significance of centering the policies and practices of early childhood education in the lives of all young children.

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