Children's Protagonism at the Centro Cultural Da Criança: A Case Study

Claudia Protasio Ceccon

Western Michigan University

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CHILDREN’S PROTAGONISM AT THE CENTRO CULTURAL
DA CRIANÇA: A CASE STUDY

Claudia Protasio Cecon, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University, 2011

This dissertation provides a thick description and discussion of how child protagonism, participation and autonomy were implemented in an out of school center – The Children’s Cultural Center – in a favela, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The researcher visited the center for more than two years, twice a week from February 2008 to June 2009, and once a week from June 2009 to July 2010. She conducted in-depth interviews with educators and children, recorded observation sessions in the activity rooms, and observed actualization sessions for educators and family days. This study describes the perspectives and expectations of the Center’s educators on their work and how they rethought their practice to facilitate children’s protagonism. It presents the children’s perspectives on the opportunity of making choices, and participation in decision making and problem solving. Discussions are contextualized using as reference an in-depth analysis of the community setting (Morro dos Macacos), the conceptual premise of the child as a rights’ holder, how it reflected on International and Brazilian policies, and, finally, the organizational challenges of implementing a novelty concept. Three theses are presented: (a) protagonism, autonomy, and respect for children’s rights, once implemented as a methodology, led to children having more initiative and contributing solutions to problems that affect them. This thesis proved true even in the most difficult
conditions, where poverty and violence were the norm. In light of the CRC convention, it shows a concrete way to achieve children’s participation, which 198 countries signed off to do. (b) Adults learn when they are supported, when what they are learning makes sense to them, when it considers their feelings, beliefs and needs, and when they are not afraid to make mistakes. The learning process transforms them deeply, altering some core values. And (c) even in trying conditions, children learn best when they feel they belong to a community, they are trusted, loved, and have freedom to make choices. They learn when they are seen for their potential, when they can try out new things without being judged. Violence affects children in many ways, but their creativity in looking for solution to problems remains a resource that can contribute to change this environment.

The Cultural Center's methodology is presented, so that readers can assess and get inspired by their approach for implementing children’s protagonism.
CHILDREN’S PROTAGONISM AT THE CENTRO CULTURAL DA CRIANÇA: A CASE STUDY

by

Claudia Protasio Ceccon

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Claudia Protasio Cecon
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This study seeks to understand how particular concepts, namely children’s protagonism, children’s autonomy and children’s rights were implemented in an out of school center setting – The Children’s Cultural Center - in a context of poverty in an urban area of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. These concepts are especially important in the international context where 193 countries have signed the United Nations’ Convention on the Rights of the Child (OHCHR, 1989), which highlighted children’s participation in two articles. While much progress has been made towards advancing the rights of the child in the last two decades, the aspect of participation, especially for young children, remains a challenge. As child advocate Jaap E. Doek stated, “In my many years as an advocate for children’s rights, I have seen only a few comprehensive examples of child participation” (2009).

In this study, the researcher sought to investigate the CCCria as one of the many possible ways to implement the children’s right to participation, where their voices are heard and impact the decision making process in their school their families and their communities.

A Brief Overview

After this brief introduction (Chapter One), the context is described in Chapter Two, followed by the description of the topic chosen and research problem addressed. In Chapter Three, the researcher presents a review of the literature in three aspects. The first is related to an analysis of the existing scientific production regarding the setting (favela),
to set the stage and help the reader understand the peculiarity of such environment, as well as the many challenges it presents. The second is related to the frame of reference of this work: the child as a rights’ holder. The study presents a history of how the vision of the rights of the child evolved in the past centuries, and how International and Brazilian policies reflect this change in conception. It includes the discussion about participation, protagonism and autonomy regarding young children. Finally, looking at the Cultural Center as an organization, some of the challenges of implementing a novelty concept are presented.

In Chapter Four, the researcher presents the research methodology choices as well as the steps taken to collect and analyze the data. Using a qualitative approach, the data was captured through interviews and observation sessions of children and their interactions with the adults, during the day-to-day activities at the Center. Monthly training sessions and Saturday’s activities with the families were recorded, and many artifacts produced by the children were photographed and analyzed. The themes that emerge from the data were then presented to the public (children and adults) for feedback. The format chosen in this particular chapter was a first person account, describing what really happened, reflecting on the reasons involved and possible impacts on the study.

In Chapter Five, the researcher presents the findings through a thick description of the training strategies and day-to-day practices to promote children’s autonomy and implement child protagonism. Excerpt of interviews, anecdotes and notes from observations are used to present the concepts, and how they were assimilated by adults
and children.

The insights and responses to the research questions that oriented this work are presented in Chapter Six, dividing the findings into three theses, supported by themes that emerged from the analysis of the data. The researcher intends the appendix to serve as a resource for practitioners, including: the full version of the rooms’ descriptions, interactions between educators and children, and copies of the forms used.
CHAPTER I

CONTEXT AND PROBLEM

In this chapter, the researcher describes the international, national, and local context in which the Children’s Cultural Center (CCCria) was created. Within that context, she presents the research problem and questions investigated. Key definitions and acronyms used in the text are provided at the end of the chapter to facilitate the readers’ comprehension.

Context

Brazil’s population is over 187 million people, and of those, close to 60 million are under 18 years old (UNICEF, 2008). Brazil has approximately one third of the total youth population of Latin America and the Caribbean. According to 2008 UNICEF report on Brazil, the country has the largest zero- to six-year-old population in the Americas, representing 11 percent of the population. Approximately 11.5 million (56%) of all Brazilian children ages zero to six live in homes where the income is less than half of the minimum wage (UNICEF, 2008).

The Children’s Cultural Center (CCCria) is located in Rio de Janeiro, a city with 6,093,472 inhabitants (IBGE, 2007) spread over more than 456 square miles. About 860,000 people live in poverty (less than R$120 per month or less than US$70 per month) plus 360,000 in extreme poverty (less than R$60 per month or less than US$35 per month) (Urani, 2006). One of the unique geographical characteristics of the city and part of its natural beauty is that it stands between the ocean and several chains of mountains. Since the late 1800s, the poorest population was pushed away from the flat
lands to occupy the city hills. There they formed fast growing, unplanned communities called *favelas* – neighborhoods where the public services (water, sewage, electricity) were nonexistent, but housing was rent free and close to work opportunities. Therefore, Rio is a city:

…characterized by spatial contiguity - with few equivalents in other major cities - between *favelas* and *asphalt*, and wealth and poverty. It is the explanation of the existence of “two cities”; one of them not only poorer than the other, but also occupied, in the vacuum of public authority - by a sway of private illegal groups. (IPEA, 2002, p. 4)

In 2005 there were over 750 registered favelas in Rio de Janeiro’s metropolitan area (Cavallieri & Lopes, 2006) where approximately one million people live (SABREN, 2000). The CCCria is located in one of these communities.

The Morro dos Macacos, translated “Monkeys’ Hill,” is a favela occupying 215,451 square meters or 2,319,093 square feet (Cavallieri & Lopes, 2006) in a middle-class neighborhood called Vila Isabel, in the North Zone of the city of Rio de Janeiro. While the geographic area is easily recorded through aerial photography, it is challenging to know the precise number of people living in the Morro dos Macacos. Favelas are difficult places to survey for several reasons: access, violence, and attitude (surveys are seen as unwelcome governmental interference). Therefore, the data found through survey research is often conflicting. In her ethnographic study of Morro dos Macacos, Piccolo (2006) said, “The number of inhabitants varies according to the source and, as I understand, according to the intentions of who presents the numbers” (p. 119). The

__________________________

1 Asphalt is the terms used by the people who live in the favela (the hills) to designate the upper class people who live in the city, where streets are paved.
official IBGE data (2000) indicates that there are 3,435 inhabitants in 914 residences. However, the architect Cláudia Magnani (2007) reports a population of 17,184 inhabitants living in the Morro dos Macacos Complex. According to Magnani (2007), the Morro dos Macacos Complex’s occupation started in the 1920s, caused by the process of expropriation of poor downtown dwellers as the city expanded. They chose the Morro dos Macacos area because it was far from downtown and from the South Zone and, therefore, gave them less risk of expulsion. Thus, the favela Morro dos Macacos is one of the oldest in the city and has suffered from poor city services (unpaved streets, lack or precarious availability of electricity, water and sewage services) for years. To face this state of affairs, the population organized itself. In the 1960s, a neighborhood association was created, bringing people together to fight for better living conditions, particularly the right to have electricity and water.

After almost twenty years, some of the community leaders left the association and created an active social association that fosters a culture of peace and creates educational opportunities for young people inside the community, called the Centro Comunitário Lídia dos Santos/CEACA-Vila (Piccolo, 2006). CEACA-Vila started its activities in 1978, dedicating its efforts toward improving life in the Macacos Community. This nongovernmental organization (NGO) offers an array of educational opportunities to the favela’s dwellers. Among these are adult literacy classes, counseling, and job training. However, CEACA-Vila’s main focus is children and adolescents for several reasons.

First, research demonstrates that the earlier a child’s brain starts to be systematically stimulated the better. A recent study done by Knickmeyer, et al. (2008)
using magnetic resonance to better understand brain development during childhood and adolescence confirms that “brain development in the first 2 years after birth is extremely dynamic” (p. 12176). The same study also found “a rapid growth of the entire brain during the first year of life, with slower growth during the second year of life” (Knickmeyer, et al., p. 12181). Studies (UNICEF, 2008; World Bank, 2002) point to the importance of interventions during the early years of development in order to reach each person’s full potential.

The second reason CEACA-Vila focuses on children and adolescents is that Brazilian law acknowledges and upholds reinforces children’s rights, considering them citizens with specific rights as “people in peculiar development condition” (Brasil, 1990, Title I, Art.6). The law protects them from child labor, reinforces their right to education and leisure, and gives them priority in accessing health services. To those ends, the law assigns the duty to monitor compliance with children’s rights to two groups: citizen councils (Conselho Tutelar) composed of elected members of the community, and mixed councils (Conselho dos Direitos da Criança e do Adolescente) composed of representatives from the public justice system and representatives of civil society.

The third reason CEACA-Vila focuses on children and adolescents is that the younger the child is, the most vulnerable s/he is to all kinds of violence. Finally, cost analysis studies from the World Bank (2002) concluded that early schooling for four- to six-year-olds positively influences the number of years they will stay in school, reduces retention, and makes a difference in their future earnings. A 2008 UNICEF report said, “Therefore, the investment in early childhood is the best way to reduce the inequities,
face poverty and build a society with sustainable social and environmental conditions” (p. 8).

*A Brief Account of Brazil’s Recent Legal Paradigm Shift*

In the 1980s, after two decades of military dictatorship, Brazil revised its juridical basis. The Constitution, written in 1967 during the dictatorship years, was obsolete and unfit to legislate over a democratic society (Alencar, Carpi, & Ribeiro, 1994). In 1986, deputies were elected to form the Constitutional Assembly responsible for creating a new Constitution. The political regime was changing and with it came a political struggle between the new order and conservative forces. Some deputies appointed by the old regime managed to keep their seats and participate in the Constitutional Assembly. At the same time, a process of mobilization from organizations within society (in syndicates, neighborhood associations, universities and so on) took place, with significant results: over 15 million voters signed more than 50 “popular amendments” to the new constitution. In 1988, Brazil ratified the Constitution, nicknamed “The Citizenship Constitution” (Alencar, et al., 1994, p. 433). On one hand, it brought back traditional civil rights (i.e., end of censorship, end of torture, equality of rights for men and women), and made progress in labor rights (i.e., establishing the 44 hour work week and the unrestricted right to organize and participate in strikes, creating maternity leave with pay for mothers and fathers, and prohibiting racial, gender or age discrimination). On the other hand, the military managed to keep the right to intervene in maintaining internal order (Koshiha & Pereira, 2003). Once the Constitution was approved in October 1988, 450 complementary laws still needed to be created for it to be put fully in practice
Within the Constitution, regarding the population under 18 years old, articles 227 and 228 represented a change from the previous Code of Minors (1927 and 1979), recognizing young people not as “incompetent minors” but as children and adolescents, with rights, and not imputable\(^2\) before the age of eighteen. The creation of this regulation in the Constitution was made with the participation of organized movements. One important example was the National Movement of Street Boys and Girls, created in 1985, to advocate for children’s rights – especially the rights of children who live in the streets and constantly suffer violence. They held regional meetings starting in 1986 where the need for new policies was discussed and documents produced. This evolved into a participatory process to create new policies for the protection of children and adolescents. The law resulting from this process was called Statute of the Child and Adolescent - Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente, or ECA (Law Nº 8.069), and was passed in July of 1990, the same year as Brazil’s ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

The CRC was the first legally binding international convention to affirm human rights for all children. According to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, it was signed by 195 and ratified by 193 countries, the exceptions being Somalia and the United States of America. Dan Seymour, Chief of the Gender and Rights Unit of UNICEF’s Policy and Practice Division regarding the Convention on the Rights of the Child, said about the CRC, “As a binding treaty of international law, it codifies principles

\(^2\) Imputable: the possibility to associate an individual with its acts (Martell2006).
that Member States of the United Nations agreed to be universal – for all children, in all countries and cultures, at all times and without exception, simply through the fact of their being born into the human family” (Seymour, 2009, and p. 1). The alignment between the ECA and the CRC reflects Brazil’s participation in the international debate that led to the Convention. As Castelfranchi (2005) stated, “The ECA implements CRC’s recommendations in Brazil” (para 6). In fact, Brazil was the first country to adjust its legislation to CRC, even before the date where all signatory countries agreed to do so. Among many provisions perceived as very advanced, early childhood education was included as a right for all citizens and the State was appointed as provider for day-care centers and pre-schools (Article 54, Item IV). However, data from the 2001 census indicated that only 10.6 percent of children from birth to three years old and 57 percent of children aged four to six were enrolled in some kind of educational institution (IBGE, 2001). In 2008, the percentage of 4 to 6 year olds enrolled in preschool rose to 76 percent, or approximately 11 million children. These numbers hide yet another aspect relevant to the matter at hand: from the 4 to 6 year olds children not enrolled in preschool, 58 percent, or 1.3 million, are of African descent (UNICEF, 2008).

Brazilian School System and Its Immediate Implications

At four years of age, the children that enter the Brazilian public education system will have, from that day until they graduate high school, part-time schooling, usually from 7:30 a.m. to 12 p.m., or 12:30 p.m. to 5 p.m.. The system often leaves young children in the care of older siblings, neighbors, or on their own during non-school hours. As a result, children are at risk for injury. According to the Health Ministry’s VIVA
survey, in Rio de Janeiro 25 percent of the emergency cases registered in hospitals were children from 0 to 14 years old. In Brazil, accidents tend to be more frequent during the day, increasing from 6 a.m. (1.4%) until the first peak around 10 a.m. (6.6%), followed by a reduction to 5 percent at 1 p.m., and increasing to 7.7 percent (maximum occurrence) at 5 p.m. (Ministério da Saúde, 2009).

What is not often mentioned, perhaps because of its controversial nature, is that violence also occurs at home. A study by SOS Children from the NGO Brazilian Agency for the Protection of Children and Adolescents (ABRAPIA), using data from the 1,169 cases³ they oversaw between January 1998 and June 1999 in Rio de Janeiro, (ABRAPIA, 2004) revealed that of the children that were abused, 85 percent were subjected to abuse inside their homes. Among the cases of domestic violence, 93.5 percent of the perpetrators were relatives, in 52 percent of the cases, the child’s mother. In the 6.5 percent of cases where the perpetrator was not a relative, 46 percent were neighbors. Regarding the type of violence suffered, 65 percent of the cases were physical, 51 percent were psychological, 49 percent involved neglect and 13 percent were sexual abuse. Looking specifically at sexual abuse cases, 82 percent of the victims were between two and ten years old. This data supports the claim that young children need special, immediate, and full-time protection.

In the Morro dos Macacos favela, in 1979, CEACA-Vila initiated its activities by creating a community daycare center, the Patinho Feliz (the Happy Duckling), which is still serving the community today. It is a place where toddlers (12 to 36 months old) are

safe and well cared for from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. while their parents are at work. CEACA-Vila also created special training programs for teenagers – computer classes, bakery skills, and so on. However, children from 4 to 11 years old, enrolled in the part-time public schools, still had no before or after school program they could attend. In interviews people said that many of these children were either locked inside their houses, or unsupervised, unattended, uncared for, and free to roam the streets, “children were loose in the hill, learning all that wasn’t good” (Piccolo, 2006, p.189). Since the Morro dos Macacos is a favela considered violent even for Rio’s standards, where armed conflicts between police and drug dealers are frequent (Piccolo, 2006), unsupervised children are, therefore, highly vulnerable to urban violence.

The Community Looks for Solutions

Dona Anastacia founded CEACA-Vila and served as a community leader in Morro dos Macacos. She and her team were searching for a solution that would protect children up to 10 years old that were idle and vulnerable in a risky environment when they were not in school (CECIP, 2009). Anastacia asked a partner NGO, CECIP – Popular Image Creation Center, which had experience in early childhood education, to develop a project to address the issue. A team of experienced educators from CECIP designed the Children’s Cultural Center (CCCria), introducing an innovative methodology, and presented it to CEACA-Vila leadership – who readily approved it. Along with other partners, including the financial support of the Dutch Bernard Van Leer Foundation, the CEACA-Vila formed a partnership to build the CCCria, in 2006. Thus, the Center’s creation is a response to a need identified and expressed by the community:
the lack of safe, educational spaces where children four years of age and older can stay when they are not at school. CCCria is a place where they can grow and develop comprehensively with access to culture and leisure and be able to play and be happy as specified in Brazil’s ECA (CECIP, 2009).

*The Site: Children’s Cultural Center*

The Children’s Cultural Center (CCCria) was built in the Morro dos Macacos favela and inaugurated in December 2006. The building was designed as a castle, with a high tower painted yellow, a pointed roof, and gates that control access. A circular stairwell followed by a small ramp gives access to a second gate that leads to the Center itself. Built with intention to make it a place for children to play and be happy, it purposefully uses the image of a castle, a place where children are protected from harm. The center includes a computer room, a play-room, a library, an art room, a music room, a video/DVD library, an English classroom, and a dance studio.

Over 200 children, ages of 4 to 11 years old, attend CCCria regularly. In addition, the center hosts about 20 drop-ins per day, ages 2 to 4 years old, who come from the downstairs community day care center. One hundred children attend the morning shift, from 7:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Those children go to school during the afternoon. The children who are at school in the morning go home, have lunch, and come to the Center from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. This is the physical setting. But to understand what is happening at CCCria one has to be aware of the interactions inside the Center between adults and children, surroundings, of the social context where this center is developing its work.
**CCCria: Basic Principles**

CCCria is inspired by the concept of “children’s protagonism” where young children are stimulated to participate in decision-making, be in charge of their own actions and learning, respect the rules they help to create, gain knowledge about their rights and learn to respect the rights of other children and adults (CECIP, 2007). The idea behind the Center is that children who have an opportunity to make choices and develop their autonomy through dialogue and participation in decision-making not only will feel empowered, but also will have better problem solving and conflict resolution skills. Another idea underlying the CCCria is that children will learn and develop their talents through several workshops that are offered daily, and therefore will have more opportunities in life. All of this occurs in an environment that keeps them engaged and safe from harm. Safety is critical because these children live in a community where armed conflicts between drug dealers and law enforcement happen often, and where, for lack of public investment and services, the drug lords fill the gap and take their toll.

CCCria can be associated with Article 12 and 31 of the CRC (OHCHR, 1989). Article 12 states that young people have the right to participate in all matters affecting them, beginning in early childhood. Article 31 speaks of the right to participate in cultural and leisure activities. The actual text of those articles is as follows:

**Article 12**

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law. (p. 4)

Article 31

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity. (p. 9)

This section covers the political, social, and juridical context of the favelas and children in the favelas. It shows also how the community organized itself into a community movement to protect its children. Finally, it introduced the center’s physical structure and founding principles related to that wider context.

The Research Problem

In this section, the researcher describes (a) the general topic framing this dissertation, (b) the research problem and purpose, and (c) the target audience for the research findings.

The Topic

The researcher will explore the action of NGOs partnering in developing solutions for problems that the government cannot address properly. When provided the proper
funding, the NGO as an independent organization has the freedom and agility needed to study the problem, propose, and implement small-scale solutions well-adjusted to the local needs of the population. Those solutions can later be adapted to other communities, and possibly become public policies – if properly documented and evaluated.

The case at hand is an example of such process – a community-based intervention in an underprivileged community in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, involving education for civil rights and social justice of children, supported by a Dutch Foundation, and developed by local NGOs. This intervention operates in the children as rights holder’s framework, aligned internationally with the Convention of the Rights of the Child and nationally with the Statute of the Child and Adolescent, the Brazilian legislation that applies the CRC principles, focusing in the promotion of the children protagonism, participation and autonomy.

The Research Problem Statement

Since the publication of the UN CRC, in 1989, the concept of child participation has been the topic of many discussions (Lansdown, 2001, 2005, Miller, 2003), but little research has been done on how it might be implemented and sustained. In this context, child participation means children being actively involved in the decision making processes regarding matters that affect their lives. Developing processes, programs and activities that will truly allow children to be heard and build their skills to achieve citizenship is an issue challenging every country that signed on to the CRC, a total of 193 countries, as of 2009 (Doek, 2009). Moreover, some child advocates have suggested moving beyond child participation to child protagonism. The concept of child
protagonism extends child participation to include initiatives to take action to solve real life problems.

The CCCria is an institution located in a favela – a disadvantaged urban community in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, where children come to play and learn in the period they are not in school (morning or afternoon). The researcher’s interest in the CCCria is three-fold:

First, in the methodology itself, that seeks to maximize children’s participation, protagonism and autonomy, viewing children as rights holders. This responds to a recent and growing international movement to recognize children’s citizenship rights and promote their participation. To produce knowledge on this topic is of great importance.

The second aspect of interest is related to how the educators learned, and translated these complex concepts into practice. Considering that new methodologies are constantly being created and need to be put in place in schools and other settings, some contribution to the already existing body of knowledge may come from looking at this particular process.

There is a third aspect also pertinent in this investigation: how children learned and acted with such methodology, especially in a context of poverty. Research shows that teachers tend to believe that children from favelas, where the illiteracy rate is high would be more difficult to teach. This study investigates how children (re)act when given more autonomy to choose activities, manage their time, take responsibility for their behavior and for decisions that affect them.
The Purpose Statement

In this study, the researcher will document how the concept of children’s protagonism was developed and implemented in the Children’s Cultural Center, in 2008 and 2009. Using case study methodology, the researcher will describe: (a) the methods and activities employed to achieve the participation and empowerment of young children, (b) how the different actors influenced the concepts’ implementation, (c) how educators themselves were affected by it, (d) how the local culture and beliefs interfered. It also looks at how the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was translated into the Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente (ECA), and how this law relates to the concepts implemented at CCCria. Ultimately, it will contributes to the knowledge base and provide child advocates with a model to maximize child participation and protagonism, to be used and adapted to the diverse settings where children interact.

The Audience that will be Interested in this Research

The findings of this research will be of interest to educators working both in the school system and in alternative educational settings, who are concerned about promoting child autonomy and participation. It will be significant for educational authorities studying processes of child empowerment, as well as national and international foundations that support community projects and/or the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Scholars interested in childhood development and sociology of childhood in the 193 countries signatories of the Convention might take notice of the relevance of this study’s contribution.
Research Questions

In order to fulfill the purpose of this study, the researcher will explore the following questions:

1) How is the concept of children’s protagonism put into practice in CCCria – Centro Cultural da Criança, an afterschool center for disadvantaged children in the Morro dos Macacos favela, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil?

2) How do educators and educational leaders adjust their practice to facilitate children’s protagonism?

3) How did children act in response to the autonomy provided by CCCria children’s protagonism?

Rationale for the Study

This study is important because the community based initiative it will investigate uses a methodology that endeavors to promote the rights of children – especially their right to have a voice and affect decision making processes. What adds to this singularity is that it promotes the rights of children while located in an extremely impoverished area, where violence and disregard for human rights are the norm. CCCria is intended to implement a new way to relate to the children, empowering them to participate in the decisions that affect them directly, putting in practice the Article 12 and 31 of the 2005 UN CRC, helping community building and fostering a culture of peace. Finding methodologies to implement the right of children to participate in matters that affect their lives is a challenge facing the 193 countries that signed the above mentioned treaty.

Another aspect that makes the CCCria experience unique is the implementation of the
concept of children protagonism, which is new, and little has been written either about how to implement such a concept, or on what it means for both children and educators to use protagonism in their daily practice. Documenting this initiative, bringing in the many perspectives of the people involved will hopefully increase the repertoire of practitioners, as well as contribute to the ongoing debate on the issue of increasing children’s participation.

Definition of Terms

Some terms that will be used in this study are familiar terms and some are relatively new or at least, less known. They are defined as follows:

*Innovation:* Change, or the process of learning something new; i.e. the process of redoing (behavior, skills) and rethinking (beliefs, understanding) pursued through new materials, policies, and structures (Fullan, 2002).

*Participation:* “...the process of sharing decisions which affect one’s life and the life of the community in which one lives. It is the means by which a democracy is built and it is a standard against which democracies should be measured. Participation is the fundamental right of citizenship” (Hart, 1992, p. 5).

*Citizenship:* “Lays on the relationship between membership, participation, entitlements and obligations” (Drake, 2001, as cited in Bernard van Leer Foundation, 2006, p. 90). “A political and social status, linked to the idea of individual right, on one hand, and to the idea of belonging to and care for a community, on the other” (Alfageme, Martinez, & Campos, 2003, p. 72).

*Children’s Protagonism:* Social processes through which children and adolescents take a
leadership role regarding their own development and the development of their communities to reach the full realization of their rights (Gaytán, 1998, p.86).

Abbreviations

*CEACA-Vila* – Centro Comunitário Lídia dos Santos (Lídia dos Santos Community Center), a Brazilian nongovernmental not for profit organization, based in Rio de Janeiro, in the Morro dos Macacos favela. It originated in the 1970s from an organized community movement. Its first project was to build and maintain a daycare center in the community, to attend the children of working mothers. CEACA-Vila’s mission is to contribute to social promotion and improvement of the quality of life of this underprivileged community, strengthening public policies for children and adolescent rights, and improving young people’s quality of life through social, educational, and cultural activities and sports and job training programs.

*CCCria* – Centro Cultural da Criança (Children’s Cultural Center), a cultural center located in the Morro dos Macacos favela, where approximately 200 girls and boys go before or after school, to play and engage in recreational/learning activities. The educators implement a methodology that aims to promote children protagonism and autonomy.

*CECIP* – Centro de Criação de Imagem Popular (Popular Image Creation Center), a Brazilian, nongovernmental, not-for-profit organization, created in 1986, based at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, committed to social transformation, through education and communication. CECIP’s mission is to produce information and to create methodologies that contribute to strengthening citizenship and to influencing public policies that
promote basic human rights, focusing on education, health, environment and culture.  

**CRC** – Convention on the Rights of the Child - first legally binding international instrument to incorporate the full range of human rights for children—including civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights.  

**ECA** – Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente – Lei n.8.069 (Statute of the Child and Adolescent), a Brazilian law created in 1990, through a participatory process involving children. ECA translates the recommendations of the CRC into policies.  

**IBGE** – Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (The Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics), the main provider of data in Brazil. It is ruled by the Federal Government and subject to the Ministry of Planning, Budget and Management. IBGE collects, processes and disseminates reliable information to different segments of society, including governmental institutions at federal, state and municipal levels. Its mission is "To portray Brazil by providing the information required to the understanding of its reality and the exercise of citizenship" (IBGE, 2010).  

**NGO** – Nongovernmental organization; also nongovernmental, not-for-profit organization. The dictatorship years in Brazil, from 1960 through the 1980s, were marked by organized civil resistance. The dictatorship conditions sparked a new form of organization, created by civilians: the NGO. Each one of these organizations had a mission statement, a statute declaring their purposes, a governing assembly, and registered status as a not-for-profit organization. At first, most NGO income came from international cooperation financing specific projects or actions related to the improvement of the quality of life by aiming to (a) restore rights, (b) promote adult
literacy, (c) divulge information on citizenship, and (d) strengthen civil society overall.

“These NGOs played an important part in the organization and building of a large number of social movements and their leadership, rural and industry workers, syndical opposition, community leaders, contributing to the restructuring of Brazilian civil society” (ABONG, 2006, p.1).

_SABREN - Sistema de Assentamentos de Baixa Renda_ (Low-Income settlement system)

SABREN is a governmental agency, from the Rio the Janeiro Municipality. The objective of SABREN is “to gather and facilitate the access to information on favelas, irregular/clandestine lots and other precarious dwellings that exist in Rio de Janeiro” (SABREN, 2010, p.1)
CHAPTER III

SUBSTANTIVE THEORY

Many reasons exist to conduct a review of the literature when beginning a research project. One of the most important is to identify what others already built on the topic chosen, and therefore identify where one’s contribution might add to the knowledge base. The review of the literature also establishes a connection between the experience the researcher is presenting and other experiences explored by other authors. As said Rudestam and Newton (1992), the review of the literature determines that “not only the proposed study is distinctive and different from previous research, but that it is worthwhile doing” (p.46).

The literature review is organized in three topic areas: the favela, a history of children’s rights, and organizational change in education settings. First, to grasp the meaning of the CCCria experience, the reader needs to understand its context: the favela phenomenon in Rio de Janeiro. Therefore, the researcher presents a panorama of how favelas came to exist and their social, political, and cultural aspects. Next, the researcher describes the evolution of children as rights holders and children participation in the international arena. Finally, the researcher discusses the topic of organizational change in educational setting with regard to program implementation, to support the dialogue on the CCCria experience which will be presented in chapters five and six.

Understanding the Favelas

_Favela_ is a Brazilian Portuguese word translated in English as slum or shantytown (Taylor, 1985). In Rio de Janeiro, it is also a political, historical and cultural phenomenon
of major importance. As Randolpho and Burgos (2009) said, “...especially in Rio de Janeiro, the slums are the territories that best express the effects of urban segregation” (p. 9). Ferreira (2006) said that although the term might contain some imprecision, it is the norm to equate “housing in subnormal clusters” to “housing in favelas” (p. 72). The definition of subnormal clusters used by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) in all Brazilian census and population studies is “the disorderly occupation and, during its implementation, having no ownership or title of property of the land. It is also called ‘informal settlement’” (Ferreira, 2006, p. 74). Geographically situated in areas of difficult access, and often associated with lack of security, especially for outsiders, the favelas represent a challenge for conducting surveys, establishing the population needs, and consequently planning for attending to those needs.

In a historical perspective, poor and migrant people created favelas as a solution to their housing problems, due to the lack of urban planning or specific policies to address that demand. According to most historians, starting in the mid-nineteenth century, an array of factors contributed to increase the influx of people moving to Rio de Janeiro looking for work opportunities and cheap lodging (Mattos, 2007; Koshiba & Pereira, 2003; Alencar, Ribeiro, & Ceccon, 1997). Among the most important factors the cited authors include: (a) the end of slavery (a process that started in 1850 and ended in 1888), (b) the beginning of the coffee culture decline (reaching its lowest point in 1920), and (c) the initial process of industrialization. This influx of people, with no means to support themselves or pay for proper lodging looking to settle in the country’s capital, worsened the already critical habitation crisis. The city offered no resources, solutions, or
urban planning to address the situation. As a result, in the mid to late 1800s, the downtown area of Rio de Janeiro was occupied by overcrowded, unhealthy houses, spreading along narrow, dirty streets, forming neighborhoods known for their disease incidence as well as for their high crime rate (Mattos, 2007). Rio was hit by epidemic and endemic diseases.

To address these issues, in the last decade of the nineteenth century the city began a process of urbanization and sanitation inspired by the European capitals, especially Paris. This process was conducted by the engineer and appointed city mayor, Pereira Passos. His administration became known as “The Tear Down” because he led a major effort to open large avenues, embellish and sanitize the downtown area – literally tearing down many popular housing. According to Mattos (2007), in 1893 one of these housing areas, called Cabeça de Porco, or Pig’s Head, was demolished in the name of hygiene and progress. Since there were no plans to relocate people living in the area, the dwellers were authorized to gather the remaining material from the rubble. With it, they started another community on the hills of the Morro da Providência, the first favela. The name favela comes from the kind of vegetation that grew on those hills. The shacks were made of wood and scraps of different materials found; they were fragile and subject to being washed away by the strong summer rains. Even so, they became part of the landscape, expanding from 14 such communities in 1920 to over 750 registered favelas in Rio de Janeiro’s metropolitan area in 2005 (Cavallieri & Lopes, 2006).

Approximately 19 percent of Rio de Janeiro’s total population lives in favelas. Although the majority of people living there, called favelados, are workers, the favelas
are also perceived as safe places for criminal activities (Piccolo, 2006). They are easy places to hide and there is less presence of law enforcement. Even if famous samba and bossa nova songs describe romantically the joys and struggles of living in such communities, and artist depicted them in modern art paintings, movies and other forms of art, the favelas are still seen by most people as not belonging to the city (Souza, 2010). They are unwanted by the middle and upper class, perceived as threatening, dangerous places, and often as places that should be “removed.”

For most of their existence, the favelas have been threatened with demolition, and many of them were demolished. In 1927, the first plan to eradicate all favelas was created. In the following decades, many more attempts were made. During the military dictatorship between 1962 and 1974, 80 favelas were stricken, 26,193 shacks destroyed and approximately 140 thousand people removed (Mattos, 2007). People were discriminated against for living there, and with the political climate favelas were seen as possible harbors for communist activity. Many favela leaders were arrested, tortured and killed.

Meanwhile, a growing, organized movement led to a change in the situation. A study done in the favela Morro dos Macacos (Piccolo, 2006) showed how the community leaders fought for their rights, starting by demanding clean water and electricity. Then the residents created the neighborhood association, with representatives elected by the community. The association grew to be part of a movement that led to many improvements in the life of the favela dwellers and the guaranty of their basic rights. However, not until the 1980s did the Rio government assured favela residents the right to
a permanent settlement. Some important investments were made to improve the infrastructure. First, wooden shacks were gradually replaced by more solid brick constructions. Second, public services like sewage, water, electricity and garbage disposal were made available to the majority of the population (Ferreira, 2006, p. 77).

Favelas have been historically marked by the lack or poor quality of public services, prejudice, and conflicts with the law. In the late 1980s, the growth in drug traffic brought changes that would greatly impact the life in these communities. With the advent of cocaine and other heavier, more profitable drugs, the drug dealers became heavily armed and more powerful in the favelas. The conflicts between law enforcement and drug lords who lived in the favelas, as well as the conflicts among the drug lords for control of the illegal drug traffic, became more frequent and more violent.

Piccolo (2006) associates this phenomenon with an important change in the neighborhood associations in general and to the one located in the Morro dos Macacos in particular. From the eighties on, the association no longer held elections. The president and board of the neighborhood association were appointed by either the drug lord in power or some politician that had influence in the area.

Another aspect of the drug lords and law enforcement conflicts, and the media around them, was that they seemed to be increasing the city divide between the hills and the asphalt, between “us” and “them.” Jailson de Souza (Observatório de Favelas, 2009) discussed the long standing perception that favelas are dangerous places, and challenged the traditional city division between the favelas and the asphalt. He argued that Rio de Janeiro was one city, with areas where there were public and private investments, and
areas where there were not. This shed new light on the issue, allowing one to see the possibility for a positive future if the proper investments were made. The CCCria and other educational projects were a step in that direction.

Children as Rights-Holders

As mentioned in chapter two, the Brazilian Constitution of 1988 referred to people under 18 years of age differently than the previous constitutions (1927 and 1979). First, the term “incompetent minors” was removed from the new text. In addition, the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente - ECA) brought forth the notion that children and adolescents before the age of 18 had rights but could not be associated criminally with their acts until reaching adulthood (in Brazil eighteen years of age). These changes were a strong indicator that society had begun to see children in a different light.

The ECA is part of this movement to guarantee the rights of children and adolescent. Brazilian law makers were expressing a debate that was also present in the international arena. Dan Seymour, Chief of the Gender and Rights Unit of UNICEF’s Policy and Practice Division wrote, “The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) represents a major milestone in the historic effort to achieve a world fit for children” (Seymour, 2009, p. 1).

When celebrating its 20th anniversary in 2009, the CRC was the target of an intense public debate. Issues of monitoring were raised in the first months of 1995, and ten years later, the situation was the same (Tomás, 2008). In addition, some countries found aspects of the CRC difficult to adjust to their culture, pointing to “its western and
hegemonic spirit” (Tomás, 2008, p. 5). Tomás also revealed that there was less progress on promoting child’s rights than anticipated. She concluded:

This new, complex and revolutionary status has triggered major changes in the images and conceptions of, and discourses about, childhood and children and has also led to changes in the legal frameworks surrounding and supporting childhood in the majority of countries that reflect the spirit of the CRC. In particular, it is worth noting that the greatest innovation of the CRC lies in its understanding of children as subjects of law, a condition which emerges fundamentally out of the recognition of their civil and political rights creating challenges which imply the need for deep social and cultural changes in many societies, with new social and legal conceptualisations, and the need for short, medium and long-term appraisal of the impact of such changes. In spite of this, it is now essential to review critically the progress that has been made in implementing the CRC, to recognise its weaknesses, and to consider how to maximise its impact with a view to improving children’s lives and effectively promoting their rights.” (p. 10)

In Brazil the ECA is making great progress in changing how children are treated, with special attention in considering them in legal processes. However, the reality is still years away from having the children’s rights fully respected (Pires, 2007).

These societal changes were reflected in the literature as well. Since the late 1990s, the field of childhood sociology has been flourishing, concentrating on issues related to understanding childhood and its processes of socialization as a separate field (Delgado & Muller, 2005). They stated, “The processes of socialization, ever more complex, occur from the moment young children spend most of their time out of the
family context” (p. 352). The authors suggested that this change in how the children are perceived in society will have a number of consequences – one of them being how researchers will adjust their methodologies to truly capture children’s voices:

This notion of socialization in childhood sociology stimulates the understanding of children as actors capable to create and modify cultures, although inserted in the adult world. If children interact in the adult world because they negotiate, share and create culture, we (as researchers) need to think about methodologies that really focus on their voices, views, experiences and perspectives. (Delgado & Muller, 2005, p. 353)

Delgado and Muller’s suggestion created a fertile debate on researcher’s practices when working with children. As Czyoniewicz-Klippel (2009) wrote:

Prompted by widespread global interest in, and commitment to, children’s rights and the establishment of childhood studies as an interdisciplinary field of inquiry, the past twenty years have seen an explosion of participatory research aimed at eliciting children’s unique views on social life. (p. 1)

The author further stated, “Promoting children’s participation rights was part of my personal philosophy on childhood” (Czyoniewicz-Klippel, 2009, p. 6); however, she challenged the wave of participatory research as the only true way to reach an understanding of children’s views. She expressed concerns about the ethics and the practicality of having children designing and conducting research, even if supported by adults. She concluded, “Ultimately, perceiving children as competent social actors does not necessarily mean that children must initiate and lead every piece of research” (p. 21).

Educators all over the world embraced this understanding of the competent child
and adjusted or created new practices aligned with the notion. For example, Loris Malaguzzi, a pioneer in this line of thought, believed that children are autonomously capable of making meaning and intellectually processing their experiences, expressing this ability through planning, coordination of ideas, and abstraction (as cited in Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1999). Thus, he rethought the role of adults, conceptualizing them as learning facilitators. A learning facilitator seizes the moment when the child is ready and interested in learning something, and establishes a dialogue between his own knowledge of techniques and pedagogical approaches and the meaning-making competencies of the child (as cited in Edwards, et al., 1999).

In this section it is shown how Brazilian Constitution evolved over the years in the matter of the rights of child. A connection with an international movement toward assuring children’s right is made. One of the rights that is highlighted here is the children’s right to participate in matters that affect them. Educators established the competence of the child in engaging in discussing and solving complex problems they identify as problem. Educators also stress the importance of adults to act as facilitators, to help children in their learning process.

*Citizenship*

In the past twenty years, the subject of child rights and child participation has been connected to the concept of citizenship (Tisdall, Davis, Hill, & Prout, 2006). The idea of children as having rights, developed earlier in this literature review, and those rights being guaranteed by the law reports to the classic concept citizenship. The citizen, as defined in the modern era, according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary was "one
entitled to rights and the privileges of a freeman” (1995). However the concept of citizenship has greatly evolved over the past century. According to Roche (1999):

The traditional model of citizenship was firmly linked with the question of property: in the West it was white men of property who had the vote. Women, slaves and children were excluded. I am not equating these “exclusions”; the terms of exclusion were different and often multiple. The “story” of citizenship over the past 150 years has been of struggles for inclusion and that these struggles are unfinished is evidenced by the endurance of racism and sexism (see Donald and Rattansi, 1992; Evans, 1994; Sachs and Wilson, 1978). Much of these struggles were precisely about making a public issue of what had been seen as a private matter: about redefining the public and the private. The demand that children be included in citizenship is simply a request that children be seen as members of society too, with a legitimate and valuable voice and perspective. (p. 479)

Citing Marshall’s 1950 paper, Roche (1999) presents three elements of citizenship: civil (issues related to laws and personal liberties, including the freedom of speech), political (rights of participation in the political process, as for example, the right to vote), and social (full membership in a community, with rights and duties). However, children were not included in this notion of citizenship, other than from a “future adult” perspective. This meant that it was “not the right of the child to go to school, but of the adult to have been educated” (Marshall, as cited in Roche, 2009, p. 480). This concept has changed over the years, and now scholars defend the idea that “young people are citizens now” (Maitles & Deuchar, 2006, p. 262).

Roche (1999) makes an interesting parallel between the struggle of women and
African Americans to achieve the recognition of their rights and the barriers children (and children’s advocates) face to get their rights recognized and respected. He especially highlights the social discourses and practices that legitimized oppression. Arguments used against women’s participation included the dominant perception of women as being weak and in need of protection, who should be protected (by men) and hence confined to the private sphere of the home. Women were seen as too emotional or even irrational. When the word “children” is substituted for “women,” it is clear the same arguments are being used against children’s participation (Roche, 1999).

The feminist movement in the 1960s and 70s brought enormous changes in the way women were perceived. Roche (1999) cited Alanen’s 1994 paper suggesting that a second wave of feminism brought the idea of a generational agenda in parallel to a gender agenda: “A particular social order that organizes children’s relations to the world in a systematic way, allocates them positions from which to act and a view and knowledge about themselves and their social relations” (Roche, 1999, p. 481).

Bernard van Leer Foundation (2006) cites Drake’s 2001 paper stating that a more modern perspective on citizenship still sits on the relationship between membership, participation, entitlements and obligations. Drake offers an application of this concept to young children:

- Membership: having a sense of belonging, of ‘I’ and ‘We’ (I am).
- Participation: being a contributor with a voice that is heard and effects change (I do).
- Entitlements: being a rights-holder who exercises those rights respectfully
(I can).

- Obligations: having a sense of duty to self and others within society (I must). (Bernard van Leer Foundation, 2006, p. 91)

When discussing rights and duties of young children, the maturity level of the children is an element adults need to be mindful of, but not an impediment for exercising their rights. The term maturity is controversial and not clearly defined. On this subject, Tomás (2008) said:

Lucchini considers that “maturity is defined by cognitive competences and empathetic capacities. The child is, therefore, capable of anticipating what is expected of him or her and, consequently, is also capable of deciding if he or she wants to or should respond to these expectations” (2003:12). This definition is itself subjective, however, and is further limited by the fact that it does not consider the various contexts in which a child is situated. (p. 8)

The discussion and awareness of the maturity factor is especially important because it is in the children’s interactions with the adults that these rights become a reality. The younger the child, the more relevant the discussion becomes. As Irish Preschool Play Association (IPPA) stated:

The implementation of child rights in early childhood depends, from the adult perspective, on awareness, shared values, training and resources. As an adult living or working with young children, I must first be aware that children, too, have rights, and I must believe, integrate and reflect the concept and reality of ‘children’s rights’ in my life. I may also need support in the form of training or resources to live and breathe a rights-
based approach within the context of the family, child-care service and the community. As Hindess (1993) proposes, rights can only have meaning and significance where a citizen can command sufficient resources (mental, as well as material) to exercise those rights (Irish Preschool Play Association - IPPA, as cited in van Leer, 2001, pp. 88-89).

Feldman (2001) linked child participation to a democratic society, where children have the opportunity of influencing policies and decision making. He described this in his study of one of more than 30 democratic schools around the world:

If a goal of education in a democratic society is for children to develop the ability to make moral decisions that they will need to make as adults, then the values of schools should be based on the larger societal values. A school that gives children the same rights and responsibilities as adults provides children the opportunity to observe, learn, and participate in those processes and to develop those skills within the context of their daily lives. As children mature, they participate in the community at levels of escalating responsibility as they develop an increasingly deeper understanding of personal liberty, mutual respect, and political democracy. (p. 24)

Another powerful example of child and adolescent participation in a wider arena, affecting not only the classroom or the school curriculum but the legislation of a country, was the creation of the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (1990) in Brazil. As Hart (1992) wrote:

In 1989, a Second National Congress of Street Children was held in Brasilia, this time with 700 children from all over Brazil and a selection from other Latin American countries. This time the politicians felt obliged to listen. The children came from state
and regional conferences where they had been debating the draft of a Child and Adolescent Statute. Instead of a few representatives, there was a large scale occupation of the senate by the children. Congressmen listened to powerful testimonies by children and many gave up their seats. From all accounts it was a very moving day for the politicians, though no doubt the press was again very important in guaranteeing that this minority group was allowed such a voice in the corridors of power. (p.26)

**Protagonism**

To understand the concept of child protagonism, the reader needs to understand the root of the word protagonist. Coming from the Greek *proto*, the first or the principal, and *agon*, fight or *agonist*, the fighter – the word protagonist means the main fighter. Merriam-Webster’s (1995) definition includes “a leader, proponent, or supporter of a cause: champion” (p. 938).

According to Alfrageme, Cantos and Martínez (2003), long before the Children’s Rights Convention, the concept of child protagonism had its origin in Latin America during the 1960s and 1970s, closely related to the popular education movement. At that time, working children who were being exploited started to organize and demand their rights, claiming that their voice be heard in deciding their present and future conditions. One of the definitions of children protagonism was offered by Gaytán (1998):

…the social processes through which children (boys and girls) and adolescents take a leadership role regarding their own development, the development of their communities, to reach the full realization of their rights. It means putting in practice the vision of the child as a rights’ holder, and therefore
redefines the roles on the different component of society: children and youth, authorities, family, civil society, etc. (p. 86).

Barrientos and Lascanos (2000) agreed with this developmental approach, and added to it, proposing to divide the concept into two levels. The first was a space where children are free to plan and execute activities and attribute/assume roles without the adult interference. In the second level, space was created together with the children, in order to consider their voices and allow them to influence decisions that affect them.

The aspect of children’s participation in a broader arena related to influencing decision making regarding issues that they consider important was emphasized by Hill, Davis, Prout, and Tisdall (2004), when they argued:

…children traditionally have had little or no input into national and local policies, so greater social participation in ways that meet their wishes and felt needs is crucially contingent on their enhanced participation in decision-making. Therefore multi-dimensional participation must be part of the process and part of the answer for social inclusion as a dynamic concept emphasizing society’s barriers rather than individual failings (p. 78).

The role of the adult in regard to the children’s participation was perceived as a delicate issue – especially the balance between adults’ responsibilities and children’s rights (Kay, Tisdall, Davis, Hill, & Prout, 2006). The new adult role described by Kay and altri would be based on a different kind of relationship established with the children, requiring from the adults distinctive skills, ethics, attitude, and desire to relate to children in another way. For example, educators would need to change their attitude to “adults
who work “for” children, and not “on” them. Moss, as cited in Tisdall, et al., 2006, proposed moving toward the vision of the adult working “with” the children, where each respect and learn from the other’s experiences (p. 189). This proposed set of roles, as an example of the higher level of child participation, exemplifies Hart’s (1992) ladder of participation, which the researcher presents later in this text.

Lansdown (2005), borrowing from Clark and Moss (2001), agreed that there was a need for adults to change their attitudes, and learn to be skilful listeners, respecting the children’s rights to be heard and to influence decisions. He also put forward the notion that children are experts in their own lives, are skilful communicators, are (and want to be) active agents, and finally are meaning makers. There is a need for adults to change their attitudes, and learn to be skilful listeners, respecting the children’s rights to be heard and to influence decisions. His 2005 study presented data on the benefits of participation for children: “children will acquire competence in direct relation to the scope available to them to exercise agency over their own lives” (p. 7) citing Vygotsky’s theory of zone of proximal development. Landsown’s study also says that children who express their views are less vulnerable to be abused by adults. It doesn’t mean that children will rule and/or be responsible for deciding everything on their own. They need guidance and protection according to their age. The study presents several examples of experiences all over the world where schools and day cares are implementing the concept. The final benefit is that it strengthened democracy.

According to Pires (2007):

To promote protagonism is to provide children with opportunities to elaborate by
themselves and overcome the mere implementation of something that is delegated to them by adults. It is to welcome original and creative designs. It is to keep walking beside them, and widen the space for participation already established, to serve as the backdrop to achieve the noblest service that this group can offer to the community: spreading the idea that the child is capable! (p. 232)

In Brazil, the concept of protagonism was brought by Antonio Carlos Gomes da Costa – an educator who participated actively in the process of mobilization that resulted in the Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente, or ECA (Law Nº 8.069). Costa (2002) presented the concept of youth protagonism, adapted to the education field:

It is when young people act as the main character of an initiative, activity or project geared toward the solution of real-life problems. The core of protagonism lays on the active and constructive participation of the youngster in school life, in the community, and in society in general. (p. 9)

However, the author relates protagonism to teenagers not young children. In fact, in his essay on heteronomy (Costa, 2002), he defined youth as the transition phase from childhood heteronomy to adult autonomy. The idea of promoting protagonism at a very young age does not seem to be part of his understanding of the concept. His discussion was about whether young children could be “taught” to be autonomous, i.e. if they could be encouraged to think and act autonomously and participate in the decision making process of matters that affect their lives.

An important author whose writings on the subject of autonomy are widely accepted is Constance Kamii. Based on the theories of Jean Piaget, who saw autonomy as
the broad aim for education, Kamii (1994) defined autonomy as:

The ability of an individual to be self governing – in the moral as well as in the intellectual realm. Autonomy is the ability to think for oneself and to decide between right and wrong in the moral realm and between truth and untruth in the intellectual realm by taking all relevant factors into account, independently of rewards or punishments. (p. 672)

The opposite of autonomy is heteronomy – to be controlled by others and to obey blindly what they ask. Kamii (1994) cited several ways in which traditional schooling values and rewards heteronomy. What is often valued as good behavior is associated with blind obedience to the rules and to the teachers. Obedience per se is not the problem, but obedience because of fear of punishment or desire for reward results in a decision that is not the desired one – as would be, for example, decide to obey (or not) because, all factors considered, it is morally right to do so. She summarized heteronomy this way, “Heteronomous people are governed by someone else because they are unable to think for themselves” (Kamii, 1994, p. 672).

In contrast, Kamii cited examples of moral and intellectual autonomy. She referred to Martin Luther King Jr. as an example of moral autonomy. King knew that discrimination was morally wrong, faced enormous adversity for expressing his conviction, and contributed greatly to give voice to a social and political movement that ultimately led to a change in society. Kamii described intellectual autonomy as being true to what one knows – even if it goes against what is believed to be true at a certain time in history. Her examples included Copernicus, who, taking all the relevant factors into
consideration, created the heliocentric theory and, as a result, faced ridicule from the society of his time.

Encouraging autonomy should be fostered beginning in early childhood, according to Kamii (1994), “All babies are born helpless and neither autonomous nor heteronymous. But young children are initially dependent on adults and therefore become heteronymous. Ideally, they become increasingly autonomous as they grow older” (p. 674). The development of autonomy, therefore, depends greatly on the interaction between children and their caretakers – both parents and educators. As Dewey (1944) wrote, “Any education given by a group tends to socialize its members, but the quality and values of the socialization depends upon the habits and aims of the group” (p. 83).

The challenge then, is the habits and aims of the groups socializing children. As educators in charge of this process, it is crucial to discover strategies that would create the ideal conditions to foster autonomous thinking and behavior. Kamii (1994) argued that most teachers have only experienced heteronomy in their relationships and life experiences. In their schooling, family, and professional lives, these individuals have been rewarded for blind obedience and are accustomed to having other people define their choices through reward and punishment. As such, these teachers are not prepared to help children develop as autonomous beings. Kamii, in a recorded interview, said it is impossible to foster autonomy having only known heteronomy, and that educators have to work on their own autonomy before they can act as facilitators of their pupils’ autonomy. Working on autonomy is a conscious choice, and a hard one, because it changes one’s value system and the way people relate to one another. In educational
settings, the adults in charge need to reflect on their own autonomy before they will be able to encourage children to do so. They can organize their rooms accordingly, creating activities and gearing interactions towards giving children opportunities for discussion, choice, decision making, and participation.

**Participation**

According to Ferretti, Zibas, and Tartuce (2004), interest in the active participation of children came to Brazil around the 1930s, through the influence of John Dewey’s democratic education. Dewey (1944) argued that schools should be places where children learn and practice the lessons of democratic participation. During that time, important theoreticians of education, such as Anísio Teixeira and later Paulo Freire, adopted Dewey’s ideas about the importance of involving and listening to what learners had to say, and applying these concepts in schools and other educational settings. In the 1960s, mechanisms of participation were created in most Brazilian schools on a student senate or student council format – called *grêmios*. In the active political climate of the sixties, the students fought for their rights and political convictions through these organizations. Ferretti, et al. (2004) draw attention to the creation of the school councils in the 1980s, where parents and students were involved in discussing school issues with the school leadership team. In the 1990s, the laws, policies, and national curriculum guidelines created by the Ministry of Education both extended and qualified this participation. Parents and students were required to be involved on school councils and in discussions concerning school policies and curriculum. The intent was that each school would become more democratic in regard to its operation and administration in order to
become a more attractive and challenging pedagogical arena for students, teachers, parents, and the community.

Internationally, there are studies documenting the experiences of children’s councils in schools that reported significant gains for both teachers and pupils. In Scotland, Maitles and Deuchar (2006) showed that teachers were surprised at the children’s responsibility and ability to express their views. The teachers also reported that the class climate improved after they adopted a democratic approach to managing the class and organizing the curriculum. According to Maitles and Deuchar (2006) children in these classrooms felt their voices were heard and were having an impact; therefore, they were proud to be a part of a process affecting changes in the classroom and the school.

Although the UK has a long tradition of school councils, real participation remains unsatisfactorily addressed. Veitch (2009) revealed that although school councils were promoted as a tool for facilitating children's participation by offering students real power and responsibility, she argued that “When participation is defined more narrowly – as a radical, transformative and empowering process – the school council is viewed as tokenistic” (p. 5).

In the context of protagonism, participation (as defined above) is a key component. The literature review on the subject done by Ferretti, et al. (2004) found different conceptualizations of the terms protagonism and participation. In some instances the concepts are used interchangeably by different authors. For example, they indicate that “one author refers to ‘protagonism’ in a context where another would speak
of ‘participation’ and there are instances where both expressions are used in the same text as synonyms” (Ferretti, Zibas, & Tartuce, 2004, p. 413). However, not all participation can be considered an act of protagonism. Lansdown (2005) distinguished and described three levels of participation: consultative, participatory, and self-initiated process, which range from low to high involvement. O’Kane, 2003, as cited in Lansdown (2005) highlighted four key components for meaningful, quality participation:

1. an ongoing process of expression and active involvement in decision making at different levels in matters that concern them;
2. information sharing and dialogue between children and adults based on mutual respect and sharing;
3. power for children to shape both the process and outcome;
4. acknowledgement that children’s evolving capacity, experience and interest play a key role in determining the nature of their participation (p. 13).

Hart (1992, p.5) conceptualizes young people’s participation as “the process of sharing decisions which affects one’s life and the life of the community in which one lives. It is the means by which a democracy is built and it is a standard against which democracies should be measured” (p. 5). The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF) and the Bernard van Leer Foundation (2006) seemed to agree with this view of participation leading to a more democratic society and laid the basis for how participation can be made more concrete when applied to young children:

…participation’ means that children can express their views and relate
their experiences and that these views and experiences are given weight in decision-making. The aim of children’s participation is to make children visible in social life and policy-making and to promote education for good citizenship by giving children opportunities to experience democracy. Encouragement for the participation of children can foster mutual respect, trust and good citizenship. (p. 86)

Hart’s Ladder of Young People’s Participation became a classic on the subject of children’s participation (Hart, 1992). Created in the context of children’s involvement in environmental issues, the author organized participation in eight levels, according to the degree and role of children, as well as the balance between adult and children as leaders of the process. Hart called the first three levels non-participatory (manipulation, figuration, and tokenism). In these levels, the children are entirely guided by the adults. The children’s participation is decorative, meaning they are present but are not fully informed of what is happening or why. The five other levels grow from a level of participation guided by adults where children are informed, to more child-led initiatives. At the highest level, the initiative is developed and led by the children and the decisions are then shared with adults. The idea is that the children have the experience of initiating and leading, while also learning from the adults’ life experience.

To reach this last level, adults have to respect the timing and learning process of the children they are working with and refrain from giving answers, so the children can take ownership over the process and product of the inquiry. This requires that educators learn the art of posing problems and asking questions that provoke children’s reflection.
In this context, the role of the educator is that of a consultant, ready to share their knowledge in dialogue to facilitate learning. Even though Hart (1992) designed the Ladder of Participation in the context of involving children in environmental issues, he also reflected on what children’s participation meant in a larger context. In a June 1997 interview, he said:

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is a powerful treaty that all countries have signed except for the United States and Somalia. Somalia has an excuse; they have no government. It is a revolutionary document that sees children as citizens with rights, and hence deserving to be protected. There is a more progressive side to the CRC, which says that "children have the right to participate in all matters affecting their lives, according to their capacity." Children in most parts of the world now know that they have rights. This is helping them to protect themselves. Also, if children are included in genuine dialogue as children, maybe they will be able as adults to create the kind of participatory democracy that we don't have in any country of the world right now. (The View, 1997, p.1).

Many experiences that value children participation in school settings have some common roots. The famous Italian Reggio Emilia’s experience in early childhood education, for instance, has listening to the children and learning from them as a basic principle. The curriculum is built around the children’s desire to learn, with the active participation of children and parents in its development and implementation. The Reggio Emilia experience was greatly influenced by pedagogical philosophers Celestine Freinet and John Dewey through the participation of Loris Malaguzzi in helping to structure and
implement the initial school (Meeuwig, Schepers, & van der Werf, 2009). As Schutz (2001) points out “Dewey’s pedagogy in the Laboratory School was designed to foster individuals who actively engaged with obstacles, changing themselves and their environment in the process” (p.268). In the origin of both Reggio Emilia and the Laboratory school there is a belief that education can transform society, and that the participation and engagement of students and parents are key elements. In the case of Reggio Emilia, the schools were created by the parents, from scratch, immediately after the Second World War. They were looking to transform the chaos caused by the war throughout Europe into a nurturing place for children. It was believed that “a better world would only begin with better people, and that meant better upbringing and education” (Meeuwig, et al., 2009, p. 41).

These experiences, along with others such as Summer Hill in the United Kingdom and the Escola da Ponte in Portugal, are linked by their desire to engage students in participatory and cooperative processes inside their walls. They are also united by the vision that this participation will effect change outside school’s walls to build a better, more democratic society. This overt curricular purpose is in stark contrast to the hidden curriculum of most traditional school that focuses on competition, social and cultural reproduction. Hidden curriculum has been defined as “the unstated beliefs, norms, and values tacitly embedded in and transmitted through the underlying rules that structure the social relations and routines that characterize everyday life in schools” (Giroux, 1983, as cited in Kretovics, p. 168). In the settings mentioned above, rules and routines are purposefully created with the children to foster reflection, community building and
collaboration, and made an explicit part of the curriculum. The consequences for citizenship if keeping excluding the voice of children are well described by the Early Childhood Organization (IPPA), cited below:

When society fails to embrace and support the participation of young children, they become the voiceless and powerless adults of the next generation …. Participation brings with it a sense of belonging and a sense of ‘making a difference’. Without this, people become disconnected from neighbours/others, disenfranchised from civic engagement and apathetic to the political/democratic system. (IPPA, as cited in Bernard van Leer Foundation, 2006, p. 90)

In this context, the child is seen for the citizen he or she presently is, and not as an adult or citizen-to-be. As said Veitch (2009), the processes used to implementing democracy need to be changed: “A range of processes that are based on children’s competences and which encourage children’s agency can help children experience democracy in the here and now rather than learn about democratic practice for the ‘adult’ world in the future” (p. 19).

Innovation Implementation

In this section, the literature on program implementation is presented bringing together organizational learning and organizational change in educational setting. This contributes to explaining the experience at CCCria where innovation seems to have generated a learning culture.

Learning Organizations

Burke (2002), in his introduction to the theory of change in organizations,
emphasizes the non-linear nature of any process of change. In regard to this study, the same can be said about implementing an innovative methodology. Although plans follow a logical order, the process is all but linear and can be described as “messy: things don’t proceed exactly like planned; people do things their own way not always according with the plan; some people resist or even sabotage the process, and some people who would be predicted to support or resist the plan actually behave in just the opposite way” (Burke, 2002, p. 2). The individuals’ background, belief systems and experiences, and their mental models are part of what makes the organization. The author uses a metaphor of the organization as a biological organism that needs to adapt in order to survive, and which survival depends on the external, ever-changing environment. In order to survive, business organizations must adapt to ever changing environments and markets.

Educational organizations must also adapt to the rapidly paced social, economic, cultural, and technological changes in society in order to adequately educate the next generation. Therefore, educational institutions have eventually to change from the dominant reproductive role to one that facilitates transformation – a fundamental role in the survival and success of the community as a whole. This aspect raises the issue of the capacity of the organization, and the people who make the organization, to evaluate their work, look for alternatives for the challenges they face, learn skills, and change their practice. This process is part of what Senge would call becoming a learning organization. Creating this culture is an important part of the underlying concept of CCCria.

Senge (2000) describes the “learning school” as a complex system, where everybody has to be involved in expressing their aspirations, building their awareness and
developing their capabilities together. Applying this concept to the Children’s Cultural Center is seeing it as an organization that is the product of how the participants work and how they interact. Senge (2000) identifies the stakeholders – defined as “people that recognize their common stake in the future of the school system” (p. 5) as not only parents, teachers, school staff, principals, and students, but also business people, administrators, writers, and publishers of key books for students and curriculum developers. They all affect and can be affected by what happens in schools, and that is why they have much to learn from each other. This requires a mindset where participants, understand and value the different perspectives they bring to the discussion. There seems to be a premise of permeability in which those inside the organization let in the ideas and values of stakeholders outside the organization (Senge, 2000).

The Reggio Emilia Schools serve as an example of this kind of permeable school (Meeuwig, et al., 2009). The schools have been built by the children’s mothers, and the connection with the community was never lost. On the contrary, the culture of the community is always present and valued. Children go out weekly in the community to research or present their work, or visit each other’s houses as a class to learn, observe and discuss. The vision and mission of the schools was built together with the main stakeholders and the connection between the school and the community is a key concept.

*Implementing an Organizational Innovation*

On the subject of organizational innovation, Baldridge and Burnham (1975) argued that “research on diffusion of innovation should shift from individuals to organizational structure and environmental factors” (p. 165). They found that individual
characteristics (for example: gender, age), were not determinant of innovative behavior in
organizations. Nonetheless, roles or position within the organization did have an impact
on the involvement in the innovation process. Managers and people in positions of
leadership were more likely to engage in the innovation process as initiators, evaluators,
or mediators – making the link between the outside ideas and what was in fact
implemented. Their study also suggested that size and complexity mattered. Larger and
more complex organizations were associated with increased adoption of innovation.
Finally, Baldridge and Burnham (1975) found that environmental input from the
community and other organizations was a major determinant of an organization's
innovation behavior: “Organizations obtain various inputs from their environments,
process them, and feedback finished products. At the same time the surroundings place
many demands on organization” (p. 172), and “A heterogeneous environment
surrounding an organization makes numerous demands for responsive behavior” (p. 175).

In the case of CCCria, the size of the organization may be very small, but its
interaction with the context and its demands possibly stimulate change, looking for new
practices to better serve the children, the parents and the community. It would be
interesting to see if in a small sized organization, where leadership is less formally
established and encouraged among educators and children, one can find that other factors
become more relevant.

More than two decades after Baldridge and Burnham (1975), the interest in
studying changes in organizations and how innovations are implemented and sustained
continues to raise interest among educators and business professionals as well. Fullan
(2001) analyzed the components of change at a local level as well as the district or state level. He stated: “The question of implementation is simply whether or not a given idea, practice or program gets ‘put in place’” (2001, p. 1). In terms of implementation of an innovation, Fullan drew lessons about how to deal with and influence educational change, identifying key factors to explain why and how change processes work, and to identify what has to be done to improve success in implementing educational changes. Focusing on educational institutions, the author advocated that improvement in educational settings occurs when educators talk about their practices with their peers in a systematic way. In addition, he stated that stakeholders must develop a “shared language” when they plan, design, and evaluate materials and practices in a collaborative way. In this respect he agreed with Baldridge and Burnham that the individual characteristics might not be of influence; nonetheless, the interaction among the members of an organization seem to matter. Fullan suggested that before starting a new effort, some questions are crucial: Has the experience been tried before? What were the reported results? Does it address an assessed need? Does it have the active support of the administration and major stakeholders?

He also advised that changes should begin in a small scale, and then be expanded to the whole system. Fullan (2001) defined implementing change as “the process of learning something new; i.e. it is as process of redoing (behavior, skills) and rethinking (beliefs, understanding) pursued through new materials, policies, and structures” (p. 2). He identified six barriers for change that seem to fit the case at hand: (a) overload “caused by a combination of too many pressing needs” (Fullan, 2001, p. 13), (b)
excessive complexity of the proposed changes, (c) incompatibility of those changes with policies and already existing programs, (d) lack of capability, (e) insufficient funds, and (f) poor change strategies. It is a valuable framework to use when analyzing the implementation of a new concept in an organization.

Another factor to consider is time. The author estimated three years for innovations to be institutionalized, if effective strategies are used. Another important aspect to be considered is if sustainability strategies are built in from the beginning and how a particular innovation relates to other programs already being implemented, and to the culture of the community in which it is being implemented. In the context of education reform, Hargreaves stated: “Sustainability does not simply mean whether something will last. It addresses how particular initiatives can be developed without compromising the development of others in the surrounding environment now and in the future” (Hargreaves, 2000, as cited in Fullan, 2005, p. ix). Fullan added that “sustainability is very much a matter of changes in culture: powerful strategies that enable people to question and alter certain values and beliefs as they create new forms of learning within and between schools, and across levels of the system” (2005, p. 60).

Fullan (2005) offered eight elements of sustainability, all of them pertinent to the context at hand: the first one, moral purpose, means the program has to serve the community, offering quality services to all. The second element speaks of the commitment to change, which implies creating learning systems, able to bring about continuing transformation to the organization. Third, capacity building, is a key element; the author suggested that it should include both vertical support, from external
consultants, and lateral, from other schools or partner organizations, which would foster a network of peer learning and collaboration. The fourth element, intelligent accountability, one that balances local autonomy to implement solutions and strengthen vertical relationships, offering support and resources, as well as implementing monitoring strategies. This leads to the fifth element, deep learning, that involves all levels of the system. The author claimed that it can only happen if strategies are used to drive out fear, allow for experimentation based on data, and promote reflection. The sixth element is to be committed both to short term results, that build trust and create a positive climate, and long term results, that will happen as investments are made and as the system gets stronger. Cyclical energizing, the seventh element, is a new concept. The author strongly suggests that is vital to monitor energy levels, both overuse and underuse, to avoid burnout situations, where the level of energy needed to sustain results is too high, the results reach a plateau, and it seems that no progress is being made. Finally, the eighth element is called long-lever leadership, drawing from Archimedes, who said that with a lever long enough he could change the world. “If a system is to be mobilized in the direction of sustainability, leadership at all levels must be the primary engine” (Fullan, 2005, p. 27). The leader’s main task is to create conditions to implement the seven other elements of sustainability. The eight elements of sustainability framework will be used as an assessment tool of how sustainability was addressed at CCCria, and will be part of the discussion in Chapter Six.

Still on the topic of leadership, Fullan stressed the importance of creating leadership at all levels, especially relevant in a context of high turnover. As Fullan (2005)
put it, what defines a good leader is not just his or her impact on the organization, but “how many leaders he or she leaves behind” (p. 31). Another important point is brought by Calabrese (2002) concerning the type of leadership needed to bring about change. He wrote: “The leader needs to act as a transformational leader to create conditions for change” (Calabrese, 2002, p. 89). The concept of transformational leader draws from Burns (1978) who argued that transforming "leadership occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality" (p. 20). The transformational leader is one who strives for advancing the collective purpose, by understanding the needs and deeply espousing the desires of the community he serves. This last sentence is of great appropriateness to the CCCria’s case. In a population that struggles with difficulties such as poverty, malnutrition and violence, it seems that forming positive leaders is of fundamental importance to strengthen the community. The high turnover in the organization makes it all the more necessary.

Summary

The phenomenon of the favela is complex and provides the context of the educational experience under study in this dissertation. As was demonstrated in this review, the social, political and cultural dimensions have a deep impact on both the underlying objectives and the choices made when implementing a new program. Advocating for practices where the concepts of children as rights holders and their participation are central, putting into practice the recommendations of the CRC and attending to a need of the community is what is at stake. The CCCria experience tests the
notion that an organization that implements a new and positive model can influence the surrounding community where it is created. It assumes that the relationship between educational organizations (school or other) and community is a two-way street: a violent community can have a negative impact on a school or educational facility, as much as the latter can promote a culture of peace that will affect the community (Ceccon, et al., 2009).

The topics of transformational leadership and systemic capacity building, to create a learning organization that is constantly improving the service it provides is relevant to this case, as a way to promote sustainability. Especially in social projects, this is a challenge. The lessons listed above need to be taken into account and will be useful to analyze what early steps were taken to promote it.
CHAPTER IV
METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the researcher presents the methodological choices made for this study, describes the paradigm with which she aligns, and justifies the method and strategies she plans to use for this study. The researcher also defends the case study as her method of choice and discusses the implications and limitations for such study. Further discussion includes the choices made regarding the researcher’s role, the steps for sampling, data collection, and analysis procedures. Finally, the researcher offers an account of her first steps inside the community, including who took her there, how it happened, and what happened, offering the reader a description of the first contact with the setting. Using the information obtained in documents, interviews, and observations the researcher will portray the CCCria and its history - how it was created, the community where it is situated, the objectives and underline concepts it put forward since its foundation.

This chapter is written using the first person, following the tradition of qualitative research (Creswell, 2005; Patton, 2002; Stake, 1995). As Creswell (2005) stated: “In qualitative research, however, the researcher is typically present and in the foreground in the narrative report of the study. This is seen as in the use of the first-person pronoun “I” (or the collective “we”) and in the personal experiences of the author that are written directly into the report” (p. 270).

The Qualitative Paradigm

Qualitative research has been defined as "any kind of research that produces
findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 17) and is often presented as an alternative to quantitative research (Creswell, 2005). However, when qualitative research is defined only in comparison to another type of research, some of the complexity of the issue can be overlooked. In fact, Stake (1995) pointed out that qualitative and quantitative do not necessarily exclude one another, that in each qualitative study we find enumeration and records of amounts, and in each quantitative study there is room for natural language and interpretation. For Stake (1995) it is a matter of emphasis. Selecting a particular methodological emphasis reflects a belief in a particular research paradigm (Hatch, 2002). Hoepfl (1997) stated, "phenomenological inquiry, or qualitative research, uses a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings. Logical positivism, or quantitative research, uses experimental methods and quantitative measures to test hypothetical generalizations. Each represents a fundamentally different inquiry paradigm, and researcher actions are based on the underlying assumptions of each paradigm." Paradigm is a word often used with different meanings in different contexts. According to the definition provided by Hatch (2002), in social sciences, to meet the status of a scientific paradigm, the school of scientific thought:

…must have generated firm answers to the following questions: What are the fundamental entities of which the universe is composed? How do these interact with each other and with the senses? What questions can legitimately be asked about such entities and what techniques employed in seeking solutions? Answers to those questions reveal sets of assumptions that distinguish fundamentally different belief systems concerning
how the world is ordered, what we may know about it, and how we may know about it.
(p. 11)

For this study, I chose the constructivist paradigm, which aligns best with my beliefs. Constructivists claim that universal reality can never be known, and that “the objects of inquiry are individual perspectives or constructions of reality... Realities are apprehendable in the form of abstract mental constructions that are experientially based, local and specific” (Hatch, 2002, p. 15). In constructivism, knowledge is co-constructed by the researcher and the participants and their interactions are part of what is studied. According to Hatch (2002), constructivists believe that there are multiple realities, depending on the people experiencing the phenomena. The object to be known is the construction of this multifaceted reality, by the people who experienced it, through the eyes of the researcher, but with their participation in this construction. “Knowledge is symbolically constructed and not objective; that understandings of the world are based on conventions; that truth is in fact what we agree it is” (Hatch, 2002, p. 15). Brunsell (2006) drew on the work of Auerbach & Silverstein (2003), and added that “constructivism assumes multiple, conflicting, yet understandable social realities. Qualitative research is particularly well suited to study this diversity because it does not assume that there is one universal truth to be discovered, but rather, focuses on listening to the subjective experiences and stories of the people being studied (Brunsell, 2006, p.105).”

Based on the constructivist paradigm, the object and purpose of the study, and the research questions, I chose a qualitative, naturalistic, case study methodology. First, the object of the study is the interaction of the participants in a natural setting, i.e., people are
observed in their natural activities, and not in an experimental situation. Second, the study seeks to understand and include the participants’ perspectives, as part of the construction of the meaning of the experience. Third, the purpose of the research is to portray the complexity and wholeness of the case that are important features of qualitative studies (Hatch, 2002). Therefore, the qualitative case study method is the best approach to document and interpret the experience of implementing the concepts of child protagonism, participation and autonomy in a poor urban community in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

According to Stake (1995), “Case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (p. xi). Therefore, it fits very well the purpose of this study. Hatch (2002) defined case study as “a special kind of qualitative work that investigates a contextualized contemporary (as opposed to historical) phenomenon within specific boundaries” (p. 30). Hatch (2002) emphasized the importance of defining carefully the boundaries of the case, i.e. the unit of analysis, since that is the main characteristic that differentiates case studies from other qualitative approaches. Yin & Davis (2007) reinforced the argument, saying that “The classic case study focuses on single entities—an individual, organization, decision, community, and the like” (p. 77). The authors added, “…at the same time, one strength of the case study method is its ability to tolerate the real-life blurring between phenomenon and context” (Yin, 2003b, as cited in Yin & Davis, 2007, p. 78).

Although the study’s boundaries are clear – CCCria was the single entity for this
study, as referred to by Yin & Davis – it involved other organizations and the culture of
the community as well. Patton (2002) adds another level of complexity to the discussion.
He indicated that in choosing a case study, as for example the implementation of a
program, the researcher might find nested and layered case studies, i.e. micro-case studies
within the boundaries of a single (macro) case study, which may be the case at CCCria.
One particular activity room, where a group of children interact with a particular educator
might create such a distinct culture that it could constitute such micro-case.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation is that the study draws conclusions on the first years of CCCria’s
existence, when their methodology is being constructed and tested for the first time. The
study will witness, no doubt, the dynamic process of implementation: the effort of a team
in experimenting, reflecting on the results, making adjustments, and then trying it again.
What will be consolidated and what will not resist the test of time will not be the object
of this study.

Another limitation is limited generalizability. Due to the qualitative nature of the
study, the research findings are to be taken in context, and may need to be adjusted to
relate to other realities. However, there might have many aspects of the findings that can
be applied to other settings where children and educators work together.

The Researcher's Role

In qualitative research, especially when using the constructivist paradigm,
“Researchers and the participants in their studies are joined together in the process of co-
construction. From this perspective it is impossible and undesirable for researchers to be
distant and objective. It is through mutual engagement that researchers and respondents construct the subjective reality that is under investigation” (Hatch, 2002, p. 15). On the other hand, Stake (1995) argued for a nonintrusive role for the case study researcher, picturing him or her as “noninterventive and empathic” (p.12) during the observation sessions.

Considering both Hatch (2002) and Stake’s (1995) views, I planned to start by observing the scene in an unobtrusive manner to be able to have an outsider perspective, and to better capture and describe the context and activities taking place and how children and adults interact. As I became more familiar with the setting and both the educators and the children, the nature of the relationship became that of a participant observer, where there was interaction among researcher, children, and educators during the course of normal daily activities.

For the interactions with children, I took Corsaro’s (2003) approach. He described his behavior when researching with children as an atypical adult and argued that the researcher is: “a special friend who will not tell them what to do or attempt to control their behavior” (Corsaro, 2003, p. 6). An atypical adult is an adult that children can interact with without being judged or punished and who has no authority over the children s/he conducts research with. “Several ethnographers of children have pointed to the importance of developing a participant status as an atypical, less powerful adult in research with young children” (Corsaro, 2003, p. 23).

I made efforts to establish trust and empathy with educators and children alike. Stake (1995) cited Von Wright referring to empathy as “the knowledge of the plight of
another by experiencing it yourself” (p. 39) and spoke of the role of the researcher as attempting to convey an empathetic understanding of the situation for the reader, using mainly a rich and detailed description of the experience. In order to create empathy, I hope to have come close to what Corsaro called “the atypical adult,” described above. In the children’s eyes I believe I was, at first, an odd presence. I was often in the room with my notebook and camera; I would listen to them, take them seriously, and on occasion, be an audience to a play they had created. However, I would not interfere in their disputes nor propose activities. I was a caring adult, although I was neither a parent nor an educator, and I believe the children resented the fact that I did not intervene in their disputes. I believe that in their perspective, I was an adult and therefore I had a power to settle disputes and I was not using it. I don’t think they understood why.

The children at CCCria are very comfortable at CCCria. It is part of their surroundings. They know they are protected and that they can make decisions, as for example, leave the room, or ask me (or any other person) not to take pictures, or stop observing them if they felt awkward about it. They have this power and have used it on several occasions. In response to my atypical adult behavior the children were very friendly, affectionate, and love the attention of an adult available to talk and play. They talked freely, often inviting me to follow them around, holding hands. Each time I met them, they would ask details about my life, especially my family, my children, my husband, where I lived, and so on. In later visits, they would ask about all the details I had given them, showing that they remembered (for example, the name of each of my children, the fact that I spoke other languages), strengthening the ties of friendship.
Regarding the educators’ understanding of my role as a researcher, they soon realized that I was not an extra pair of hands; I would not help with conflict management, and tried my best not to interfere with the scene. I did on a few occasions get so engrossed in observing a scene that I missed the fact that the educator had left the room, expecting me to handle the occasional disputes among children, which I did not do. That caused some level of frustration, since one assistant would have been helpful to an educator handling 20 to 25 very active young children. One way to support the educators, while not interfering with the room dynamics, was to stay after the children had left, to talk and exchange impressions at the end of the observation sessions. During these times I would often help them put away materials and sweep the floor while talking about the day. I believe this helped bridge the discomfort. I believe it is not easy to have somebody observing your room, and I am very grateful to these educators to have allowed me to be there.

Although I had the policy of minimum intervention, there were exceptions to my atypical adult role: on occasions when there was imminent danger either from external violence (i.e., gunshots heard in the vicinity) or violent behavior from the kids, I did engage in the situation as someone who cared for the children’s safety and followed the procedures established, helping to get children into the safer room, and distracting them until the situation was under control.

Sample

This study includes observation sessions where children and educators interact freely, as well as semi-structured interviews with educators, children, and members of the
NGOs that coordinate the effort. An interview guide was created and approved by the Western Michigan Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB), containing basic, open ended questions to help conduct the interviews (see HSIRB approval letter in Appendix F). Following this guide helped me obtaining answers from all participants on the major questions addressed by the study, while leaving space to include issues found pertinent by the participants. The criteria to select the interviewees are described below.

Children

Verbal skill and outgoing personality were the primary criterion for children to be included in the sample of research interviewees. I made this sampling choice because children with good verbal skills are able to contribute with more information, as well as enjoy themselves in the process. Since this choice might have biased the results obtained from the interviews, I compensated by obtaining information during observation sessions. During those sessions I was able to observe how children with different characteristics interacted, and get quotes from them while observing them as they played.

I found out that the criterion “outgoing” was closely related to both relationship and activity. A child might feel very at ease and be outgoing and talkative among his friends and around people he knew, and yet be shy when talking in private with someone to whom he had no real connection. The best interviews were those where I had had the chance to get to know the child and build a relationship prior to the interview, during observation sessions, for example. The youngest child’s interview was also the shortest interview. I knew him well, had a good relationship with him, but his interest in answering my questions was far less than his interest in playing with the audio recorder.
For selecting the group of children to interview, I asked informants to indicate children that were fluent and enjoyed talking about their experiences. I consulted educators and administrative staff who knew the children, their characteristics, and could help identify those who were likely to participate well. The sample of students I interviewed included seven children, three girls and four boys, ranging in age from 5 to 10 years old. Descriptive characteristics of the children in the interview sample are presented in Table 1. In the case of all research data presented here, aliases are used to protect the rights of participants.

Table 1. List of Children Interviewed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alias</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Time at CCCria</th>
<th>Shift</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>&lt;1 year</td>
<td>Morning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emilia</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Morning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiago</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Morning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silvia</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Morning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anderson</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Morning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mia</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Morning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toquinho</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Afternoon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CCCria Educators

I interviewed all the educators who agreed to participate on the study. The team was composed of two female art educators, two male computer educators, two female library educators, two female toy room educators, one male music teacher, and one female dance teacher. I also asked the CCCria coordinator and the administrative staff to participate in interviews. I wanted the sample to include all who chose to participate, in order to access each one’s unique perspective and experience. These adults represented a variety of personal characteristics, origin, type of activity, relationship with the
community, and relationship developed with the children. Bringing in these different views enriched the study. The process of inviting, scheduling and conducting the interview is described in the sub-section “Interviews with CCCria/CEACA-Vila staff” below.

All staff members were invited to participate in the study, and only one declined. The interviews were conducted between September 2008 and January 2009. The final list of all 11 interviewees by alias and pertinent descriptive characteristics is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. List of Educators Interviewed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alias</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Hired on</th>
<th>Left CCCria on</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chloe</td>
<td>Educator – Library</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>August 2006</td>
<td>December 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erica</td>
<td>Educator – Playroom</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>November 2006</td>
<td>(still on staff)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leo</td>
<td>Educator – Music</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>November 2007</td>
<td>December 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bernardo</td>
<td>Educator – Computer</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>April 2007</td>
<td>(still on staff)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watson</td>
<td>Educator – Computer</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>November 2006</td>
<td>(still on staff)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tereza</td>
<td>Educator – Dance</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>February 2008</td>
<td>(still on staff)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luiza</td>
<td>Educator – Art room</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>September 07</td>
<td>(still on staff)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renata</td>
<td>Educator – Art room</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>March 2007</td>
<td>(still on staff)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daphne</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>July 2008</td>
<td>(still on staff)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heather</td>
<td>Coordinator</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>December 2006</td>
<td>August 2009</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CECIP Team

CECIP has a department of Early Childhood Projects where a team of educators operate. Two CECIP professionals, the CCCria Project Coordinator and the Pedagogy Specialist, were directly involved with writing the proposal to the Bernard van Leer Foundation that sponsored the project that funded CCCria. They were also part of the team that created the methodology and selected and trained the educators. In addition,
they closely supervised the implementation of project methods. Thus, they had unique knowledge of the discussions that led to the creation of CCCria, including what was originally planned in terms of methodology and activities to be implemented at the CCCria, and the foundational assumptions, concepts, theoretical framework and rationale. They had been following up and guiding the process since the beginning. I felt it was important to include both the CCCria Project Coordinator and the Pedagogy Specialist in my interview sample to learn how they perceived the project implementation, challenges and results. I interviewed both educators; their pertinent descriptive characteristics are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. List of CECIP Personnel Interviewed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alias</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Involvement at CCCria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Josephina</td>
<td>Project Coordinator</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Planning and staff development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malu</td>
<td>Pedagogy Specialist</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Planning, staff development, researcher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Access and Permission

CEACA-Vila is the NGO that manages the CCCria. Before starting the study, I sought permission for collecting data at the CCCria for my doctoral thesis. CEACA-Vila granted permission in writing (see CEACA-Vila approval letter in Appendix E).

CEACA-Vila has parents sign an agreement that allows the organization to take and use children’s pictures and art work for non-commercial purposes. CEACA-Vila policy extends this permission to any research or evaluation done with their consent; therefore, I was able to take pictures of the children and use their artwork in my dissertation research.

As for interviews and observations, I strictly followed the protocol approved by Western Michigan University Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (see HSIRB approval
Access to the site was challenging at times, due to the armed conflicts between the police and the local drug dealers. I was advised always to call the CCCria before entering the favela, to make sure that there was no conflict. The same way, before leaving the CCCria I always asked if it was safe to do so.

Data Gathering Strategies

Stake (1995) suggested that if it is possible to get the needed information by discrete observation and documentation, then interviews should not be done. However, in this case, in order to better understand the phenomenon, the choice was made to observe day-to-day activities, always asking permission from educators and children beforehand, and do interviews with key stakeholders such as children, educators and NGO staff. The planning for data collection and alignment with the research questions is presented in Table 4. (The interview questions used are presented in Appendix A)

Table 4. Alignment of Research Questions, Data Source and Sample Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research questions</th>
<th>Data source</th>
<th>Sample interview questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) How is the concept of children’s protagonism put into practice in CCCria, an afterschool center for children of poverty in the Morro dos Macacos favela, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil?</td>
<td>Interviews, observation, existing documents, video recorded material; artifacts (e.g. game, tools, written signs/symbols)</td>
<td>Interview w/ adults: Were there previous experiences or projects for children in the community? How was the process of implementation? What does children’s protagonism “looks like” for you? Interview w/ children: Tell me about your first day here – what do you remember?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) How do educators and educational leaders adjust their practice to facilitate children’s protagonism?</td>
<td>Live interviews, video recorded interviews, analysis of artifacts</td>
<td>Interview w/ adults: How did child protagonism fit your previous experiences as an educator? What are the challenges of implementing it? Has it changed over time? How?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4. (cont.)

3) How did children act in response to the autonomy provided by CCCria children’s protagonism?

| Observation, interviews, analysis of video recorded material; analysis of artifacts (case confirming or deviating from concept) | Interview w/ adults: Is it important in this particular community? Why? |
| Interview w/ children: How is the Center different from school? And from home? How do you decide where to go (what room, or activity)? If there is something you don’t agree or you don’t like here, what do you do? Have you participate in a children’s assembly? Are there rules here at the Center? |

Data collection dates are presented in Table 5. From February 2008 to December 2008, I did and recorded the observation sessions in the rooms. From September 2008 to August 2009, I conducted the interviews. Until July 2009, I was visiting CCCria twice a week on average. From that time on, my visits became less frequent. However, as I was writing, I still visited the center in average once a week to take pictures of artifacts, attend special events, and collect stories from the educators as told during professional development sessions, which I attended until July 2010.

Table 5. Data Collection Time Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Data source</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Existing documents</td>
<td>CECIP</td>
<td>Feb. 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>CCCria team</td>
<td>Sept. 2008 to Jan. 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CECIP team</td>
<td>Jan. 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children at CCCria</td>
<td>Jul. to Aug. 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>CCCria activities</td>
<td>Feb 2008 to Dec. 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>Feb. 2008 to Jul. 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artifacts</td>
<td>CCCria children</td>
<td>Feb. 2008 to Jul 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback sessions</td>
<td>CCCria team</td>
<td>Jul. 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CCCria children</td>
<td>Jul 2010</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Observations

The observation sessions included the normal routine in the activity rooms, the professional development sessions called “actualization days” at CCCRia, and the Fun Saturdays – a day where the community is invited to visit the Center.

Observing the Activity Rooms

I visited the Center to conduct observation sessions once a week, for a period of at least two hours, covering different rooms (dance, computer, library, arts, music, and play rooms) during the morning and the afternoon shift. My intent was to observe a sample of how the concepts (autonomy, protagonism) were implemented by different professionals and how they played out in different fields of activity. The children stayed at the Center for approximately three hours, with time for a snack.

The routine I established for my weekly observation sessions consisted of entering the room, greeting everyone, and then asking the educator if it was all right to stay there and make my observations. They never refused. However, sometimes I perceived that it was maybe not the best day, and in those cases I would stay only if I felt they were up to it, beyond their formal acceptance. My first observations were made by remaining in the room with a notebook and writing what I was seeing, without much interaction in the milieu. There were almost always many things happening at the same time. In the art room, for example, up to five tables were placed so the children could choose between either doing activities that the educator had suggested or getting materials to do something creative on their own. Sometimes small groups of children would run into the room, look around, call on a friend, and run off, often laughing and
speaking loudly. This multiplicity of scenes all at once was challenging to record.

I observed that the children usually talked to each other or sang as they drew or played. The normal noise level was excessively high for me, but it didn’t seem to bother the children or the educator. The children were curious about my presence in the room, and I had to explain several times what I was doing, including why they could not take sheets out of my notebook, use my pen, and so on. Although they got more accustomed to me being around and writing in my notebook, they would often ask the same questions, and almost always asked to take sheets out of my notebook or write or draw on it.

My camera was an object of desire for the children. They would ask me to take their pictures with their friends posing in groups or alone. They would also ask to borrow my camera to take the pictures themselves. Some of the children would say that their parents or other relatives had a digital camera and they all knew what to do. Nonetheless, the fascination about seeing the digital picture right away never grew old.

As I became known by the children, at their invitation I would sometimes participate in games, help them jump rope, accept their invitations to accompany them as they went from one activity room to another, be invited to watch plays they had created, learn a game, help them to learn a new game (by reading the instructions written on the box, for example), and have informal conversations over snacks. Many times they asked me what I was writing in my notebook. I would answer, “I am writing everything that is happening right now.” Some took it very seriously, often asking me to read what I had just written. That made them giggle more than once. Children would sometimes call me
and say, “I am playing house, come see and write on your notebook!”

I usually would stay in the Center for the whole day, observing the rooms during both morning and afternoon shifts. The Center operated with 98 registered children in the morning, and more than 120 in the afternoon. According to the CCCria coordinator, the reason for that difference is that parents prefer to have their children in school in the morning shift and extra activities in the afternoon. That schedule fit the parents’ daily routine better (some can take their children to school on their way to work). Some parents also believe children are more alert and learn better in the morning. As a result of the larger number of students, the afternoon shift at CCCria was always more agitated and harder to observe than the morning. Activity rooms were packed and having an extra adult occupying more space was a challenge.

Each observation session lasted from 10 to 30 minutes and I would do several of those per shift. The duration would vary according to the circumstances. If the interactions in a room were interesting and I was following a situation, I would stay for as long as it lasted. Sometimes a child would ask me to go to another room with him or her, and I would follow that child’s activity. Sometimes a particular situation lasted a very short time, and then I would look for another room to observe.

Within a 24 to 48 hour period after leaving CCCria I would write an account of that day, recording what had happened and my thoughts and feelings. I created a word processor form (see Appendix B) to record my observations and reflections, employing, as Hatch (2002) recommended, “a specific strategy for separating impressions, feelings and early interpretations from descriptions during qualitative data collection” (p. 86).
This way of recording the data translated my concern, as an observer, to be always mindful of my assumptions and preconceived ideas, setting them aside from the facts being described, but not neglecting them as an important part of the data. I produced 30 recorded observations of activity rooms using this format.

Observing Professional Development Sessions

One day a month, usually the last Tuesday of the month, children are dismissed, and adults use the time for reflection, discussion, reading and planning to deepen their understanding of the methodology. I was invited to participate as an observer at these monthly actualization sessions. I observed I attended every monthly meeting from February 2008 to July 2010. Attending these meetings was relevant because I was allowed to hear from all the adults, in a collective fashion, about what they considered to be their challenges, and how issues were dealt with by the coordinator.

I took pictures and wrote full accounts on four of the meetings that were more relevant to my research. I screened all the notes on the others during the data analysis phase. I also shared these notes with the CEACA-Vila and CECIP teams to corroborate my understanding and get their input and perspective. The pictures taken during the training sessions were sent in digital form, by email, to CECIP and the CCCria, as a contribution to their work, to be used on reports, power point presentations to promote the project, and to be included in CECIP’s, CCCria’s, and CEACA-Vila’s websites. Educators often printed those pictures and put them on the bulletin boards, showing parents and children what they did that day.

I did participate as a “content person” for these professional development sessions
on a few occasions – especially related to conflict resolution, autonomy, and children participation. For example, I presented Hart’s Ladder (Hart, 1992), an instrument created to classify different levels of children participation, developed by Roger Hart and his team while working on environmental projects with children and teens. That presentation might have placed me closer to the expert role, and therefore closer to an authority figure. However, it was a way to give back to the team and contribute to the improvement of the Center. This was important to me, because I value the partnership between university and community as one of dialogue and exchange of knowledge. As Hughes (2003) said, “University researchers and community collaborators have different but equally valued goals…. A primary role of the university-based researcher is to bring theoretical and empirical knowledge relevant to solving a problem of importance to community members” (p. 42).

Existing Documents

I had access, in electronic format, to the documentation of the project since its inception. The early documentation contained the description of the problem the center was to address and the main ideas behind the center. Reports sent to the Foundation also were a good source of information. More importantly, I found interim reports in the CECIP files, made by the CECIP team to keep records for later reference. Information from those reports was cited on the annual report to the Foundation. The reports contained detailed accounts of project activities and evaluative comments that helped me understand the team’s thoughts process at the time, complementing the information gathered through the interviews. In addition, I also analyzed the content of the book
Castelo das Crianças Cidadãs (The Children Citizen Castle), a publication about the CCCria. This publication, written in 2008 and published in 2009, contained valuable information regarding the Center’s history.

One of CECIP’s main activities is producing videos – therefore, there were some materials recorded on video, with interviews of members of the community (leaders, parents and educators). CECIP granted me access to the full footage as well as the edited version. The videos weren’t as rich as I thought they would be; however, I found some interviews with children, parents and community leaders informative.

*Interviews*

In this section I describe the interview process with children, educators, CECIP staff, and offers some comments pertinent to all interviews made in this project.

*Interviews with Children*

As mentioned above, I conducted individual interviews with seven children from both genders, ages ranging from 5 to 10 years old. The children were chosen based on the criteria of age, gender, and suggestions from staff members. I approached the children while in the Center, and asked if they would be willing to talk to me for a while, not that day, but sometime later. All of those I approached agreed, except one older girl, around 10 years old, that said she was shy, and would feel embarrassed to talk. For those who were willing, I contacted the parent to explain the research project, and obtain their written consent. The children then signed an assent form. All forms and protocols were approved by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at Western Michigan University.
Each interview, as stated on the HSIRB protocol, started with an explanation of the research project and the child signing the assent document. Then the interview proceeded using the approved interview guide. At the end, I thanked the child for their time and insights. All interviews were recorded with a digital voice recorder.

The information I obtained from this group was very valuable. However, the process to contact the families was more cumbersome and time consuming than expected, as I explain in detail below. Once I had made the contact and obtained the parental authorization, there was an issue of asking the child to give up his or her activities to dedicate time to the interview. While in the center, the children would rather go to their activities than stop what they were doing and speak to me. This is a common occurrence in research, as Hill et al., (2004) reported, “Equally, like adults, they [the children] also have other priorities in their lives, so not all wish to give up their valuable time to meet the needs and wishes of adults to consult with them (Borland and others, 2001; Christensen and others, 2000)” (p. 90). In those cases, I did not force the issue; to try to prevent the children from continuing their activities would contradict the methodology of the center, my philosophy and the approved HSIRB protocol. However, they were often happy to talk to me when involved with various activities with their peers. I believe that I obtained more and better information interacting with children during the observations or during snack time than from the interviews.

Contacting the parents was challenging. Most don’t have landline phones and change cell phones numbers quite often. Making visits to their homes was not an option due to the characteristics of the community, especially at that time when conflicts
between drug dealers and the police made it unsafe to visit the community freely beyond the Center. The CCCria’s office often didn’t have updated contact information for all of the children. However, the secretary knew how to navigate the network of relationships between parents, families and the Center. Sometimes the more efficient way was to send a parent a message through somebody else (a friend or relative). Other times I would send a note home with the child and wait to hear back from the parent. Once I had spoken with the parent and explained the study, I would send the consent document home for their signature and return. On one occasion I had to talk to one mother several times over the phone, and then schedule a meeting with her to explain about the study. She and her son were worried that I would ask questions about the child’s father who had left the family. It was a delicate subject the child didn’t want to talk about. I showed her the questions I was going to ask, nothing remotely linked to family issues. She felt satisfied, and asked for one more day to talk to the child. This interview ended up being one of the shortest. Even though the boy chose to participate, he didn’t seem very comfortable and only provided brief answers to my questions.

Once I had the parental consent, I waited for a moment when the child wasn’t involved in an activity, and had to first remind him or her that they had agreed to be interviewed, then see if he or she was still willing to participate, and determine a good time to conduct the interview. The reminder was necessary because usually a few weeks had passed since I had talked to them about the interview due to the reasons described above.

Another challenge was to find the right time and place to interview the child
without disturbing his or her activities. Children at CCCria are almost always busy with things they like. I soon realized that boys would never give up soccer time, so I was not able to interview any of them after snack time. None of the children would give up computer time. Two of the children had lunch at the Center, and I did the interview during that time. Others considered the interview a fun/different activity to do and agreed to do it during activity time, right after snack.

As for the interview itself, I explained to them that I had talked to their parents, and they had agreed to let me interview them, but now it was their turn to say if they really wanted to participate. They could say no, or say maybe another day, without any consequences. I wouldn’t be upset, nor would their parents. Once they agreed to continue, I started by explaining the study, read the assent form, and ask them if they understood what I had told them and if they were willing to sign the document. This gave a serious and formal tone to the conversation, especially with older children. The children seemed to really enjoy signing the paper. Most of them wanted to write their whole name and had trouble fitting it on one short line. I used the HSIRB approved protocol and taped the interviews on a digital voice recorder, with their consent.

As for length of the interviews, I had planned that each would last between 15 to 30 minutes, according to the age of the child. In fact, the interviews lasted an average of 11 minutes, ranging between 6 and 22 minutes. In terms of gender, the girls’ interviews averaged 15 minutes, while the boys’ interviews averaged 9 minutes. In terms of age, the more talkative children were the seven year olds (average 18 minutes), followed by the 8 years old (11 minutes) and finally the ten years old (9 minutes). The one 5 year old
child’s interview lasted a total of 6 minutes because he interrupted the interview several times to hear his own voice on the recording device. He would ask to play the bit we had just recorded, listening carefully to my question, and then repeat his answer in a soft voice right before listening to it on the recording. After listening to his answer confirming what he had just said out loud he would be very excited, like he had the answer correctly on a test. All the children liked to hear back at least some of what they had said, and confirmed their opinions by nodding their heads and smiling as they would listen to their answers.

The extent of the relationship I had established with each child influenced the length and depth of the interview. The closer I had become to the child, the longer the interview. At the end of each interview I asked if the child had anything that they wanted to add, and thanked them for their participation. I often got a hug upon completion. I transcribed all interviews and saved the digital files in a password protected drive.

Interviews with CCCria/CEACA-Vila Staff

Each of the adults working at CCCria was invited to participate in an interview, during a staff meeting. I explained the purpose of the study and told them that I wanted to do observations of activity rooms and meetings and also interviews with the educators that were willing to participate. Eleven out of the twelve members of the team agreed to participate. They were interviewed at the CCCria, on different days, at a convenient time for them. I made myself available at times that would best fit their needs and provide the least possible disruption to their routine. Some interviews were held during their work time, when there were few children in the room, and after the snack, when children have
more options (they can play outside) and the activity rooms are less busy. Other
interviews were done during lunch time or after hours. If the interview occurred during
activity time, the room would be closed for the length of the interview, with the
knowledge and consent of the CCCria coordinator. However, this caused some level of
frustration for some of the children that couldn’t use the room for about an hour.

As for the interview itself, I followed the HSIRB approved protocol, explaining
the research project to the participant and reading the consent form together. One of the
participants asked many questions and requested a little time to think about it. A few
minutes later he gave his consent and we proceeded with the interview. Once the
participant had agreed and signed the consent, I followed the approved interview guide,
only diverging if the interviewees branched out to an issue relevant to the research. At the
end, after asking if they had anything to add, I thanked them for their time and insights.
The interviews were recorded using a digital recorder.

As for the length of each interview, I had planned they would vary between 30 to
45 minutes. Actually, the shortest interview lasted 25 minutes and the longest over one
and a half hours. Most of them lasted between 30 and 45 minutes.

I interviewed nine CCCria educators, the CCCria secretary, and the CCCria
coordinator. The coordinator’s interview had to be rescheduled a few times, since she had
a very dynamic routine. I had to go there three times before I was able to conduct the
interview.

*Interviews with CECIP Staff*

I personally invited the CECIP coordination team connected to the CCCria project
to participate in an interview and explained the purpose of the study. Both agreed, and the interview was scheduled in the place and time they chose. As for the interview itself, I followed the HSIRB approved protocol, explaining the research project to the participant, and reading together the consent form. Once they agreed and signed, I followed the approved interview guide – only diverging if the interviewees insisted on an important subject, related to the purpose of the research. At the end, I warmly thanked them for their time and insights. The length of each interview was planned to last between 30 to 45 minutes, but they lasted longer. The first interview, with the project coordinator, was conducted at her house, and lasted one hour and a quarter. The second interview was conducted at my office and lasted one hour and half.

All interviews were recorded using a digital recorder with the permission of the interviewees. After the interview, I would write some comments on my feeling about the interview. The audio recordings were saved on my password protected drive, with an extra copy kept safe in a thumb drive in a locked cabinet. I transcribed them in the weeks following the interview. The files are kept in a password protected drive.

For All Interviews

Sometimes, the interviews happened in places with loud noises in the background, either children playing or some construction work happening in the vicinity. I had no directional microphone, and got all that background noise on record. I only realized the impact of it when transcribing the interviews. The process of transcribing the tapes took many more hours than I anticipated; however, it was worth the time spent, as I got to know the material well. It also helped in the data analysis process, since I had all the
material entered in digital form as text, and could work with electronic searches and key words.

Artifacts

I observed the art (paintings, drawings, construction using recycled materials, etc.) was visible on CCCria’s walls and shelves. My intention was to get a sample of manifestations of children’s creativity. The parents sign a consent form when enrolling their children at CCCria, agreeing that their pictures can be taken and other products of their work can be photographed, as long as not for commercial exploitation. During my observation sessions, especially in the Art room, children often offered me their drawings that I collected and filed. I photographed drawings, paintings, and sculptures that were placed on shelves or hung on the walls and ceiling using a digital camera. The files, in high resolution, are kept on my secure hard drive and backup system. I used mostly those images taken with the digital camera. The artifacts given to me by the children were usually hearts or writings of their names that were not useful for the purpose of the study. The result is over three thousand pictures that show not only the children’s creativity, but also reflect concepts related to the CCCria, and situations of their community.

Data Analysis Approach

The data analysis approach that best fits the constructivist research paradigm is called interpretive analysis (Hatch, 2002). This approach was chosen because of the understanding that the researcher’s role is to make his or her best effort into giving meaning to what he or she observed and recorded during the data collection process. The interpretations are all grounded in the data, justified by it, and the participants are invited
to give their opinion, contributing to construct a shared meaning of their experiences.

**Analysis of Existing Documents**

As mentioned above, I was granted access to the full documentation of CCCria original project in electronic format. Since I had the documents in electronic format, instead of writing a formal summary of all the documents, I wrote notes on where to find the information, and came back to the original documents to find ideas and quotes as needed. The use of text search, both in the Microsoft Word and Microsoft Explorer, allowed me to search by key word, which greatly facilitated the work of looking for information around specific themes.

I used the data collected through the documents to check facts and dates, as well as find how the concepts (autonomy, protagonism) were initially described, how many times a particular term was mentioned, and then ask, “Why?” For example, through the analysis of the documents, I discovered that the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) wasn’t mentioned once in CECIP project documents, while the Statute (Brazilian law that translates the CRC to Brazilian reality) is mentioned often, in connection with children’s rights. This finding was then added to others, from different data sources, in order to comprehend the complexity of the phenomenon.

For most of the written material (especially interview transcripts), I used discourse analysis - more specifically thematic analysis with the intent of identifying meaningful categories or themes. For some internal documents, for example, informal accounts of training sessions, this method was helpful to assess the state of mind and the emphasis put on the early trainings to which the team referred to many times in their
interviews. The process of going back and forth between interviews, observation, and documents allowed to triangulate the data, confirming and sometimes finding discrepancies to be dealt with in the writing of the findings. The process of integrating this information into the final analysis is described below.

*Analysis of Video Recorded Material*

The material was viewed and logged in. The video material contained interviews with key people in the community and a chronology of the CCCria’s building process was very valuable. Most of the material had already been viewed and logged in paper. I had access to the original footage, and could verify that the final edited version contained the best material in terms of illustrating the daily routine of the Center. What I saw there was not very different from the routine I observed myself. However, the recording process was sometimes intrusive. A three person crew of people that children were not familiar with entered the rooms with a camera, lighting, and microphone. The result was that some play scenes looked rehearsed and staged for the camera. On one of the recordings the cameraman’s voice directing the children can be heard, making it not very useful to my study.

One vignette recorded a scene that well represented the kind of interaction I observed while in the toy room. Two children had built the Sambódromo (where the Carnaval parades are held) using legos and construction blocks. In the video, they are singing the samba of the local samba school, while having playmobile, Barbies, and other dolls parading. Their singing and the way they moved the parade cars and dolls demonstrated their knowledge of and connection to that culture. The video materials also
contain interviews with key people in the community and a chronology of the CCCria’s building process that was very valuable, especially to triangulate with what I had learned from the documents and interviews.

**Analysis of Artifacts**

I collected artifacts through digital pictures or videos. The electronic files were organized by date. The pictures of children in the activity rooms were in folders by month and year. This actually helped to keep track of how special events (for example, an assembly discussing the CCCria’s rules or a field trip to a museum) influenced the children’s production. The pictures of drawings, artifacts and performances were placed in a separate file named by date and art form. In two years, I gathered over three thousand images, between short videos, pictures of children in activities, and children’s art work (drawings, sculptures, books, and others).

I studied the pictures of children in their daily activities at the Center, and made a selection of images that depicted the major concepts of this study. This process was repeated several times as new themes emerged. The coupling of images with themes that emerged from other data sources brought up unexpected issues. For instance, at a certain point, I realized that conflict among children appeared several times in my notes. Looking at the pictures, however, I couldn’t find any taken of conflicts, which brought to my attention that this is might be a difficult theme. While taking pictures of children playing or working on projects was well accepted, photographing their conflicts and fights felt invasive to me. This is a sensitive cultural issue that influenced my work even without my being aware of it at the time. Therefore, I couldn’t find this theme in the
pictures I had taken or in their drawings. However, in their illustrations of the do’s and
don’ts at CCCria, their drawings representing what couldn’t be done at CCCria pictured
scary images of people bleeding, black eyes and scars, showing strong feelings toward
violence.

I used the pictures in several ways. One of them was to triangulate the data.
Another use was to include them in presentation of the data to the public (children and
educators). I chose images that translated concepts or findings I wanted feedback about
and it generated rich discussions. In addition, the pictures were provided to the Center to
illustrate articles and publications about the CCCria and to put on display at the Center.
They were also used by CEACA-Vila and CECIP on their websites and in institutional
yearly reports.\footnote{It is important to notice that the parents signed a consent form when they register their children, allowing their pictures to be taken for non-commercial use.}

\textit{Analysis of Field Notes from Observation and Interviews}

For analyzing the data obtained from observation and transcribed interviews, I
used Hatch’s (2002) steps of interpretative analysis:

1. Read the data – interview transcripts, observation writing, to have a view of
   the whole data set;
2. Review overall and specific impressions or insights the researcher had during
   or after the interviews, as well as the notes in brackets from the observations.
   Also to look at insights that emerge from the literature review. From those
   impressions and insights define some common themes;
3. Read the data again, looking for the themes that were identified – code each
part according to the theme it refers to. Record the theme, documenting its location. Look for statements that confirm or contradict the theme. I conducted observations of the activity rooms from February to December 2008 (Table 5). I recorded them by hand in a notebook first and then into a digital form. I first recorded the day, hour, room and educator observed, with a brief description of the context and events. For example, if a conflict with the police happened that day, or anything else that could be meaningful for later reference, I recorded that. To write up the observation of the day I used a three column format. In the first column, I kept track of the time. In the second column, I wrote the situation as I observed it. In the third column, I wrote the thoughts and feelings that particular scene meant to me, as well as early thoughts on themes that might be interesting to go back later. For example, I might write “good example of protagonism” or “solidarity.” Finally, in free form at the bottom of the document, I wrote a reflection of what the situation meant to me at the time, insights and possible connection to other data sources, evaluative comments or just random thoughts. To process this information, I first read the whole data set. I printed both the interviews and the observation records and read them several times, making notes and finding the emerging themes.

Final Analysis

The process used to make sense of the data followed these steps:

1. Analyze the memos written from the data gathered (observation, photos,
documents, artifacts).

2. Write brief summaries in which the interpretations are clearly supported by the excerpt of the interviews, observations and/or images. Produce a power point presentation with images and phrases that substantiate the findings.

3. Present it to both educators and other key stakeholders, asking for their feedback. This is not a step meant to verify if the information is correct, but to get their perspective on what the researcher discovered and add it to the study.

4. Compose the fourth chapter of the dissertation, including their feedback.

The process included all four steps, although not in such a linear and neat fashion.

After analyzing the data set separately, I proceeded using mostly the electronic files, typing key words that would guide me directly to all the observation containing that word. For example, by typing the word “autonomy,” I would find instantly all the observation records I had made notes about this theme on the third column mentioned above. This helped me both locate the information and see if it was relevant by the number of records where that word was present. It also helped me to instantly see what type of data confirmed that theme. I would then revisit the files, see what was said about that theme, choose cases that exemplified what I was finding, and save them in a file. It is relevant to say that the words chosen corresponded both to themes I expected to find, related to protagonism, but also to terms that emerged, as for example the importance of caring relationships.

For the interviews with educators I also made a file with all their answers by question, which helped me to better see patterns as well as commonalities and
discrepancies. With this pre-processed material, I built a case around the research questions and wrote a text including the different perspectives. Again, issues that were not part of the original questions appeared to be prominent, as for example, the violence in the community and how it affected the children’s lives. Although there weren’t any questions about it, this theme appeared in observations as well as in the educators and children’s interviews. Another theme was the different ways of learning that emerged from the data, and was included as an important aspect of the CCCria’s experience. I wrote about this too. Each of these different texts were then enriched with what other authors wrote on the issues. I wrote down any new thoughts generated through that process and returned again to the data summaries. The themes developed through this process are presented in Chapter Five. To present the discussion of my research in Chapter Six, I used Foss & Waters (2007) scheme dividing the findings into three theses, supported by themes that emerged from the analysis of the data.

Feedback Sessions

Part of the process was to give and receive feedback from the children and educators of CCCria. I organized two sessions with children and one with the adults that are presently working at CCCria, to see how my conclusions would be received, and what they had to add. Of the people I interviewed, only five still worked at CCCria. The coordinator is now the day care’s principal and came especially for the presentation.

The children that participated in the feedback sessions were those interested in “listening a story about the CCCria”. Not all of the children who participated on the feedback were part of the group that was interviewed, and not all seven children
interviewed decided to participate in the feedback session. I made a power point presentation with the main findings, with lots of pictures of children in activities and some of their work. I told them a story about how people in the US would be interested in learning about what they were doing in the Morro dos Macacos, and I was going to write that story and tell them. In the first group (6 boys and one girl, aged 4 to 8) one child reacted saying that I shouldn’t say that (the name of the community) as if it was a bad thing, that people wouldn’t be interested. The child was demonstrating her knowledge about the fear and prejudice people have toward their community.

Slide after slide, the children commented on the results, sometimes telling stories that had nothing to do with the presentation, sometimes confirming my conclusions, sometimes challenging them. For example, most of them agreed that the relationship with the educator is part of the reason why they choose a particular room, although the older kid in the room said that he usually choose because of the activity itself. When I presented the slides about participation, mentioning the petition as a form of participation, the three girls in the second group didn’t know what it was. They got very excited about the pictures. They recognized the educators that had already left the Center, their friends, and laughed at themselves and how different they were now. The slide where the children are fighting while forming the line got a lot of attention, allowing some interesting conversation about conflicts among children and how to solve them. The sessions had to be focused, quick, and preferably entertaining – since the attention span for that kind of activity was, in my experience, rather short. After 15 minutes, I felt they were tired of it, and wanted to play games on my laptop.
The session for the educators was held at lunch time, inviting both shifts to be present. Eleven educators came to the session. I had a different presentation, of course, and their feedback greatly enriched my work. The educators mostly agreed with the findings, and added some of their own reflections. For example, their discussion of how everyone at CCCria was also a mediator was an important to add to my conclusions. Another interesting topic they explored was conflict resolution and creation of the CCCria’s norms. The educators discussed how it often happened that the children needed to remind the adults of what was agreed upon. Another still was related to the children being the guardians of the methodology, and therefore an important element for its sustainability. All the sessions were recorded, and transcribed, then included into Chapter Five and Six.

One aspect particular to this study was that my data, all in Portuguese (recorded material, interviews, observations, as well as some of the literature), needed to be translated into English. This took time and also represented a risk that something might get a slightly different meaning when translated to another language, or that some cultural aspect would lose its richness in the translation process. As the Italian expression says: “traduttore, traditore”! (“translator; traitor”). It speaks of the difficulties of translating not only the words literally, but more importantly the meaning and culture they stand for. I tried to mitigate the risk of misrepresentation by, whenever possible, having more than one person fluent in both languages read the excerpts in Portuguese and English, and then double checking the understanding with my advisor.
Ethical Considerations

The project that created CCCria in partnership with CEACA-Vila and the Bernard van Leer Foundation was developed by CECIP, an organization where I worked for many years and in which I was still doing consulting work. Many of my family members were involved with the organization and with CCCria itself since its very beginning. On one hand, this could ease the process of entering the field – serving as reference in a community where people are rightfully very suspicious of new comers. I was aware that people in the community and in the CCCria knew and respected CECIP and transferred some of these positive feelings to people who came through CECIP. On the other hand, participants, especially adults, could see me as an authority because of proximity with leading figures, and, therefore, withdraw information that they thought could get them in trouble. To mitigate that effect, I did go alone to the interviews, and stressed that all that was said was kept confidential. CEACA-Vila, the community center that runs the CCCria, is an organization accustomed to having guests and researchers visiting the projects and the community and does their best to help the visitors with their work. My experience, therefore, was not unusual treatment.

As for the children, whenever my family ties with other members of CECIP team came up, they were excited about it, since family is a matter that stirs their curiosity. The observation sessions sometimes happened on days where other members of CECIP team were there as well. Finally, my special relationship with CECIP did help me by teaching me the codes/routines to enter the community safely.

All names of adults and children were changed to protect their privacy. I am
aware that, for people who know the community and the Center, it might be possible to identify the educators, even under an alias, not as much for the opinions but for the art form or activity room they discuss in the interviews. The adults interviewed were aware of this risk. However, I made sure that the excerpts of the children’s interviews presented in my findings would not allow any identification of the interviewee, even for the people involved at CCCria.

Another issue I had anticipated and needed to be considered is that after months of going every week to the CCCria, some children did become very friendly. This is a concern among researchers who closely work with children over long periods of time. As Corsaro (2003) expressed, “In my research with young children the end of a particular study is always bittersweet. The kids and I reflect fondly on our time together and we know that, in most cases, we might not see each other again” (p. 195). I always honored the children’s trust, and kept within the boundaries of my role as a researcher. However, many children are especially eager for attention and some might have gotten upset when the research project ended.

I think these considerations were, in fact, important and I reflected on them several times as I conducted the data collection portion of this research. Doing research with children involves a great deal of sensibility and care about their feelings, even more so than adults. The majority of the children reacted well to my presence every time I was visiting CCCria. Some chose me as a caring adult, would be very friendly to me during my visits, and even expressed that they were looking forward to the next visit. Others would be indifferent and go on with their activities. One child did react strongly to my
presence. At first, we created a bond, as had happened with several children, but later she became very possessive and expressed frustration whenever I was talking to other children. The CCCria coordinator did mediate this relationship, at my request, and we had some moments where we could go back to being friendly, but she mostly became distant. This same situation had happened with other adults she had selected as special in the past, but nevertheless, it wasn’t an easy situation for me. As time passed, we managed to create a good relationship, where she was happy to see me when I came to visit CCCria, but went on with her activities without caring too much about my presence.

I had planned on making a gradual retreat from the field in order to make this transition as smooth as possible, for example increasing the intervals of the visits to the Center. I think it worked very well for the children. I still go back to the center with the CECIP team from time to time, and get hugs from those old friends.

The Context of CCCria

To better understand the CCCria experience, this section begins with my first observation day, to give a panorama of the community of the Morro dos Macacos. Then I give an account of CCCria’s inception, who were the partners and how the community was involved. This is relevant to give the reader the dimension of the challenges presented by the context where CCCria is located.

Entering the Field: First Impressions and Considerations

I visited the Center a couple of times before officially starting my observation sessions, in order to explain what the study was and get the proper authorizations. On my first observation day, on February 11th 2008, I described the CCCria and its activities:
We arrived around 1:40 p.m. on a hot summer day. The Cultural Centre was very vibrant, full of children running from side to side, laughing, and having fun. From downstairs, outside the gates, we could already hear the drums playing the school of samba rhythm. Josephine, CECIP Early Childhood Projects’ Coordinator, said that Leo, the music teacher, must be there. Heather, the CCCria coordinator, came downstairs and welcomed us by opening the gate so Josephine could park the car inside CCCria. When we arrive upstairs, Heather tells us that Leo is not there, but a group of children have asked to use the music room. They are rehearsing on their own.

I wrote the words Autonomy and Responsibility on the side of my notebook.

Then I visited several rooms to get a general impression of the setting. The comments I made on this day express my first insights on the CCCria. For example, in the library, one educator was telling a story to a little girl and my comment was “Both the girl and the educator seem to be enjoying intensely this moment.” The warmth of the relationships also caught my attention; children welcomed me affectionately on this first observation visit. Three girls stayed with me the whole time, enjoying showing me around. The entry said, “I already knew one of them, Emilia, from a previous visit, but I had never seen the others before, and they are so open to contact, so friendly.” It was the first time I saw a dispute to get a spot in the computer room. The dispute became heated, and the coordinator had to intervene.

The routine for snack time was also explained to me: the rooms are called one by one for snack time. Once the room they are in is called by Laurence, a community educator that helps around the center, the children run to the bathroom to wash their
hands and run back to get in line. Snack time was organized this way so children can enjoy their snacks without having to bother getting in line for too long. I thought that this showed respect and care for the children’s needs, as much as it showed that there was an effort to keep an organized routine. Malu, a member of CECIP team, explained that it was organized like this to make sure everyone would get a snack. The children and staff get a plastic mug (reusable) with fruit juice, and some carbohydrate – that day they had cracker sandwiches. Adults may have coffee as well. Most of them sit by the children, and share that time chatting with them.

After a couple of hours of observation, I felt very tired from the heat and from the surrounding noise. Everything seemed loud to me: the drums playing nonstop, as well as the children running, playing, screaming, and laughing. It seemed that the children never walked around – if they were going somewhere, they were mostly running there. I felt drained, while staff and children seemed fine with the energy level of the place.

Another thing I noticed right away was that people didn’t use the word *favela*, preferring the word *community* instead. Piccolo (2006) confirmed my perception. In an interview that author conducted with Anastacia, the community leader, the latter explains the difference between using the term *favela* and using the term *community*:

“No one calls it favela anymore, they call it community. But in the past, nobody use to say community, it was favela, they changed its name, it sounds nicer,” she explained.

“But, the changing of the name, did it happen from inside or from outside?” I [Piccolo] asked.
“From the inside, some leaders of the favela thought you know, that they did not want to live in a favela, they wanted to live in a community,” said Miss Anastasia. (p. 123)

Piccolo (2006) concluded:

Currently, the term "slum" [favela] is also used both in society at large as in the slums, with a pejorative connotation, naming things considered aesthetically ugly, disorderly, negative: "this will turn into a Favelinha\(^5\)" I heard once from the President of the Community Center and from one of the cooks on the organization referring to a bookcase, as I had suggested, tying it with a string onto the window. On that occasion, the leader commented further that the cleaning lady who works for one of her children "loved to make a Favelinha" by hanging out clothes to dry in front of the house, the street where they live. (p. 124)

From the moment I understood that the word community was perceived as more respectful, I stopped using the word favela, and used the term community instead.

*Establishing a Routine in a Context of Violence*

For the first two months, I would only go to the Center with CECIP team members, usually by car. At arrival, before entering the community, we would call the Center to be sure it was safe. Once we announced our arrival, we would lower the car’s windows, to show ourselves and let people see that we presented no threat. Then we would drive up the community for about 200 meters, slowly, and park in front or inside

\(^5\) The term “Favelinha” means little favela. In this case, it is a pejorative way to refer to an untidy spot or a messy job.
After the initial two-month period I felt safe to go on my own, always calling first and being aware of the surroundings. Some signs around the entrance of the community would also tell if it was safe. For example, if there were people coming and going on the path, it usually meant the situation was normal. If the man washing cars at the entrance of the community was there, busy with his work, it was likely safe to go in. However, if the path was deserted, the stores closed or if gunshots were heard, I would refrain from going to the CCCria that day or at least wait a couple of hours. I never felt unsafe during the visits, although I witnessed several raids from the police, and the consequent exchange of gunshots. On these occasions, we would round up the children in the toy room or the library, the safest places in the Center, and wait for about 15 minutes. Then children would be back to playing, although there were two moments to be careful: when the police entered the community, and a few hours later, when they left. Even though the children are familiar with this unfortunate routine and would often keep on playing, some still got nervous, cried, or asked to stay close to an adult. The educators mostly kept their cool to avoid upsetting the children even more.

It was not uncommon to enter the community and cross paths with young people on motorcycles, armed with rifles and handguns. We were instructed to avoid eye contact, and keep going slowly, as do the people who live there. We had become familiar faces, and allowed to be there. The presence of the drug traffic and the conflicts with the police were subjects often mentioned during the interviews.
The Inception of CCCria

CCCria was created in the Morro dos Macacos, located in Vila Isabel, a middle class neighborhood in the North Zone of the City of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The community started in the 1920s (Magnani, 2007) like most, with shacks made with whatever material or scraps of wood that could be found. Over the years people kept improving their living quarters, making them into more solid and permanent constructions. Nowadays, most of the houses in this community of 17 thousand people (Magnani, 2007) are made of bricks, usually two stories high and growing vertically. The community is near a park that used to be a zoo. It was not very well kept, but it was a beautiful green area.

At the time of CCCria’s inception, the Macacos community was marked by violent conflicts. These armed conflicts occurred between drug dealing gangs and the police and also among different drug trafficking gangs, disputing territory. During the years of 2008 and 2010 the conflicts between the police and the gangs happened often, part of a dramatic routine often not noticed by the press. It was a different picture when conflicts arose because an outside gang invaded the area for controlling the drug traffic. Those conflicts happened usually at night and were more violent and threatening to the community. In one, a police helicopter was shot down by drug gang members using heavy artillery causing many casualties. The event was widely reported in the international media.

During the period of data collection, especially from January 2008 to December 2009, the community was raided by the police sometimes as often as once a week. The
police entered the community shooting and being shot at, both sides making victims among innocent bystanders who happened to get caught in the middle. People commented that you never knew when it would start. The conflicts happened suddenly and people often were caught off guard, looking for shelter. In one of my interviews, one child told me about a recent incident that had one fatality: “He saw the Caveirão, and he ran. You should never run, ‘cause then they shoot you” (Emilia’s interview, given on 08-04-09). The young boy who ran had indeed been shot. These raids are reported in the news only when casualties occur, so it was virtually impossible to find statistics that represented the reality.

Although drug dealers did live in the Morro dos Macacos, the great majority of the community was composed of working people, who suffered the consequences of violence and often said they would like to leave the community if they could. Some of the older residents remembered times when drug trafficking was less prevalent, or not as heavily armed, and life was more peaceful. In fact, they say they used to feel a lot safer inside the community than on the asphalt (as the locals call the area outside the community). Of course, the children and what happened to them was their greater concern and higher priority.

Over the years, the community organized itself to fight for their rights, to offer job training and other educational opportunities to adults and teenagers, and to protect their children. In 1960, a group created the first school. In 1962, a neighborhood association

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6 Caveirão: literally translates as “large skull”- the nickname given to the armed car used by the special police force to enter the favelas, which has a logo of a skull laid on top of two guns and trespassed by a sword
was created, primarily focused on fighting for better services and infrastructure, such as bringing running water and electricity to the community. In the late 1970s, the association started to change. The representatives were no longer elected by the community members, but “placed there.” Piccolo’s (2006) study stated:

Therefore, for a period of time, the association members, the people who live in the community were the ones determining who the association’s president was going to be; changing the configuration of power, other people began to appoint them, those appointing being either politicians or drug lords. According to Ms. Anastasia, the event that marks the end of the elections for the neighborhood association president is a "raid" of the community and the assassination of the President of the entity at the time. Therefore, these changes in the configuration of local power that reflected in changes in how leaders were chosen from the neighborhood Association are related to transformations occurring in the social organization of the community. From the moment the "raids" began, "things became more difficult," the drug dealers started to occupy places of power and command. (p. 179)

Around this time, there was a split inside the association. The group that wanted the association to remain democratic, with elected representatives, was defeated. This dissident group left the association and created a community organization called Centro Comunitário Lídia dos Santos, or CEACA-Vila, named after a midwife that delivered and cared for many babies in the community. The CEACA-Vila, also called Community Center, focused on developing initiatives to address the needs of the community in relation to children and teenagers. CEACA-Vila is structured legally as an association or
NGO. It has a board of trustees who meet every couple of years to review the institution’s financial report, appoint the President, the Vice President, and the Executive Director, who run the institution. CEACA-Vila created a community day care center to keep children safe while their parents worked – the Creche Patinho Feliz. Since then, many projects were developed, addressing the needs of children, adolescent and adults. These projects created opportunities for job training, women’s empowerment, and the general well being of the community.

CECIP entered this story as CEACA-Vila’s partner, long before the CCCria project began. According to its website, CECIP was founded in 1986, structured as:

…an autonomous non-profit civil society organization that seeks to democratize the access by all layers of the Brazilian Society to quality information on their basic rights, thus fostering a conscientious, active and participative citizenry. Its actions are directed at social actors, such as teachers, school administrators, students, and health, human rights and environmental workers and promoters. (CECIP, 2010)

Focusing on communication and education, over the years CECIP developed close to 100 projects nationally and internationally, ranging from the production of video documentaries and educational materials, the development of training programs, and the promotion of educational campaigns around issues of citizenship. CECIP’s mission was “to contribute to the definition of public policies that promote human rights in all their aspects – economic, social, cultural, political and environmental” (CECIP, 2010).

CECIP’s headquarters are located downtown Rio de Janeiro.

In 1997, CECIP and CEACA-Vila worked together in a project related to the
ECA (Brazilian Statute of the Child and Adolescent) (CECIP, 2009). This project was part of a cooperation program between Brazil and the European Union, called PIDMU Program (Programa Infancia Desfavorecida em Meio Urbano, or Disadvantaged Childhood in Urban Areas Program). The goal of the project was to produce educational materials (videos, booklets) and launch a campaign to provide information and foster the mobilization of civil society around the rights of children and adolescents.

To this end, CECIP established partnerships with governmental and nongovernmental organizations, CEACA-Vila being one of them. CECIP conducted focus groups in the production phase for their educational materials, and CEACA-Vila was included in those groups. Once the materials were ready (a kit with seven booklets, four short videos, and one poster) each organization that participated received the final product, to be used in their activities. CECIP staff participated as experts in workshops and public debates for different audiences (teenagers, educators, and community) promoted by CEACA-Vila to inform the population about the Statute of the Child and Adolescent.

In 2004, CEACA-Vila was contacted by CECIP about their interest in developing a project called Investing in the Future. Investing in the Future was a training program financed by the Bernard van Leer Foundation to help daycare workers reflect on their practice, provide them with new information, and then assist them in designing and implementing changes to improve the quality of service they were offering to the children and their families. CEACA-Vila welcomed the Investing in the Future project under one condition: the other daycare centers that serve the community would be included. CECIP
agreed, and the one and a half year project was a success.

Many improvements in the quality of the daycares were achieved as a result, for example, reopening the library (CECIP, 2009, p.26), creating new policies to welcome parents inside the Patinho, allowing more contact between the families and the educators, and valuing the drawings of small children as an art form, displaying them on the walls and shelves. These changes helped make educators feel proud and more confident at their tasks, parents more satisfied, and the children happier (CECIP, 2005). Dona Anastacia, community leader, said in a 2010 video interview given to CECIP that the daycare was at first only staffed with community members that would volunteer or work for a very low pay. They had no pedagogical training, and would mostly take care of the children. After the project, many staff members decided to go back to school and get a degree. She referred to the Investing in the Future project as an important step toward improving the educational quality of the daycare, where community knowledge and technical knowledge reach a balance, one team learning from the other.

As the end of the Investing in the Future project was approaching, CEACA-Vila and CECIP started to discuss plans for a new project together. The major concern for Dona Anastacia was what happened to the children once they left the full-day daycare center. At that time, children attended public school from four years old on, but only part time (morning or afternoon). The rest of the day they were at home, where often there was no parent to look after them. The children often stayed with a neighbor who babysat,

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7 Children are eligible to attend public school at 4 years old, as preschoolers. The mandatory age to enter school at that time was 6 years old, when they begin a nine-year basic cycle, followed by a three-year cycle.
with slightly older siblings, with a grandparent, or even alone at a very young age. According to Dona Anastacia, many of them were “soltos no morro,” an expression that means they were loose inside the community and vulnerable to harm (2010 video interview to CECIP). CEACA-Vila and CECIP decided to establish a new project to address this issue and CECIP was in charge of designing it.

Considering the need expressed by Dona Anastacia for a place for children 4 to 10 years old, CECIP’s Early Childhood Education team decided that whatever they would design, it was to be something radically different from a school or daycare. They wanted a place where children would be able to play, to have fun, to be free and to make friends. However, above all, they wanted a safe place where children would grow and develop their creative potential. From its experience in early childhood education centers, CECIP settled on creating a center where, instead of traditional classrooms, there would be experiential learning through art forms and opportunities to play and fully enjoy childhood. The center would be a cultural center for children from 4 to 10 years old. Josephine, CECIP project coordinator, talked about what they wanted to accomplish:

You offer the child a place where she can choose if she wants to go to the computer room or if she wants to go to an art room and work there for a while, then go to the library, then dance ... these are many languages that she can try out and find there something she identifies with. I like this one more, but I did try several others. Their little heads open up to those opportunities. They can find their talents, their strengths, believe in themselves, be valued for the things they do. Their drawings are posted on the walls

8 The word “language” is used here in the sense Edwards, Gandini and Forman (1998) used in describing the Reggio Emilia experience in their book “The Hundred Languages of the Children”
and shelves. We talk to them, and I think this helps the children change the way they will relate to the opportunities that are out in the world. They will have opportunities because they will be looking for them. (Josephine’s interview, January 14th, 2009)

The CECIP Early Childhood Education team presented the idea of the Cultural Center for Children, which was immediately accepted by CEACA-Vila, even if they did not fully understand what this center would be, or what implications it would carry. The main goals for them were to keep the children safe and busy, and they trusted CECIP to offer something that would benefit the children. This trust was earned in the above mentioned previous projects done in partnership in which both organizations managed to reach agreements when problems arose by listening to each other, respecting each other’s knowledge, and considering each other’s constraints and limitations. As Josephine said:

The Community Center (CEACA-Vila) was interested in something to keep children busy when not in school, and they loved it. They gave us their support all the way, and we never had problems with them, even if they didn’t really understand what the idea was, what it meant, they just placed their trust in us. (Josephine’s interview, January 14th, 2009)

CECIP’s team worked on designing the Cultural Center and presented the idea to the van Leer Foundation. In this project proposal, in addition to the aspects of safety and play, the concept of child protagonism was mentioned as one of the main objectives for the Center (CECIP, 2005). This project resulted from a thorough process of discussion, as Malu, member of CECIP’s team and co-author of the CCCria methodology, reported:

That was not as easy as I am telling you – there were lots of meetings, lots of
coming and going, until we were sure we understood what CEACA-Vila really wanted for the children. And it was a long process in writing the project to the van Leer Foundation, designing the idea. Looking back, it seems it took us a whole year just discussing and exchanging ideas – I know it wasn’t all this – but it feels like a long time, us gathered around a table, designing, planning: Is it going to be like this? Designing something that didn’t exist, that nobody knew; we had desires, something no one had ever seen! Just dreams of what would be ideal for a child to have as an education.

(Malu’s interview, January 26th, 2009)

In August 2005, the Dutch Bernard van Leer Foundation agreed to finance the project. The first year was dedicated to building the Center, both the methodology and the edifice. The space initially planned to host the center was on the second floor of the community day care center Patinho Feliz. CEACA-Vila had offered two unused rooms that were filled with leftover construction materials and broken pieces of equipment. However, during the first meeting between CEACA-Vila and CECIP after the project was approved, CEACA-Vila offered the possibility of drastically augmenting the area. Provided that CECIP agreed to build two extra rooms downstairs, the Cultural Center could have the entire area of the second floor, and build a separate entrance. CEACA-Vila would take on part of the added costs, and together they would look for more partners if needed. In a January 2006 meeting, according to CECIP internal documents, the plans for the construction of the Center, using the entire second floor of the Patinho Feliz daycare center, as well as the construction of the two downstairs rooms, adding to the daycare area, were presented by CECIP and approved by CEACA-Vila. This decision
had a huge impact on the size and therefore on the number of children that could benefit from the center: from the 150 square meters foreseen on the original project presented to the van Leer Foundation, the Center reached 400 square meters and could serve many more children (CECIP, 2007).

While CCCria was being built, CECIP’s team was involved in refining the plans and defining what the Center was going to look like, as well as the underlining concepts and how they were going to be translated into practice. Since they found no other examples of a cultural center for children, the team used their many years of professional experience to build a new methodology involving the ideas of children protagonism, freedom of choice, autonomy, access to cultural and artistic opportunities, which includes the valuing of the children’s play. In her interview, Malu, member of CECIP team that created the CCCria, described the process this way:

Of course, we had many years of experience working with children, with educators, and institutions who think about education, about different conceptions of education, about different conceptions of children. That was consolidated already. But the idea of a cultural center? That was really new. For example, we had long discussions about things like: would there be a bell that would indicate the time for children to stay in a room, or to switch from one activity to the other? (Malu’s interview, January 26th, 2009).

As described in CECIP’s September to December 2005 internal activity reports, the first step they took was to initiate a process to ask the children in the community what they would like the Center to be. CECIP and CEACA-Vila teamed up to find out what
their interests were, organizing a series of workshops for children, involving a total of 112 participants from 2 to 14 years old. There was storytelling and other activities to make the children comfortable. They could also express their desires through painting and construction with recycled materials. An educator used a puppet (a stuffed monkey) and asked them what they liked to have in their neighborhood. The children wanted dance, arts and music, but also computers and a video room. They asked for toys to play (they mentioned Barbie dolls, a stuffed monkey, a beauty salon, a pink telephone to call Santa, mirrors, brushes, beauty products, especially hair products, cake, pizza, snacks, and parties). One child asked for a pencil and drew a playground slide (CECIP internal report on the process of creating the CCCria, 2006). As a result of these workshops, CECIP added to their list a playroom and a library.

One workshop was held with eleven educators already working at CEACA-Vila day care centers to gain their perspective on what a cultural center should be. The report (CECIP, 2006) showed that they had trouble grasping the differences between a cultural center for children and a daycare. However, they expressed clearly the importance of such a place for the children and contributed the following suggestions: (a) involving the families and telling them about the importance of the CCCria for the future of their children; (b) looking for partnerships to sustain the center; (c) looking into the community and finding talented people to work at the Center; (d) encouraging children to attend regularly and calling their friends to join them on “the CCC\(^9\) family” (CECIP, 2006).

\(^9\) CCC was used at first for Centro Cultural da Criança. However, it is the same acronym used by a right wing movement during the dictatorship that persecuted and killed “communists” (in reality, any oppositionists to the military regime) – therefore it was later changed to the acronym CCCria.
In addition, three workshops were held to train 27 teenagers in how to conduct a survey to find out what the community of the Morro dos Macacos thought a cultural center was, if they knew any, what it should be, and about their willingness to participate. An interview script was created and this group of teenagers went door to door, asking children and community members if they knew of any cultural center and what they wanted their cultural center to be. The result of this survey showed that 59% of the adults surveyed knew at least one cultural center. They named the Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil (mega cultural center of the Bank of Brazil Foundation, located in downtown Rio) and CEACA-Vila. What they most of all wanted from a cultural center in their community was a space to dance and do other physical activities, for example, capoeira or ballet. As part of the survey, CEACA-Vila and CECIP wanted to know how supportive the community was of the idea of a cultural center. To the question on how the community felt about getting engaged with the cultural center, 70% said that they would participate and engage with it. CECIP coordinator Josephine talked about the results:

The closest they had seen to a cultural center was the Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil which it is not really… I mean, they have some activities for children, but those are not very well known, and it is definitely not a cultural center for children. So they didn’t really know any. Therefore to enter a community – of course we did so together with the community center (CEACA-Vila) – with an entirely new proposition, one that the community didn’t know what it was about, and that for us too was an entirely new experience – never had anyone in the team thought of ever creating a cultural center – so
we knew we were facing a huge challenge.

Building in a favela was not an easy process. The daycare center was built many years ago by members of the community who had hands-on knowledge of building but no formal training in architecture or engineering. When the construction started on the second floor, some significant problems with the sewage system of the Patinho Feliz Daycare were discovered. The problem was so severe that the whole system had to be redone. CECIP gathered a team of volunteer architects and engineers who specialized in calculating structure, remodeling, and constructing to help create a design that would overcome the problems in building the new structure. This team worked together on the construction with plumbers, brick layers, and electricians who were members of the community. The result looked like a castle – the entrance is inside a round orange tower, with circular stairs leading to the second floor.

According to CECIP (2007), the project’s objective was

…to provide children from the Morro dos Macacos with an alternative cultural space, safe from urban violence, through the creation of a Cultural Center for Children, to insure children their right to be treated as participant citizen and protagonists of their development and learning processes, with access to education, culture, leisure, play and the possibility to be happy, fulfilling the vision contained in the Statute of the Child and Adolescent. (p.2)

The CECIP team designed a place where educational activities would be offered, and where children could roam free from one activity to another, according to their interest, with no set time to stay in each room. They called it an experience of child
protagonism. Children would be free to make choices, respecting the rules of occupation, the other children and the educators facilitating each room.

Summing up, this section gave a panorama of the community and the challenges presented by an environment where armed conflicts and violence were present. It also spoke of the strength community leaders and community organizations had to pursue positive initiative in order to provide educational opportunities to their children. The following chapters will give an account of how CECIP and CEACA-Vila implemented the project and offer an analysis of how the concepts of child protagonism, child autonomy and child’s rights were implemented at CCCria.
CHAPTER V
FINDINGS

In this chapter, I begin by exploring the data gathered, presenting the themes that emerged from the analysis, guided by the research questions. As I report my findings, I underline aspects that are connected to some relevant authors, especially Paulo Freire. This author is one of Brazil’s most famous educators and a major influence on CECIP as an organization. He is cited in virtually all of CECIP documents as an inspiration. It seems appropriate to highlight throughout the text how Freire’s principles were used in CECIP and CCCria’s praxis.

I used a different approach to answer each of the three research questions. To answer the first research question – How was the concept of children’s protagonism put into practice in this setting? – I chose a thick description following the concept of children’s protagonism, telling how it was implemented, what were the different views from different perspectives, including the voice of the children, and what challenges were faced to implement the concept of children’s protagonism. I present the strategies implemented at CCCria to involve the community and promote the children’s autonomy and participation in day-to-day decision making processes. To answer the second question – How do educators and educational leaders adjust their practice to facilitate children’s protagonism? – I used an analysis of the educators’ interviews and observations made during the field work. As for the third research question – How did children act in response to the autonomy provided by CCCria children’s protagonism? – I present stories I collected during the observation sessions, as well as information from the
interviews with children and adults. As done in chapter IV, I use the first person in this personal account of what did take place during the time I was in the field, thus following the tradition of the qualitative research reports.

**Research Question 1: How Is the Concept of Children’s Protagonism Put Into Practice in CCCria?**

In this section I present the findings related to the first research question, and explore several aspects of the selection, training, and actualization processes. The story was told by CECIP members, who planned and executed the training, as well as through Chloe’s eyes. Chloe was the only remaining educator who was part of the initial training experience and was still working at CCCria’s library in 2008. The educators referenced this training several times in their interviews and Chloe seemed to be respected as much for having participated in it than for her experience with the methodology itself. A more detailed account of the training process including excerpts of Chloe’s interview is included in Appendix C. Then I introduce several strategies used by CCCria to promote the children’s autonomy and involve the families and comment on the results of those strategies.

**Selection and Early Training of the CCCria Educators**

According to the CECIP team member’s interviews, selecting and training the team that was going to put into practice a methodology that didn’t exist yet presented a major challenge. The CECIP team involved in the CCCria Project was composed of three members – Josephine, the team leader, Malu, a pedagogue with more than forty years working in early childhood education settings in poor urban communities, and Padma, an occupational therapist who participated in the project for the first two years. Malu
indicated that the first challenge was to make the candidates understand the content and characteristics of children’s protagonism. In her interview, she said that unfortunately, there wasn’t a place that had implemented the concept of child protagonism that they could go to visit. Their process is described in the following section. It included (a) articulating selection criteria, (b) conducting interviews with possible candidates, (c) training a pool of candidates who made the first cut, (d) making hiring and emphasis area decisions, and then (e) training staff for specific skills and knowledge needed for teaching in those areas.

Selection Criteria

It was agreed between CECIP and CEACA-Vila that the latter was going to be in charge of recruiting educators and staff, according to criteria agreed upon by both institutions. According to CECIP internal documents\(^{10}\), those criteria were

1) to like playing; 2) to have the capacity to interact with both the children and the team of educators; 3) to have community identity; 4) to believe that children produce culture and therefore have the right to express it, to intervene in their group, in their family, in their school, in their community, in society; and 5) see the children as subjects co-constructors of the History of Humanity.

These criteria reflect a constructivist approach to learning and a Freirean understanding of the importance of building dialogical relationships, which is perpetuated throughout the project. They express an understanding of the role of the educator as a co-constructor of knowledge, as I will demonstrate analyzing them one by one.

\(^{10}\) Internal document – Seleção dos educadores2.doc
With the first criterion, the CECIP team emphasized the importance of play. They believed this (play) to be the main language of the child (as Malu pointed out in her interview) – the language that is to be (re)learned and valued by the adults who will lead the activities. The CECIP team, by giving importance to this language and valuing the child and his/her contribution, increased the chances of dialogue between the adult and the child. Freire would define this dialogue as “a horizontal relationship between A and B” (Freire, 1970, p. 107). The essence of Freire’s method is dialogue. Instead of teaching, listening; instead of being a professor who knows everything, a facilitator with the ability to make people express themselves; instead of a ready-made package to be imposed, the building of a common knowledge based in shared values and principles (CECIP-APS International, 2009).

The importance of dialogue was also present in the second criterion. The criterion highlights the ability to interact well with children and adults, and therefore sets the stage for this dialogue to happen. It meant that the profile the CECIP team was aiming for included the ability to listen, to be sympathetic to others’ needs, and to be open to interacting with them. It also implied that the professional needed to be able to learn through this exchange of experiences.

In the third criterion, community identity, the CECIP team spoke of the importance of being deeply rooted in the community. This aspect was also related to the project’s sustainability (discussed further in Chapter VI). By valuing the community, the project’s intent was to value the language, the culture, the way of life of children and educators. This was also expressed in the fourth criterion: understanding the human being
as a producer of culture, and the fifth: understanding the human being as an actor in transforming humanity.

The twist was introducing the notion that the children have an important contribution to make. Malu talked of the selection process as offering interaction opportunities where CECIP team could identify people who were ready (professionally and personally) to open themselves to this new vision of the child. Hall (2005), cited Freire’s 1971 talk in Tanzania, where he said that adult education’s main task was

…to invite people to believe in themselves. It should invite people to believe that they have knowledge. The people must be challenged to discover their historical existence through the critical analysis of their cultural production: their art and their music. (p. 8)

This perspective was exemplified in the training design, as reported below.

*Interviews*

The selection process was organized in a training program format, as a series of workshop that all candidates were going to attend. This training program for CCCria educators was composed of modules organized in three phases. The first phase was the interviews, listening to the educators’ beliefs regarding children and the reasons why they were interested in working at a cultural center. Priority was given to people living in the community for several reasons: (a) the CECIP team wanted to show they valued the local, community-based knowledge, (b) local applicants already knew the children and the parents, and (c) local applicants lived in the community and could circulate easily without being hassled by drug dealers.
Not many candidates from the community applied in this first round. One explanation was that the job required a high school diploma, which excluded many candidates. Malu, in her interview, stated that she believed the people wouldn’t apply or felt insecure about a job that didn’t exist yet. Josephina, the project leader from the CECIP team believed it was a mistake to accept a group of candidates mostly from outside the community, even if these people had worked or lived in favelas before, and had connections with the community. She felt so because one of the most important criteria was to belong to the community. However, the project had a schedule to follow and the training needed to begin. CECIP accepted the candidates, and proceeded with the training and selection. This subject is approached in more detail later on this chapter.

After the interviews, twenty educators who made the first cut participated in several workshops to learn more about the methodology (phase two). At the end of phase two, the educators had to present an activity to a group of children. From this group of twenty candidates, eight were selected to be hired. Those participants chose their area (library, arts, music, and so on). For the third phase of training, educators participated in another set of modules were specific to each area (i.e. library, arts, toy room, etc.).

**Methodology Workshops**

CCCria’s pool of potential educators participated in four learning modules: methodology, child development, citizenship, and reading/writing. In addition, an important part of the training was fieldtrips to cultural centers in Rio, encouraging the candidates to become involved with art and culture. Many of them weren’t familiar with museums, libraries or other cultural spaces outside the community. Once they had gone
through each module, in order to graduate to the next phase, each candidate had to prepare and perform an activity for the children at a local daycare center.

In this design, the conception of constructivism was clearly present. The training was based on the idea that participants built knowledge by using the information he or she brought from previous experiences, confronting it with new knowledge, and revising and transforming him or herself in the process. The underlying concept was that the candidates, as learners, needed to be "the subject of construction and reconstruction of the knowledge taught, alongside the educator, also a subject of the process" (Freire, 1996, p. 29). In addition, Freire (1996) presented the educator as “a responsible ‘adventurer’, predisposed to change, to accept the different” (p. 55). He stated that this should be the starting point of any educational process – the knowledge of each one as unfinished and aware of his or her own condition of unfinished beings. In her interview, Malu referred to “an opening to learning” that she saw in some candidates, a desire to be different, to change as they learned.

The last part of this phase was to have educators plan and lead an activity with young children at the Patinho Feliz Daycare. After having studied and discussed these new concepts, it was time to demonstrate knowledge, and show their understanding and interpretation of the concepts presented during the first phase of the training. Once more, the assumption was that knowledge is not transferred, but created or constructed (Freire, 1999) and does not exist as abstract ideas disconnected from praxis.

At the end of this phase, the results were communicated to the 20 candidates and the first group of eight cultural educators was chosen. At this point, the educators had to
make a choice about in what area of the Center they were going to work. Some had more
ability or experience with one or another area. But for all the educators, it opened the
possibility of changing areas, embracing something different.

Analysis

From the four above mentioned modules, I will discuss two that were more
closely related to the research questions, and therefore more important to analyze –
methodology and citizenship – the heart of what the CECIP, CEACA-Vila and CCCria
teams called “the CCCria Protagonism Methodology.”

The methodology module. The methodology created for the Cultural Center had
elements brought from CECIP’s significant experience with daycare centers, mixed with
elements grounded in its core principles, as the idea of the educator as a facilitator,
borrowing the concept from the work of Freire (1996). Following Freire’s ideas, the
information is not passed in a “banking” fashion, but presented to the participants in
workshop format, giving them the opportunity to interact, reflect and make it their own.
Once more, the constructivist concept is the backbone of the training and of the work to
be done with the children, later. Internal CECIP documents¹¹ about the training reported
“…the professionals [CCCria educators] selected would act as facilitators, which means
give the children the opportunity to construct their knowledge, having as a reference the
culture of play” (cultura lúdica). By using this methodology during the training, CECIP
set the stage for educators to behave the same way with the children. This module was of
fundamental importance regarding information, concepts, and the possibility of

¹¹ Internal document – Seleção dos educadores2.doc
experimenting with new professional behaviors. The CECIP internal document recording the selection process stated the principles that guided this module:

- Cultivate cultural manifestations and value national culture
- Believe in the ability to learn
- Encourage creativity
- Believe in children’s protagonism
- Commit to and promote community involvement
- Value the ability to observe, listen and ask questions
- Value cultural diversity
- Put into practice the collaborative norms
- Promote integrated and integral education
- Deal with feelings and emotions in a climate of happiness and trust
- Believe in continuous improvement at the personal, team and Center’s levels

Within this methodology, specific to the CCCria Project was the notion of autonomy. The source of this concept was clearly anchored in Piaget and Kamii’s work. Malu’s account of the difficulty educators had expressing themselves autonomously provided an excellent example of the challenge presented by Kamii (1994): To work with children’s autonomy, the educators need to work on developing their own autonomy first.

As Malu said, members of the team had a hard time expressing themselves, taking a stand and presenting arguments to defend their position, express ideas, or make a critical

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12 Internal document – Seleção dos educadores2.doc
appraisal about a piece of art, an image, or a TV commercial. The training helped them develop those skills.

*The citizenship module.* In this module, the training focused on discussing the citizenship theme on the perspective of the rights and duties of the child. The candidates expressed the different meanings and individual conceptions of citizenship they had and constructed a common collective concept. The material used to support the discussion was the “Statute of the Future” – produced by CECIP, where the Statute of the Child and the Adolescent (ECA) was discussed in detail.

The CECIP team believed it was especially important to connect each right contained in the ECA with the work the candidates were applying for at CCCria. The ECA (1990) affirmed in Title I, Article 4, that it is the duty of family, community, society in general and the government to ensure the implementation of the rights to life, health, nutrition, education, sports, leisure, professional training, culture, dignity, respect, freedom and family and community interaction. The candidates read and discussed what these rights meant, and how they would translate these rights into practice.

The CECIP team found other aspects of the ECA relevant to the development of the work at CCCria. Article 58 states that in its educational process the child’s cultural background must be respected, and that creative freedom and access to cultural sources must be assured. Article 71 guarantees the children’s right to information, culture, leisure, sports, fun, shows, products and services that consider their characteristics as people in developmental stage. In addition, the ECA Law uses expressions easily connected to the idea of protagonism, such as autonomy and respect for the children’s voices and ideas.
CECIP included the discussion of the legal framework in which CCCria would be operating to help educators make the connection between the work they would be doing when interacting and taking care of the children, and the application of the law. CECIP seemed to give special weight in helping educators understand their role as children’s right promoters, implementing a policy directed to protect children. Also important was to assist them in perceiving their work as influencing the reality in a bigger picture. It also grounded their work in a legal framework created to protect children and advance their participation. An internal document recording the training reported: “This helped us discuss how to apply this law on our daily practice.”

**Area-Specific Skills Workshops**

Once the CECIP team had selected the final pool of eight educators, the educators chose focus areas for their work at CCCria. Then they began the last phase of training, with modules designed according to the contents needed in each area, for example, children’s literature, arts, and the culture of play. CECIP organized visits to educational play rooms, libraries, and cultural centers to enrich the educators’ repertoire. Those who went on these visits were given an observation guide to record their impressions and what they had learned from each fieldtrip. Educators’ accounts of this training process made clear that most had little knowledge about the work in which they were engaging. As they were setting up their rooms they were learning the new job and thinking about how to implement the fresh information together with an innovative way to relate with children.

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13 CECIP – Internal Activity Report, August - December 2006
The Turnover Challenge

Despite all the effort and attention to details involved in selecting and training, very few of these educators stayed at the CCCria. At the time of this study, only Chloe, the library educator, remained from the original team, and since then, she has left as well. The reasons varied – as Josephine reported:

For us, at first, the more important criteria was to live in the community. We wanted to value the talents of that community. But it didn’t happen. CEACA-Vila didn’t…couldn’t really recruit people from the community and that brought several problems… Another important thing was the educational background. They had to have at least a high school diploma, but not necessarily the Normal. They could have other types of secondary degrees, but they needed to be interested in culture, be creative, and that is what we looked at during the selective process… There were twenty people and we needed eight – there was a knot in that selection. We had six educators, two per room (art, library, and play room), one director, and one support staff. The pairs were formed, but right from the start we noticed that something wasn’t right. There was one that had lived in the community, but wasn’t living there anymore, and lived in São Gonçalo. He had given the previous address. Others we felt had serious relationship issues. So a few things did not work when we started the practice. The coordinator didn’t work out, the secretary didn’t work out. In the first days after opening we noticed some things that

14 Normal: traditionally, a secondary level course in pedagogy, to train pre-school teachers. The legal requirements to teach now include a complementary course at the university in early childhood education, and a full degree in pedagogy to teach older children.

15 Municipality about 60 km from the Morro dos Macacos, on the other side of the Guanabara Bay.
were happening... Some people quit because they couldn’t stand the activity in the room, they couldn’t deal with the children... so people started to be replaced by some that had participated in the selection process, others joined in, and the profile started to change. Belonging to the community was still very important, but now we thought that having the Normal was important. At first, we thought that we didn’t want these educators to be contaminated by this thing of being a teacher, bringing with them their traditional classroom mentality; we wanted to get away from this. However, we saw that the educational background was important, having some didactics, knowing how to relate with a group of children. So we added that criteria – to have a Normal or a pedagogy degree. Not that all of them have that degree, but we saw that this gave them more confidence to do their job, to be in the rooms.

Josephine referred to the fear of reproducing of an authoritarian relationship established between the adult/educator who commands and the children who obey. To deconstruct this model, CECIP team thought that having a staff with alternative backgrounds would help. Freire had the same line of thought when inviting students and not seasoned teachers to organize the circles of culture. He knew that in order to establish a horizontal dialogue, he needed someone: “who knows that the dialogue is the essential condition of his task, one of coordination, never influencing or imposing” (Freire, 1976, p. 5).

Josephine gave an example of when the diploma didn’t make a difference:

[We were looking for professionals] that knew how to relate with the children in a positive way. From our part there was this new methodology, which we were working
with them there, but some basics were needed. For example, we got a young man, he was, I think, eighteen years old. He was great! Never had had any experience with kids. Never! We had chosen him to work with arts – he had said he had an uncle who had an art studio, and that he liked to work with arts with his uncle. He was great with kids. We could help with things he didn’t know, but he had an aptitude, he had that spirit of letting the children create, and support them, the product that they were creating, he gave them tips, and he was great. And he had never entered a classroom with children. So that was a good experience – but what happened? He was eighteen, and had to enlist for the Army, and then study for the university entrance exam, plus he was a Kung Fu master, so... he had to make some choices and he ended up leaving. But he stayed for some time, and he was a man [most educators were women], very nice with everyone, and the kids were very motivated to work on the art room, to work with him.

In the above passage, Josephine touched a subject that appears many times, although never stated clearly: the need of positive role models, especially for boys. The father figure is often not present in the children’s lives, and the models they see in the community are exactly the ones of which the families are afraid. During the first year, the art, music, and dance teachers were all male; however, this profile changed very quickly. By the time I started my study, the dance teacher had left to be part of a dance company that traveled abroad. He was later replaced by a female dance teacher. The art teachers were also both females. Only the music teacher was male.

Malu reflected on the turnover aspect as well. She could not point out one specific characteristic that people who left immediately or stayed had in common. She said:
Nothing to do with age, gender, or educational background, although, I might have a strong bias there. In my opinion, the person who stood up more and stayed longer with us, since the first day until almost a year later was a teacher. She had the background and professional identity of a teacher. But a teacher so open and full of desire to learn, to have new experiences, to be critical of her actions as a teacher, she was restless regarding her professional routine, therefore she was ready to absorb novelty. She had never worked in a more progressive school, or dealt with protagonism, never had even heard of it, but she was ripe, ready, and she opened herself completely...

The high turnover rate and the consequent endless recruiting and training processes were still issues at the time of my research. Team members learned the methodology and grew professionally, yet left suddenly for different reasons. Finding and training an adequate substitute has been a constant challenge for CEACA-Vila and for CCCria.

Malu has been involved in organizations that work in communities for many years. She reflected the criterion of working with people from within the community:

This is a polemic issue that haunts people who work in communities. There are moments that you say, yes, the best way is to work with people who are from the community. And there are moments than you say it’s best to work with outsiders. Why? Because sometimes the fact that you are from the community involves some situations where, from one day to the next, you lose a professional because someone decides that this person can no longer enter the community. This happened with us at the CCCria more than once, with educators, with the handyman. Because you know, the community
Some people did leave because they got better opportunities elsewhere. Chloe, for example, the only one from the original team that participated on the initial training and was still there when I started my research, left less than a year later. The reason for her leaving the Center was that she had passed a test to become a public servant, and went to work as an educator in a public daycare with a better salary, benefits and a career plan including a retirement pension. She had been a reference for the rest of the team. Whenever someone wasn’t sure about an attitude, or how to handle a situation, she was the one they would go to for advice even more than to the Center’s coordinator. The educators recognized that she had the knowledge from the first training putting those principles into practice, and the experience of being in the room with the kids. She also had years of reflecting on and questioning her own and others’ professional attitudes. Her leaving was a loss, sadly felt by the team. However, not long after she left, she recommended her younger sister to fill an opening at the toy room. She came having already being prepared by Chloe and was one of the very few that had heard of children protagonism and came searching for that approach.

Josephine and by Malu mentioned another aspect inherent to working in this community that affected the rate of staff turnover. Malu said:

It is part of life in a community. Some left because they couldn’t handle the drug traffic wars in the community – there was once a teretê (imitating gunshots) and the
person got so tense that she said no, that’s too much for me, I won’t be able to handle this.

Josephine added:

It is dangerous, I mean, there is a risk involved, so there are people who live in the vicinity and enter the community well, and others that, after some time, grow tired of it. So we have to deal with these surprises, this team that has to be renewed constantly. That is a worry we have, now that it is the last year of the project, of how to consolidate a methodology in a team that we know won’t be there forever.

The CECIP annual report (2007) indicated that, after nine months, only two educators from the original team of eight stayed at the Cultural Center – and the ones who stayed gave their full support to the newcomers. CECIP’s team had to create strategies to deal with this turnover rate. I did observe this constant turnover during the two years I was there - although not at such a fast pace. During the second and third year, the team reached more stability. The way to minimize the impact that this turnover had on the project and its innovative methodology was, according to the report, to keep up the already implemented systematic follow-up sessions, observing the educators during the time they were working with the children, and reflecting later on their practice.

Professional Development

After selecting the team, and providing an initial training, CECIP implemented a coaching strategy to implement the new concepts. During the first year, sometimes as often as three times a week, according to Luciana’s interview, one member of CECIP team would stay in the activity room with the educator, observing him or her, both in
terms of the interactions and planned activities. After the observation, they would engage
in a professional dialogue, where they could discuss what happened, reflect on the
behavior in terms of stimulating the children’s autonomy and protagonism, and then
create different responses, or reinforcing the adequate attitudes. During the second and
third year these sessions became less frequent, happening every two weeks or at the
coordinator’s request.

In addition, once a month the children were dismissed for a day and the
“actualization sessions” were held, where CECIP (at first) designed training sessions to
bring new information on child development, children’s protagonism, conflict resolution,
and other relevant themes. They organized learning situations where educators could
reflect on their practice, discuss attitudes, and create common strategies to deal with
common problems. CECIP always considered that:

…it is an institution where children[’s] protagonism should be the first priority.
This should guide the attitudes of the educator facing the children’s demands,
determining what the limits are, and while encouraging them to improve their work,
always respecting the creative process. (CECIP, 2007, p. 4).

The design of the meetings followed a pattern. First the staff and whatever
consultants had been invited to address a specific issue had breakfast together. The group
then gathered in a circle where the members of the CECIP team who had organized the
meeting read the objectives and activities for the morning. The first activity was called
“body-and-mind”– some activity that would have to do with the day’s theme, but that
would stimulate other intelligences, more than just verbal linguistic, as a sort of warm up
activity. Then the participants had about one hour to share news and issues about what they did the past month, what the children’s reaction was, and what they were planning for the next month. This was the time they shared concerns, conflicts, and how to handle the situations that had arisen previously.

They then had an activity related to a chosen theme and objective. The choice of the theme was done in several ways. Sometimes it addressed a need perceived by CECIP team. Sometimes it came from the educators, something they wanted to discuss or wanted more information about. Whatever the theme, it was usually experiential and achieved through activities. Some information was presented through a text or a video and the team was invited to process the information in pairs. Each educator usually paired up with the educator who facilitated learning in the same room on the opposite shift (morning or afternoon). They would work in small groups also. These rich discussions were related to how participants would use this new information in their day-to-day activities and how it fit with the methodology.

Sometimes the discussions addressed difficult issues, especially when it became clear that the way the educators were thinking of applying the information was not aligned with the methodology. It was clearly an opportunity to refocus the program. The educators took advantage of this time and opportunity to express their difficulties and get feedback from the support team and from the other educators. The learning activity and discussion were followed by a brief evaluation, then lunch. The afternoon was dedicated to planning and organizing materials and/or going on a cultural field trip. When I analyzed these field trips, promoted as part of the actualization session, and often as a
preparation for future fieldtrips with the children, I saw their importance on three dimensions. First, it made the educators aware of cultural goods available in their city. Although the places visited were often free of charge, educators were not aware of these places, felt intimidated by them, or did not have these sites as part of their cultural repertoire. The group visits allowed for comments and a collective reflection on the experience. In their interviews, some of them said that after having been in one of these places with the group, they took their families or made it a habit to go by themselves.

Second, these visits enriched the work the educators were developing with the children. The reality of the educators and children served as the basis for knowledge construction. The process of designing new activities came from this reality, enriched by new experiences and the reflection upon these experiences. An example was the children’s use of techniques in art that educators saw in a museum. They used these techniques in their work, showing their understanding of the tool, and assimilation into their repertoire.

Finally, it opened the dimension of the city as a pedagogical instrument where educators and children learned from the interactions with new contexts and diverse groups of people. I observed one visit to an art museum in which the children went into the bathroom and found it different than what they had seen before. The water would come magically out of the faucet, and they investigated the place to find out how it worked. The hot air machine substituting for a towel also raised interest and questions. Those moments were all part of the experience, and all processed by children and adults. The space was educational when it was made the object of questioning and reflection.
The city offered opportunities to children and educators that transformed them and transformed the city itself – or, as Freire said: “as educator, the City is also a learner” (Freire, 2001, p. 13). Through these fieldtrips, the educators were encouraged to read the world by experiencing it first hand, processing it through group discussion, and then reinterpret it in their practice with the children.

Educational Strategies

In the first part of this section, I will describe the relationships I observed between the educators and the children, which illustrate how the methodology became a core value of CCCria. Following that, I will highlight a few specific strategies that relate to the research questions. These strategies include those designed to (a) involve the children’s families, (b) promote autonomy, and (c) promote participation.

Caring Relationships Set the Tone

An aspect that I found very present in my observations and the stories told to me was the special caring relationship the staff established with the children. The educators’ concern with the child’s wellbeing goes beyond what happens in the room. There were many accounts of educators who listened to the children and heard their stories, often unpleasant, of things that were happening at home or in the community. The adults were attentive to the children’s needs. For example, I saw a child having breakfast one day, which is not usual. I was told that the child complained of a headache. The educator knew the family was going through a rough patch and deduced that the child probably got to the CCCria without any breakfast. The child was kindly and discreetly invited to the kitchen to get something to eat. I also saw occasions when a child was acting out and the
coordinator engaged him or her in a conversation, putting the child in her lap, giving her time, affection, and the opportunity to cool down. The child would open up and tell the educator what was going on.

In response to that special relationship, the children choose the room as much for the activity proposed as for the educator and their feelings toward him or her. This might be part of what Dona Anastacia calls in her interview to CECIP recorded in July 2010 16, “the knowledge of the community,” that these community educators bring to the mix. They understand what the children are going through, they worry about them, and children seem to recognize that. They speak the same language, they use expressions that are very “close to home” for the children.

This new methodology affected educators in their professional lives. Luciana, Erica and Chloe said that after working with this methodology, they couldn’t help but use at least some elements of it even in the traditional school settings where they work part-time. Another consequence of the discussions and studies done during the monthly workshops was that many educators decided to go back to school to get a degree. During the course of my study, two of them passed the entrance exams to the university, enrolled in the program of their choice, and were working on a bachelor’s degree.

The bond created between children and educators also affected the educators’ lives outside CCCria. Bernardo, for example, who lives in the community, said that his work at CCCria changed the way he is seen in the community. Children recognize him in the streets, run to give him hugs and talk to him, and introduce him proudly to their

16 CECIP Video report to the Bernard van Leer Foundation – December 2010
relatives and friends. Chloe said she became a reference among parents in her son’s school in matters of non-violent conflict resolution. The bond with children at CCCria also changed the way they treated and raised their own children. Many of the educators I interviewed told me stories of how their behavior changed completely after working at CCCria, how it would be contradictory for them to listen to children at work and not do it with their own children.

The affection and joy I observed in relationships in the Center were part of the educators’ understanding of their role as professionals, including caring and educating as an integral part of their work. This affection and joy, allied to seriousness in the application of the methodology in the educational practice is highlighted by Freire (1996):

We must, moreover, insist again that people do not think that the educational practice, lived with joy and affection, forgoes serious scientific training and political clarity of educators. Educational practice is everything: warmth, joy, ability scientific, technical field service to change... (p. 161).

This seemed to be confirmed by the climate educators created where joy and affection were combined with serious investments in learning and applying a new methodology, together with clarity of what they desire to achieve for the children through their work. As said Freire (1996), “The joy is not only present when reaching results, but also in the process of getting to them” (p.160).

Involving the Children’s Families: The Fun Saturdays

One Saturday every two months, the children’s families were invited to spend the
morning at CCCria, from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m., for events called Fun Saturdays. The main objectives of these meetings were to "strengthen the links between CCCria team and the community, encourage children’s self-esteem through the interaction between them and their families, and publicize the actions taken" (CECIP, 2009, p. 61). On these occasions, the families had the opportunity to experience CCCria guided by their children. Josephine said, “It's always a moment of joy when a father or a mother discovers how much her child is already capable of doing and are guided by them.”

Some Fun Saturdays were on an open house format, where children would take their parents around, as they would do on a normal day, changing rooms and playing with them. The computer room was one of the places often visited, and children enjoyed showing their parents the skills they learned. Some parents or grandparents never had contact with computers and expressed their amazement to see how these very young children skillfully navigated the technology. Some parents got so engrossed in an activity, in the art room, for example, that they lost their children who changed rooms or went outside to play ball. The parents enjoyed drawing or building with recycled materials while talking to other parents and educators.

Some Fun Saturdays were organized so the children would perform for their parents. On the week prior to the event, children rehearsed choreographies and plays to present; each room was involved in preparing something special. The children presented performances in music, dance, storytelling, and power point presentations made by them. The art room participated in decorating the space, making costumes and building and decorating musical instruments. The play room typically invited parents to participate in
a traditional game (for example, musical chairs), which some parents would recognize from their childhood. The children explained the games – sometimes with updated rules. No matter what the day’s activities, around 11 a.m. a snack was served to parents and children. Then they started leaving to attend to their household needs.

Luciana (toy room educator), in her interview, reflected on the importance of these events:

*I think the mothers are coming more, are participating more, and we see that it is not only the mothers. It's the mothers, the fathers, an aunt or a grandmother; I've even seen older sisters attending. So I think that the children themselves are making sure that some family member is coming to see the inside of the Cultural Center, and I think this is very important.*

These events made it possible to include the parents and community members in what the children experienced during the week. It increased their knowledge of what the children were doing and allowed parents to value the children’s skills. Relationships between parents and educators were also established

*Promoting Autonomy: Tags and Windows*

As discussed above, the CCCria was planned to give children the opportunity to make choices autonomously and to participate in decisions affecting them. Josephine and Malu also wanted the center to be a place where children could have new experiences. Playing and having fun would enrich their lives and the children could learn while in an environment different from the school environment.

When thinking about how to make this work, they had long discussions about
how the Center would function. For example, they discussed on whether or not to have a bell to mark the time children were supposed to switch rooms. They decided that at the Center, children would not change rooms answering to a bell, but stay in the rooms for as long as they wanted. With the exception of the computer room, children would come and go as they pleased according to their interest.

Each room had a glass window on the door, at children’s height, to allow them to see what was happening inside. For each room, there was a board where small acrylic colored tags hung. The number of tags corresponded to the spots available in the room. Children learned during their first days at CCCria that if there was a tag on the board, the child could take the tag, go inside, place the tag in the bucket they found there, and stay for as long as he or she wished. When they left the room, the children were supposed to get a tag from the bucket, and place it back on the outside board to allow another child to get in. The tags were a mechanism to avoid overcrowding the rooms and promote the children’s autonomy and responsibility. The adult didn’t need to be involved in regulating who came in and who went out of the room.

In my observation on February 11, 2008, I made the following entry:

Children are using the colored tags that determine the number of vacancies in each room. All the kids I saw entering the room were holding a tag and putting it inside a basket. On the other hand, I saw a few children running out of the room and forgetting to pick up the tag on the basket and put it back in place.

I also saw children negotiating and showing their understanding of the use of the tag. On one occasion, for example, little Silvia was leaving the art room to give some
artwork she made as a gift to the dance teacher. She stopped close to the bucket, as if she was thinking of getting a tag and putting the tag out on the board, but since she was planning to come back immediately, she decided not to vacate her spot.

During the two years I did my data collection, I saw days where the tags seemed to be forgotten, especially when the Center had very few children attending, like rainy mornings, for example. On those days, it seemed that children didn’t feel the need to use the tags, and unless reminded by the educators, wouldn’t use them at all. However, when the room was busy, sometimes the educator would count the children and check the basket, and sometimes rearrange some tags on the board. This was the object of discussion in one of the monthly actualization sessions: if the idea was to avoid overcrowding and there were only five children in the room, why would the children use the tags? Weren’t they showing their understanding of the tag system by not using them when not needed?

In my observations, I saw children who would stay for a few minutes and some who stayed in a room for the whole morning or afternoon. They would stay longer either because they were involved in an activity that captivated their interest, they were accompanying friends, or they were in a special relationship with the educator.

I saw, many times, especially in the art room, children that were concentrating on their work, even in a noisy and busy environment. Very often, children would work and talk or sing as they were drawing or using the computers. There was no expectation of silence or quiet behavior in any room.

I also observed children who favored certain activities and would often go to the
same rooms. Mia, for example, would always choose the dance room on the days the
dance teacher was there, and have a different routine on the other days. This is how she
explained it in her interview:

I: So, you arrive at the Cultural Center, you pick up your badge, then how do you
decide where do you go?
Mia: I go to the book room, then I read two books, then I leave. I go to the computer
room, the art room, and here I draw... When Aunt Teresa is here, I stay here with Aunt
Teresa, dancing.
I: when she's not there, where do you go? To the English room?
Mia: Oh, yeah, when Aunt Teresa's not here ... then I decide if I'm going to the book
room, or go to English class.

The autonomy children have in changing rooms is a challenge for the educators.
No educator wants to run an empty room; therefore, their room has to be interesting to
retain the children. The library (often called by the children the “books room”), for
example, wasn’t popular at first. The children were not very familiar with books, and
thought books were only for children who could actually read. Chloe told me about this
process:

And at first I thought well, a library! Children will not want to stay in a library.
Children do not want to read, or to listen to storytelling. It is very difficult; they don’t
want to stop for a minute, even. Children are very active. They want to move all the time.
I figured they were not going to care about the library (laughs). So to my surprise, they
would come up there, come to the door, look inside and say, “here is the book room” —
and leave. And many would say, "I cannot read!" Many children did not come here because they could not read. And I said to my partner, Joana, we have to come up with something, because children do not enter here because they cannot read. And there were 10-year-old children who could not read, 11-year-olds who could not read. I said if they cannot read, they will not be interested in coming back here. Then we started rocking the boat. Every time I saw someone who said he could not read, I would answer: "Oh, but there is an amazing magical book here for children that cannot read." Then the child came in and I presented the picture book, which for me was a great wealth, this picture book. For the child who says he cannot read, as soon as he opens the book and sees a lot of little letters, he closes it, and never gives it a second shot. Today they open the book and don’t get held back by not knowing the little letters, they know you can tell the story that you make up in your head.

In her interview, Chloe argued that the children have no access to books outside school and haven’t had many pleasant experiences with them there either. Many of them struggle to learn to read and write. As the educator responsible for the library, Chloe took it upon herself to make the book room interesting, possibly because of her sense of mission, of working at CCCria not only as a job but as a way of doing something special for the children of the community. She planned storytelling time, puppet shows, prepared drama activities with books and then went room by room inviting the children to participate. As a result, she made the book room a very lively and interesting place to be.

Heather talked in her interview about a new educator who was surprised when suddenly all the children ran out of her room in a hurry. She thought it was snack time,
but they simply had enough of that room or maybe someone had come to announce that something exciting was happening in another room. She said:

_The truth is that they [children] actually lead the action. That’s what we see here all the time, hence her question: “Wow, everyone left and now what do I do?” What can I propose in my room? But a moment later a child will come, then another, this is something very dynamic, and this process is scary sometimes. Because sometimes they find themselves well, “Wow? Where did they go? They disappeared!” And suddenly the room is packed again! And sometimes she’s proposing an activity and half of them are interested, and the other half are not, but they still stay in the room, using other resources. That, at first time can be scary indeed for the educators. She needs time to understand the dynamics, you know, because, she says, ah! Everyone left and now what?! They feel frustrated: "Ah, look here, I got everything ready, and I couldn’t do what I had planned." Over time they will see that they may offer linking opportunities to them. They might be doing something that often began and stopped there. It stopped? That’s it, it’s done? Then suddenly an idea comes from the game, which already becomes something else. The professional has to stay very open to everything._

*Promoting Participation: Assemblies*

Participation was a key concept in CCCria’s methodology. In addition to encouraging participation in all rooms and stimulating educators to listen to the children, CCCria used the assemblies as an instrument to foster participation. The assemblies were inspired by the model of assemblies held by unions, adapted to children 4 to 11 years old, the CCCria age group. The assemblies were a gathering of children and adults, where
issues affecting everyone would be discussed, as a town hall meeting would be, and
where decisions were made to address those issues. Someone presented the issues – a
child or an adult – and everyone was encouraged to express their opinion. The idea was
that the children would learn to use the assemblies as a way to organize their demands,
discussed them collectively, and arrive at solutions.

According to CECIP team, attending the assembly was strongly encouraged, if
not obligatory, initially. This meant that the children were invited to gather all together,
once a week, to experience participating in an assembly as a way of learning what
assemblies were about. However, after a few assemblies, it became tiring and children
weren’t interested anymore. Participation was encouraged, children were invited, but they
could choose not to attend, which the majority did. This was a clear sign that children’s
choice was being respected by adults, and that children expressed and lived their
protagonism by making these choices. The assemblies became sparse, happening when
needed, i.e. when an issue bothering either children or adults had arisen, i.e., something
that wasn’t working well and had to be brought to the table and decisions made. The fact
that neither the children nor the educators were familiar with the concept or procedures of
an assembly presented a challenge. Participation in assemblies was not part of the culture
of that community.

As said Heather:

_We have seen the assembly becoming progressively more child-led, where we do
not put much of our finger in, and we have explained to them what the assembly was –
because the model of assembly we used at the beginning wasn’t good, I didn’t like it, so it_
lingered on, because we had not yet discovered a good way to do it, you know. Then Antonina [consultant from a partner organization] brought an idea she saw at that school in São Paulo, that was very interesting, and then we've organized a small group that would talk to other children, and ask them what the issues they wanted to include in the assembly. And we already have them written on a piece of paper, and Daphne [secretary] will type it up. To my surprise, the first child who spoke asked to add to the list, not that it is the priority, but the first one who was asked by someone said: cleanliness. She worried about the cleanliness of the cultural center! Something else they said: toys. We think that the toy room is just so wonderful, a real treat, but [listening to them] we now realize that what’s inside [the toys] is already getting ... old, “played out”... not that exciting anymore. And there are many children asking for new things. It is a challenge all the time. I mean, we're realizing that the things we notice, they notice even more than we do, and that they are here to be heard.

I observed several assemblies at CCCria, mostly led by the educators, where some children participated. The children who chose to participate would listen to the issue, usually presented by an adult, and were eager to add information and give their opinion on how to solve it. Still, leading an assembly was not an easy task. For every assembly, at every training session, there were discussions among educators about how to improve on the next one. They were particularly interested in making it more child-led and increasing the number of children attending. For example, one assembly was held in the large space of the dance room where many chairs in the circle remained empty. The children were spread out and could not hear themselves properly. Some kids were running in and out of
the room creating a disturbance so the educators decided to move the next assembly to a smaller, more private room that was more conducive to the activity. If by any chance many children attended then they could go to a larger room. The use of the microphone, when meeting in the larger room, was also seen as essential to value each contribution, making sure everyone in the room was heard.

During a typical assembly, children took turns suggesting ways to fix the problems at hand, brought by either children or adults. Adults did take part in this discussion as well. I will give two examples to illustrate issues dealt with in assemblies – one brought by adults, and another by children.

In the first example, the educators observed that children were not treating others respectfully – the basic “please and thank you” rules were ignored. This was brought up by the adults in an assembly. There was a discussion between children and educators on why this was important, and which behaviors would be more suitable to foster friendship. It was decided that a campaign to remind everyone to be polite with each other was in order. The children in the art room made signs reminding people to say “good morning,” “please,” “thank you,” “I am sorry,” and “you are welcome” to each other.

In the second example, an issue was brought by the children regarding the excess fighting around soccer. Daily, after snack, children could choose to play outside and soccer was the favorite activity for boys. Since the space was limited, only six children could play at a time, and there needed to be a rotation among them. There were fights over the rules, each child bringing rules from different places they played. As a result, the fights often got physical and children got hurt. In this particular assembly, the room was
full of boys. Children who usually didn’t participate in assemblies were there to make sure they would agree with what was decided. They discussed, established the rules for soccer playing, and made a poster that stayed on the wall close to where they played, so they could refer to them in a moment of heated debate. In both cases, the impact of the decisions made and action taken on the behavior of all the CCCria community was strongly felt.

One format that seemed to work well was the mini assembly format, where an issue could be discussed in a smaller forum. For example, one day I observed a fight in the waiting line for the computer room. The coordinator called all the children involved to sit in a circle on the floor. She asked them how many spots there were in the computer room. They answered, counting the tags the coordinator was holding. Then she asked how many children were interested in going to the computer room at that moment. There were eight children more than the number of tags. The question she asked the children was, “How are we going to solve the problem in a fair way?” One of the solutions children came up with was to distribute the existing tags in a lottery, and then guarantee the eight extra children’s access the next day. Due to their greater experience, the adults often could see that certain solutions proposed by the children could potentially create more trouble in the future. Their role was to ask questions to help children realize the weak points and their consequences. While the solution the children found seemed fair to them, the adults could see that this would have a snowball effect and that this waiting list was going to be difficult to manage. The coordinator explained the possible flaws, and asked for new solutions.
In her interview, Josephina, who idealized the assemblies, shared that they still have a long way to go to become what the CCCria’s project intended. To that end, after each assembly, comments were made to help CCCria’s team reflect on how children could be in charge of organizing and taught to lead the procedures of the assembly. Nonetheless, assemblies have been an opportunity for children and adults to listen to each other and consider the other’s point of view. Once more, Freire’s dialogue was the basis to reach this understanding, based on valuing each person’s contribution.

The CCCria’s Rooms

The concept of children protagonism was created to be implemented by the educators in the activity rooms. In this section I will describe each room and how the routines and relationships were geared to foster the children’s autonomy and protagonism. CCCria was inaugurated in December 2006 with a computer room, a toy room, a library, an art room, and a video room that was also used on some days as a music room. The dance class was taught in the cafeteria with the tables put away. In March 2008, an ample space with mirrors on the walls was inaugurated as the dance room, built with the help of another partner, the Dynamo Institute. In 2009, the computer room was augmented and one other room built to be the English room. Another important partner called Future Kids – Education Planet, from São Paulo, engaged in the project. They took upon themselves to train the computer educators (and later the English educators) and helped remodel the room and find donations of new computers for the Center. A bathroom for boys, one for girls, and one for the staff, a small kitchen, and a small office completed the space.
Well-cared for, colorful, and full of materials as it was, the space was an important part of what made CCCria special. The castle-shape building and other architectural features emphasized that the space was clearly made for children and not just adapted to them. Furthermore, the children’s work was seen everywhere, on shelves, hanging from the ceiling, and on the walls.

The interactions in the rooms, however, are the focus of this section. As Holloway and Valentine indicate (cited in Hill, Davis, Prout, & Tisdall, 2004):

The use of “space” connotes not just a physical space, but a social space (combining social practices and relationships), a cultural space (where values, rights and cultures are created and changed), and a discursive space (where there is room for dialogue, confrontation, deliberation and critical thinking). The idea of children’s spaces fundamentally changes the conceived relationships between professionals and service users, adult responsibilities and children’s rights. Professionals are facilitators rather than technicians and both children and adults are co-constructors of knowledge and expertise. Participative relationships are thus fundamental to the idea of children’s spaces. It is important that adult thinking about children’s lives, needs and education embraces not only the spaces to be found in formal provision by adults, but also those territories and pathways claimed by children for their own purposes in myriad locations within the areas they inhabit and visit. (p. 84)

To give the reader a better understanding of how the rooms and interactions worked, I will present here an excerpt of observation sessions from each of the following spaces: the library, the computer room, the art room, and the educational toy room (for
the full version, see Appendix D). After each entry, I will highlight specific aspects related to CCCria’s methodology and the activities and interactions observed.

The Library (the books’ room)


The library was organized with two tables placed in the center of the room and, in a corner near the bookshelf the children had made a kind of hut, where one side is a puppet theater. Inside it stood Arianna, Wilson, and another girl. Roger was wearing a brown cloth tied in front and behind - like an apron. He enters and leaves the room several times.

At a table two children are looking at a picture book about the Araguaia region, with pictures of animals. They are very interested and want the educator to see it with them. Chloe is very helpful and not only looks at it, but talks with them. She asks if one of them will want to take care of animals someday. One boy says he likes the circus a lot and wants to be a circus performer when he grows up. She welcomes the news, and encourages him.

Arianna is back and into the corner of the theater. She talks with her two friends and calls the attention of the adults for the play that is about to start. "We have a play that is very beautiful. It is a play from the Cultural Centre," announces Arianna. She squeezes out of the small hut, and runs to the bookshelf, picks a storybook, and runs back. "It is Little Red Riding Hood," she announces from within. "Once upon a time, there was a Little Red Riding Hood."

The adults interact intensely with the children and help keep the interest focused
on the story being told. Arianna gives up one of the piggy puppets and decides to be the wolf, standing outside the hut. The trainee asks for the storybook, and begins to read to the children, as they dramatize with puppets – Arianna plays the part of the wolf, acting out her part enthusiastically. The trainee reads, skipping a few parts, and the children repeat exactly her words and play it out. When the wolf blows the first piglet’s house, Arianna jumps, shakes her braided hair full of tiny beads, blows hard on the hut.

They rushed back and already want to engage a third story, but Roger was waiting his turn to tell a story. There is a brief conflict there. Chloe intercedes in favor of Roger, who was waiting his turn. There is some resentment in the air, and Roger finally gives up on his turn and leaves the room.

A little girl pokes her head inside the room and announces that she is going to the dance room. We learn that they are going to have a dance performance - and that the performers are putting on makeup.

A child asks me if she can bring a pencil and paper from the art room to write here; Chloe says: “writing should be done in the art room, because otherwise the books end up scribbled on.” Even then, the child brings in paper and pencil. Chloe makes it clear, without raising her voice, very gently, that she cannot bring them in that room, and why.

The same group resumes their performance, starting over and telling the same story. This time Chloe is the one reading, and she reads the story with all the details, and

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In 2008, CEACA had to close a large project. Some female employees were pregnant, therefore could not be dismissed. For a few months, they worked at CCCria assisting the educators and learning with them.
kids seem to enjoy it thoroughly. In the end the “wolf” gets burned and runs to catch the “piglets” while the children loudly say all together: “And they lived happily ever after!”

As the rooms calms down a bit, Chloe tells me that Roger is pretending he is a nanny - hence the apron and feather duster he holds, which he has shown me several times and used around me. Arianna plays with him, and goes into his fantasy. Chloe closes the library’s door and the noise from outside lowers considerably.

Gustavo opens the library door, stops, and seems to appreciate the environment, as if deciding if he was going to stay there or not. He enters, sits and pays attention to what is going on. After a few minutes, he starts looking at the book about Araguaia. I start talking with him about the book, browsing the pages together. He looks and makes comments on each picture, especially those that have animals on them.

Laurence appears at the door. Snack time! Children and adults put the room in order and leave.

(End of the observation)

The diversity of activities and the dynamics of this room are portrayed in this observation. The texts and books are used in many ways. Some children read with the educator, learning information about fauna and flora of a region of Brazil. Then a classic text was chosen by the children – Little Red Riding Hood – and very young children “read” and interpreted the images in the book and make a play out of it. Then another classic was chosen – The Three Little Pigs – and they worked this text in three different manners – first. the children by themselves “read” the images and adapted the story. Then the educator read it, skipping parts, and the children repeated word for word in chorus
what was read by the educator while acting it out. Finally, the educator read the entire story, with all the details, and children acted it out, inventing dialogues to embellish the story.

The scenes I observed in the library sometimes included children looking at books by themselves, even when many other activities were happening at the same time. This showed a significant capacity of concentration. Sometimes children asked adults to sit by them as they read a story out loud, especially if reading was a skill they just developed.

During my observation sessions in the library the children led the action, proposing activities, organizing them spatially, and following through with their plans. Through this, they exemplified what the methodology proposed in terms of autonomy and participation. While children count on the adults in several capacities (in this scene only, we see the educator as audience, narrator, conflict manager, and norm reminder) they are showing how the partnership with the adult can be non-authoritative and educational, based on dialogue and respect.

One interesting detail that I witnessed many times was how children kept connecting everything that was going on at the Center and in the community. The children often poked their heads inside a room to see what was going on there, as if the door window wasn’t enough. Many times, they announced out loud either what was going on elsewhere and/or where they were going to next. This sometimes resulted in emptying a room instantly, which was a challenge for the educators.

The level of noise and activity didn’t look at all like typical libraries. It was a different kind of dynamic an observer might believe to be too busy and loud. In doing so,
the observed might fail to see that this truly respected the way these children behave when they are free from constraint. However, the level of noise and activity didn’t mean that there were no rules. While children were having fun, leading the action every step of the way, the role of the educator as supporting children’s action was quite evident. As the educator was interacting with the children, she set some limits. One example was the “no writing in the room” policy episode, where she reminded the child about the rule, then later enforced the rule, explaining the reason why the policy was needed. The child had a chance to dialogue about the rules, but it did not mean that she was allowed to disrespect them. The child expressed her frustration by rolling her eyes and deep sighing, but had to deal with her feelings. The educator also helped keep fairness in playing, when showing her support to the boy whose turn had come to perform. She kept them focused on activities aligned with the room’s main goal – working with texts.

Attitudes from the educator helped children gain autonomy while taking responsibility for keeping the space organized. One example in the observation above was when young Arianna saw the book on the floor and took it upon herself to grab it and put it back on the shelf (see unedited version of the observation on Appendix D). Before snack or before it is time to leave for home, the adult reminded children that it was time to help put everything back in its place, but I have observed even young children putting books away without any reminder.

The children’s protagonism was encouraged by the educators when they listened to their ideas and offered their assistance in putting it into practice, encouraging participation. Chloe tells a story about how a young boy interfered with how the library
was organized which illustrates well this interaction:

He always comes here; he makes a point of every day reading at least one book, if
not staying the whole afternoon reading books. That day, he asked: “Are there any new
books?” And I said: ”Yes, there are new books.” I brought all the new books for him to
see. He looked at them, one by one, opened, looked at the cover, the back of the cover,
who was the author, who was the editor, he observed everything. After a long time
looking, he said suddenly: “Hey, Chloe, we could set up a special place for new books.”
“Great idea,” I told him, “then where do you think it should be?” “There, I think.” So
we got the books there, and he stayed beside the shelf, and showed every kid who arrived
there, saying: “This shelf here is only for new books. Those books over there are the ones
we already know.” And he made a point of talking to the other children, you know, about
the arrangement he made.

In this story it can be seen that for the children to develop their protagonism, they
also depend on how the educators respond. Once the relationship with the adult was
established, the children knew they would be listened to, that their opinions would be
taken seriously to produce change. As a result, children more motivated to take initiatives
to contribute in improving their environment. Moreover, the educators’ supporting role
included being an attentive audience, which encouraged children to invest in their play,
their fantasy, and their creativity, while honestly having fun.

The Computer Room

Observation: March 7th, 2008 – morning. Educator Watson

At the entrance of the computer room the tags are being disputed. When the door
opens, children rush in. The chairs are arranged in a circle, and the children sit immediately.


Watson explains that they will first test the microphone, then he will go to every computer and help the pair of children there to save the message they want to send. The computers are turned on by the children. The pairs must negotiate who puts the headphones first. In some pairs this occurs smoothly, in others not so much. I see the kids trying out the microphones – the box on the computer screen shows the sound is not coming up right to everyone. Those who managed to make it work are having lots of fun. Some put the headphones on backwards and the microphone is pointed at the back of the neck, or is up in the air. They end up figuring it out and fixing the position of the headphone. I noticed several pairs in which one partner is helping the other to put on the headphones.

Pablo and his companion Gael are still disputing the headphone, and are unable to get a sound. Watson comes to help – the boys wait a little. The pairs seem to enjoy making the recording, both when seeing their partner recording, and then listening to the result. Watson is going from computer to computer. Once children are done with the recording activity, they can play on the computer. A couple of kids have opened a coloring game/program. A child leaves the room, his partner grabs the mouse, going on
“all programs” and finding the same coloring game the other two are using. Carlos leaves the room announcing: "I am going to the art room." Two girls are working together, although only one of them holds the mouse the entire time, they talk softly and consult with each other about what to do, where to click, etc.

(End of the observation)

As mentioned above, the computer room was the result of a partnership with a company called Future Kids. Their specialty was implementing the use of instructional technology in whole school systems, involving software, hardware, and teacher/leadership training. For over three years they invested in the Center. They trained the computer room educators using their own methodology and paid for their salaries. In 2009, at the children’s request, the teaching of English was added, and they trained and supported those educators as well.

To fit in with the Center, Future Kids had to face a challenge: adjust its school-g geared methodology to CCCria’s methodology. They made adjustments in the way they operated by adding elements that would encourage autonomy, protagonism, and children’s rights. One example was incorporating the tag system. An important difference between this room and the others at CCCria was that in the computer room there were slots of time that were pre-determined, and therefore a set time to get in and out. Children can leave the room earlier if they want to (another example of a change from the methodology Future Kids used in schools), but children were not allowed to come and go as they do in the other rooms. They could go out to drink some water or to use the restroom – in those cases they could return to the room. This shows that their needs were
considered, as well as their right to the chair they often had to invest time and strategic planning skills to obtain. The computer room was many children’s favorite place. To get a tag to get in the computer room was very challenging – there were only 12 tags per slot of time – usually one slot lasted from 45 minutes to an hour. Children sometimes skipped lunch, or had their meal in a hurry, or got out of bed half an hour before time to get to the center early enough to guarantee a tag for the computer room.

Even having made some changes to incorporate protagonism, the computer room always had a different dynamic compared to the other spaces. Another example of these differences was that the educators have a routine they had to follow and skills they had to teach, according to a planning document. The planning was done weekly, many times considering suggestions made by the children. The computer room educators also had separate sessions with a professional from the Future Kids headquarters, once a month, to supervise and provide professional development.

At the computer room, the daily activity with the children started with a meeting time in a circle, where the educator explained the learning objective of the day and presented the planned activity to the children, always asking for the children’s input. The role of the educator was to facilitate the discussion and get children excited about what they were going to learn. On the observation day described above, the skill they were learning was to use hardware (the headset) and software to record their voices. The software was very intuitive and the children only needed to play with it for a few minutes to find out how it worked. As I observed, they had already done some work with computer animation – since at least two kids worked on animation spontaneously without
any help from the educator. The voice recording device might have followed a similar procedure, because I didn’t see many of them having trouble with the technical aspect of it. When they had the headset backwards, for example, they weren’t corrected by the educator; instead, they were given time to figure out why it wasn’t recording, either by thinking about it, or by looking around to see what the others were doing. Learning by observing their peers was encouraged as a sign of cooperation.

The Future Kids’ methodology stimulated children to work in pairs, which involved learning how to share the equipment, share control, discuss ideas, consider the partner’s opinion, negotiate, and collaborate with each other. The theme (message to Rio de Janeiro) was chosen by the adults because it was the week that Rio de Janeiro’s discovery by the Portuguese was celebrated and all the rooms were connecting to the theme. Apparently the children were already fed up, and yet they accepted working some more on it, possibly because the skill they were learning was a fun one. I thought it was revealing that the first spontaneous answer to the educator’s question was about violence, and how the educator dodged the subject. Maybe because violence was present in their daily life, children often brought up the subject. It was not, however, a subject educators felt comfortable discussing. This was mentioned by educators in several interviews and professional development sessions.

Once they were done with the planned activity, children could play with the computer. On certain days they could use the Internet, go to websites and play games online. However, there was a strict policy against violent games and anything inappropriate for their age. On other days, they played with the more educational/creative
software programs that were installed in the computers.

The mix between the Future Kids methodology, more traditional and meant to be used in schools, and the CCCria methodology, which placed high value on making choice and protagonism, was an interesting one. Future Kids brought a structure that was slightly more rigid regarding time and routine, more similar to school in some respects. For example, all of the children were offered the same activity at the same time. However, the computer room also incorporated some aspects of CCCria methodology, allowing the children to make choices. Children could choose which games they played and for how long, teaching them skills and encouraging them to be as autonomous as possible. A child who left the room after five minutes was not considered to be misbehaving. The child just wasn’t interested and his or her decision was respected. Children could also stay in the room and not do the activity – they would do an alternative activity, for example, draw on the computer, waiting for the game time.

The Art Room


The CECIP team and I arrived early at the Cultural Center, giving a ride to Heather, CCCria coordinator, who we met as she was approaching the entrance of the community. On our way up we saw 6 years old Silvia, half-way down the hill. Heather says that she always goes down there to wait for her and accompany her up.

Silvia holds my hand, and we enter the CCCria, passing through the cafeteria, where some tables are occupied by boys playing dominoes. We arrive at the art room, where Silvia shows me the CCCria logo she made out of clay. I find Emilia there, sitting
at a table with Vitória and two other girls, working with recycled materials - transforming juice boxes (or milk cartons) into small handbags. Emilia is having trouble cutting the box. Vitória immediately picks up the box and cuts it for her. Vitória seems to know what to do next, the step by step procedure of making the handbag (cut, glue, make the holes, pass the wire, cover with paper, decorate), and she seems glad to help.

Josephine (CECIP’s coordinator) enters the room bringing a different type of paper, thick, suede-like and dark blue. She shows the educator, and asks how she would use this material. A few children volunteer to take a piece and begin to experiment drawing with pencils, crayons, to see what works best.

Vitória asks Renata, the educator, "Aunt, pass it through for me!" (Pass the wire into the hole. She had trouble doing it herself.) Renata suggests: "Ask a friend!" However the educator comes over and shows Vitória how to push the wire into the hole with the round tipped scissors. Vitória resumes her work with enthusiasm. She seems to enjoy doing it all by herself and feels quite competent.

The room is quiet, and I count 15 children divided in three tables. In the first table, children are using play dough, in the second table there is drawing material. The last table has recycled material, glue, pieces of fabric and other scraps. Children at each table seemed deeply involved in their activity. At the play dough table there is an ongoing dispute for the amount of dough each child has. They begin with the same amount, but each time a kid leaves the table, someone else takes the amount left on the table. Soon some children have big balls of play dough, while others have little. Carlos got a good amount of dough, and is quite happy (although he has to defend his dough from
“attacks” by other children). A child begins to pound loudly on his dough, hitting the table hard, but other kids ask him to stop the noise. Nine colored tags are hanging on the board, and 9 tags inside the bucket, possibly indicating that six children entered the room without using the tags.

Vitória shows me the handbag she made. I ask her if she enjoyed making it, and she says – “Yes, I’ll make another one." She goes to the educator and speaks with her. Soon she is back at the table and I see she is decorating the bag she had already made (perhaps at the educator’s suggestion). Emilia remains involved in the activity of bag making. Looking into the box full of recycled material where the children get what they need for the projects they are making, she has found an empty soap wrapper. She is enjoying its smell, and she puts it into one of the bags she made.

Seven-year-old Julia goes to the blackboard and writes the names Denzel, Jessica, and then tries to write hers - but the chalk gets too small. She asks the educator for another piece. She gives her a yellow chalk, but the quality of the blackboard (painted on the wall) is so bad that Julia barely managed to trace the letters. However, the names are all spelled correctly (even her brother’s name that has double letters). She seems proud to show me she knows how to write.

(End of the observation)

This observation record began before I reached the art room to give the reader an idea of the scenario. Going up to the community by car, the CECIP team and I met the coordinator, who told us about Silvia, six years old, who waits every day for her at the entrance of the community. Silvia showed both autonomy and affection toward her by
including in her daily routine meeting the coordinator halfway between the Center and the street, close to her aunt’s vending booth. Then the record showed the cafeteria where boys were playing dominoes. This indicated that the observation was done early in the day. The children picked up dominoes or board games and played in the cafeteria while the playroom educator was either on her way or organizing some activity in the room. Finally Silvia showed her artwork. She was proud of the things she made and proud to have her work displayed on the shelf.

The scene presented here illustrates the many possibilities in the art room on a given day. Free drawing was always offered. There were some craft activities, and usually children could ask for a magazine to cut out or for glue and recycled materials of all kinds, depending on availability. As in every room, the educators planned activities. These included skills or techniques they would like to show or materials for the children to explore. The children’s protagonism was seen once more in the choices the children could make and on the time they chose to spend on the activity. There were enough options so that when the educators’ planned activity did not appeal to the children they could still choose to stay in the art room. They may stay because they liked the educator or because they wanted to draw or build with recycled materials.

Some resources, however, were limited. For example, many children would like to use paint every day, but this is an expensive material, and, therefore, used in special occasions or projects. In my observations, this was the room where it was most difficult for the educators to fine tune their interactions with the children in order to promote their autonomy while respecting some boundaries. For a while, the children had free access to
the “materials cabinet” and attempts to regulate that access were seen by the educators and children as going against their protagonism. As a result, the room was often disorganized and the educators overwhelmed. As the educators reflected and understood better CCCria’s methodology and their role in it, some changes were made that allowed room for children to make choices and develop their creativity, while respecting material and organizational constraints.

Kids chose an activity or a project, and they might work independently in pairs or groups. They asked the educator for help when needed, and many times they got help from a peer. The role of the educator, as seen in their interactions, was to support what the children were doing, helping to get some materials or with a step that demanded some knowledge children hadn’t mastered yet, stimulating them to invest more on their productions. The play dough dispute didn’t go any further on that particular day, but helping resolving conflicts was definitely an area where educators were involved at the children’s request, and an area where they struggled.

The tag strategy was key to promoting the children’s autonomy, an important part of the CCCria methodology. The number of tags hanging on the door (and in the bucket) compared to the number of children in the room indicated that some children were not using the tags properly, and that the educators weren’t focusing on it either. As I saw in other observations, this happened often when there were a small number of children present at CCCria (usually the first shift, especially early morning, tended to have less children). My understanding was that children seemed to see that there was obviously room for them there, and the tags seemed somehow bureaucratic. Asking the children
about it, they said they sometimes forgot to use them. On occasions that the Center was at its full capacity, children and adults seemed to use the tag system as it helped to avoid overcrowding the rooms.

In this observation, children were quiet and busy perhaps because they were concentrating on what they were doing or because it was early morning and it felt more relaxed that way. There was no rule prohibiting talking or singing while working there. The room was often busy with children talking, laughing, singing, and clapping rhythms from samba to funk while working on their projects. On this day, however, when a child started pounding on the table, the noise bothered the others, and they asked him to stop. The level of noise was then self-regulated by the children.

The Educational Toy Room

September 22, 2008 – morning. Educator Erica

Rafaela and Lee play in the toy room with educator Erica. They are sitting in a small circle, on the floor, playing with a domino made out of wood, with painted animal figures. Pablo, six-year-old, and Daniel play with a big Lego boat.

Erica replaces the tags on the panel at the door. The tags had been removed by the children who left in a hurry on a field trip and didn’t put the tags back in place. I’m sitting at the table of the educator, as she sits back on the floor to play.

Rafaela seems very knowledgeable of the rule of dominoes. When she sees that Erica is in trouble (that she doesn’t have one specific domino) she tries to help, expanding the options, making sure not to deadlock the game. Rafaela is paying attention to the educator and seems happy to play in an ambience so calm. She is also enjoying the
attention she is getting from the educator, with this low adult-children ratio, very
uncommon in the toy room and in the CCCria as a whole. Lee wins the game, and they
start a new game.

Daniel and Pablo are still playing with the Lego, quietly, without fighting each
other. Each of them takes turn saying out loud what they are doing ("I’ll put this piece
here"). Pablo holds the Lego boat and adds to it while his friend builds a Lego house.

Carlos (Pablo’s four-year-old baby brother) enters the room, grabs a tag and
notices that it is chipped. He takes it to Erica and shows her. Then he puts the tag on the
basket and goes get another one at the door (as if the damaged one would not count).
Erica notices, and instructs the child to put the second tag back on the door.

Daniel and Pablo go play in the corner where other children have stretched a
cloth, making a tent big enough to fit them. Pablo pulls on the cloth, bringing the tent
down. He laughs at his mischief and goes back to the game of Lego. Erica draws my
attention to his behavior and tells me that he likes to spoil the fun of others. "He goes
there, and kicks their toys."

Daniel starts to put away the Legos. Pablo refuses to help, saying that his brother
Carlos wants to play with it. The educator asks him to help out, but Carlos shows interest
in playing with the Lego, and makes a gesture to Daniel to bring him the bucket he had
just put back on the shelf. He signals that he wants the boat and the bucket of Legos. The
educator encourages him to stand up, and go get what he wants. He gets up and takes it
from the shelf, brings it back to where Pablo was playing earlier, near the entrance door,
and starts playing by himself. Every now and then he says something out loud.
Pablo and Daniel now play with large race cars. They hold the cars with both hands and run behind them around the room, passing quite close to where the game of dominoes is still going on. The educator asks them to be mindful of their game. Carlos immediately says that he can move to the side to give room for his brother to play. He moves back, leaving a free "racetrack". Pablo puts the car back on the shelf, and sits on the circle where Erica and the other children play dominoes.

He comes in and says: "I want to be first, now it's my turn." The others look at him. Erica says: "You arrived last and want to be first? You have to be the last!" He answers: "But I don’t want to!" She reasons with him, and he ends up accepting the rule and participates well. As they play, Erica sings several songs in which children have to make movements according to the song, a bit like the songs for very young children, and he participates and makes the movements, fully integrated in the activity. I notice that Erica is directing her attention especially to him, encouraging him: "Come on, Pablo! Your turn! Go for it!" He responds well to her encouragement and at the end, helps putting away the game when asked by the educator.

While this is happening, on the opposite corner of the room, Carlos lost interest in the Lego. He puts it away and one of the children gets a puzzle from the shelf. Emma, Daniel, and Carlos sit in a circle on the floor. Initially, each child has a few pieces of the puzzle, and individually tries to fit them. They often force the cardboard pieces into a fit, between parts that do not fit properly. They seem to have no knowledge that they are composing a picture with all those pieces, (the traditional goal of a puzzle) and show no "puzzle strategy," for example, separating the pieces by color (blue for the sky, green for
the forest, etc.). The fun of the activity seems to be focusing on finding one piece that fits into the other (even if the child forces the pieces to make them fit). They ask me to help out, and might have not gotten to use the puzzle in the more traditional way if I was not involved. Emma is the first to realize we're doing something collectively, and helps pick up the pieces. I say that we need blue pieces with one flat side (for the top edge of the puzzle), and she takes care to finding some, looking into the pile of the other boys. They get interested in the quest as well. As we grow our puzzle, children become more and more excited. They ask for credit for the piece they did, "Auntie, it was me who made that piece there, right?" In the end, the puzzle is finished, and the kids are very happy. Daniel holds the mounted puzzle with both hands, lays it gently into the bottom of the box, and puts it away on the shelf. The children are called for a snack.

(End of observation).

The toy room was a place where children could wear costumes, play house, play school, board games, jump rope, play dolls, and unleash their imagination. The initial collection of toys was donated by a project called “Brinquedoteca Hapi” that was closing its doors when CCCria was opening theirs. The educators were trained by Cristina Porto, the Hapi coordinator, on topics ranging from how to catalogue the collection of toys to how to interact with the children in this environment. The dynamics presented in the observation above, where children got the toys and games they wanted from the shelves, played with them as long as they wanted, and then replaced them back onto the shelves (often with some nudging from the educator) was very typical of this room. Children interacted with other children, older and younger, and with the educator.
The room was set up to allow children to reach all the toys, to promote their autonomy, coherently with the CCCria methodology. The toys were on shelves, divided by type (board games, cards, Barbies, Legos, and so on). Children knew the rules of the room, for example, that they had to put away one toy or game before moving on to the next or to move to another room. The educator needed to be alert and help them remember this rule, often forgotten when a new and exciting game started someplace else. Children also learned they had to agree on some rules before starting any game, play by them, and be fair. This interaction with adults and peers, following rules they established together, helped them develop moral autonomy, as defined by Kamii (1994):

The exchange of viewpoints between adults and children fosters the development of autonomy by enabling the children to consider relevant factors, such as other perspectives. When children can take relevant factors into account, especially other people's rights and feelings, they construct from within the rule of treating others as they wish to be treated by them. (p. 674)

The different games going on at the same time, often interfering one with the other, was also very common and sometimes generated conflicts among the children. I witnessed occasions where the educator was asked by the children to mediate these conflicts. The educator always began by asking them what the rule was. Children usually were very sharp in telling the rule of whatever game it was, and, therefore, finding out who was not playing by them. The educator then would then work with them toward a solution for the conflict. Often there were children playing side by side, but concentrating on their own game, and children who browsed the room to see who was doing something
interesting they wanted to be a part of, and then negotiated their entrance in the middle of a game. Carlos’ attitude, when offering to move his Lego building activity to the side to leave room for his brother’s play, showed that while focused on his Lego game, he was also paying attention to other things going on in the room. It also showed initiative and solidarity towards other children.

The interaction between Pablo and the educator was revealing. He was a boy who had many family issues, and sometimes struggled with limits and rules. His behavior often got him in trouble, especially in school. The educator noticed his agitation as he browsed the room freely. She saw his mischief toward the children playing in the tent, but she didn’t interfere at that moment. Her comment to me showed her understanding that he might be trying to get attention from the adults. She gave him some pointers on how to behave. For example, she reminded him of the rules and asked him to put away the toys he played with or told him to be careful not to mess other people’s game. She welcomed him when he decided to sit in the domino circle where she was sitting, but she negotiated his entrance, showing how absurd it was for him to come in late and still demand to be first. Her support encouraged him to sit and participate well in the activity.

The scene of the puzzle building showed that toys are played in several ways, not only the way they were originally intended to be played. The educator often sat with the children and explained the rules of new board games. At their request, she would, for example, read the rules on the exterior of the box, even though they had been playing for some time and invented the rules and objectives themselves. Those rules and objectives made perfect sense to them. However, they also enjoyed interacting with an adult in a
playful situation, competing or teaming up and learning new ways of playing.

Negotiation, fairness, autonomy, initiative, solidarity, and responsibility regarding the common space were important methodology related skills and attitudes learned in this room, one of the most popular places at CCCria. In terms of developing their moral autonomy, the toy room encouraged the dialogue between children and adults, aiming to help the children make decisions and choices taking in account the rules they agreed upon as well as the feelings of others. In these interactions, the child built a sense of justice and fairness, making choices he or she could stand by, explaining why they were fair, not out of fear of being grounded or desire for reward. The decision came from a process of reflection, encouraged by the educator. Kamii (1996) stated:

According to Piaget, the child acquires knowledge in a way similar to the way a child acquires moral values: by constructing knowledge from within, rather than by internalizing knowledge directly from the environment. Children may accept what they are told for a time, but they are not passive vessels that merely hold what is poured into their heads. Children construct knowledge by creating and coordinating relationships. (p. 675)

Rooms Summary

The description of the spaces and reflections presented above are meant to portray how the methodology was put in practice by the educators. I chose examples to illustrate the methodological concepts. There were occasions where the interactions were not, in my opinion and understanding, the most adequate. Considering that the educator had to deal with conflicts and make decisions at a fast pace, it was understandable that some of
them reflect more of his or her previous ways to relate with children than to this new way. Therefore the fact that CECIP provided space and opportunities where adults could discuss their practices and establish a professional dialogue with peers and experts was crucial for supporting the ongoing effort of the Center.

*Challenges of Sustainability*

As I was progressing on my data collection work, I heard some concerns regarding the sustainability of the Center. What would happen at the end of the van Leer Foundation’s three-year grant was an object of frequent discussion. The challenges were two-fold. The first was to find funding to keep the CCCria running in terms of structure, paying the salaries, utilities, and maintenance of the space after the end of the van Leer Foundation grant. The second was to build structures that would allow CEACA-Vila to perpetuate the methodology, despite the high turnover rate of educators, considering the novelty and complexity of it. Those concerns were expressed by CEACA-Vila and from the CECIP team.

The financial aspect was a permanent concern, especially for a community not-for-profit organization such as CEACA-Vila. CEACA-Vila ran up to 10 projects. In several meetings I witnessed, I could see that the management team had more pressing issues with other projects which needed immediate financing. Part of the team worked tirelessly writing and negotiating projects to avoid interruptions and provide new and interesting opportunities for children and adolescents. However, Dona Anastacia, the community leader, and Vilma, the CEACA-Vila manager, stated publicly in meetings with the team that CEACA-Vila had been finding ways to keep the daycare open and
running for over thirty years, and they would take care of CCCria in the same way. The Foundation grant covered CCCria’s expenses until December 2009 in full, and partially covered expenses until July 2010; therefore, funding CCCria was not an urgent matter for them in 2008. CEACA-Vila searched for public funding but also sought to establish partnerships with foundations and other philanthropic organizations. In 2009, CEACA-Vila, on behalf of CCCria, applied for a Federal grant from the Ministry of Culture that benefits projects and institutions that promote culture. CCCria received the grant and, as a result, became a Ponto de Cultura. The grant included money to buy material and pay for some of the structure. Although not enough to sustain all the activities, it was an important step. Other projects were later added to this small grant.

As for CECIP, passing on the torch to CEACA-Vila in July 2010 was an aspect discussed very early on. The CECIP team involved with the CCCria project was always looking out for project or consortium opportunities where CCCria could be included and passed this information along to the CEACA-Vila. I saw initiatives from CECIP to point out opportunities, but it was clear that CEACA-Vila was making the decisions (as it should have). On one occasion, CEACA-Vila was presenting several projects to the same funding source. CEACA-Vila received information that only one project per organization could be approved, so the leadership team made the call to present a project for teenagers instead of one that would benefit the CCCria. This decision was justified because the teenager’s project would have been interrupted otherwise, while CCCria still had funding for a year. For the teenagers served by CEACA-Vila, losing that funding would have represented the end of an opportunity, while for the CCCria it seemed to represent a less
critical need. The decision was made by CEACA-Vila leadership team, with no consultation with CECIP, the CCCria educators, or the children, although the decisions made affected all of them. On CECIP’s part, there was an utter respect for the decisions made by CEACA-Vila, whether the CECIP staff agreed with them or not. This attitude was likely an important part of why the partnership between the organizations worked so well.

In terms of sustainability, CECIP’s main focus was on building strategies to strengthen the methodological aspect of the project. Malu, the person on CECIP team who participated in the creation of the methodology and the selection and training of the staff, acted as the pedagogical consultant for the project. She expressed her concerns, especially regarding the team’s high turnover, mentioned in earlier in this chapter:

I have great concern with this high turnover rate, I do, but not so much because I know it is not just there. I'm sorry it happens there, of course, because it makes it more difficult to consolidate the work. We are now creating strategies to consolidate the methodology, regardless of who is or is not there. What happens is that with this rotation of people, there is always someone who will be able to pass the baton. I must say that I took Obama's speech [inauguration speech, when President Obama won, days before the interview] and applied it to the Cultural Center. Because this notion of passing on the baton comes from a culture that we African descendants have deeply ingrained, you know. The African cultures have the tradition of having someone who will hold the knowledge. Other cultures, in India, for example, have that too, and the native tribes of Brazil as well. I visited quilombos [remaining communities created as early as 1580 by
fugitive slaves, in several parts of Brazil] and I saw and lived one of those moments. The old man felt he was close to dying and how he passed on his knowledge...that it was in the Amazon region. Luckily, at the Cultural Center we have time to pass on this culture, this knowledge, before one leaves, and today it is more consolidated.

Sustainability of the methodology was addressed through the monthly professional development workshops, which were a strategy used for deepening the understanding of complex concepts like protagonism, reflecting on the practice, and consolidating the methodology. As described above, in those meetings all the staff get together to study, share, and discuss their professional challenges and successes. The September 2008 workshop, which I observed, was dedicated to studying the important elements of the methodology. The CECIP team and CCCria staff agreed to discuss: (a) the free coming and going among rooms regulated by the use of the tags, (b) the self-regulated time children spent in each room, and (c) the assemblies as a tool for participation. In two groups, the staff discussed each element, its importance for the methodology, how it was being used at that particular moment, and what could be improved. As a result, elements that were used almost as a routine, which had lost some of the connection to the reason why they were important, regained their purpose and importance. This discussion of the significance of routine elements was especially important for the recently hired members of the team.

The children also played a significant part in sustaining the methodology. I observed them escorting visitors around the Center, explaining each element and why it was important. For example, they explained how the tag system worked, how they
changed rooms freely and the rules of the CCCria. Often the children showed the newly hired educators how the center worked. The computer educator, for example, was first introduced to the Center by a child. This was unusual for him and made his first contact with the institution very special, as he explained in his interview:

_Heather also explained things to me, then the children showed me the Cultural Center the same day; One of them, Josie was her name, I remember to this day. Even now, when she sees me, she gives me a hug._

The children also noticed when the rules were changed. During the summer of 2008 (January) the CCCria worked differently. Following a well-established CEACA-Vila tradition, Dona Anastacia asked that CCCria educator’s team to organize a summer camp. During this time, the rooms would be closed and all the children would participate together in adult-led activities. At first, children liked the novelty. However, after a while, some children stopped coming to the Center, and expressed that they missed the CCCria _as it really was_. On the first day of the normal routine, the CCCria coordinator reminded all of them of the CCCria’s rules, and the children seemed glad to resume their activities with the usual autonomy of choice.

These illustrations demonstrate how children were able to explain the CCCria rules and culture. The children’s knowledge of CCCRia’s rules and principles were an important part of the sustainability of the CCCria’s methodology. Children were able to engage in dialogues with educators to question attitudes not coherent with their understanding of protagonism.

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18 Later the team reworked that format, to be able to offer a summer camp (honoring CEACA’s tradition) while keeping the protagonism of the child in the forefront.
Another ever present strategy for sustaining the methodology was to count on the support of educators that had been on staff longer. Chloe, in her interview, told how she helped the CCCria coordinator understand the methodology and made herself available to share her experience. She said:

*Now each educator gradually understands better and gets ownership of the concept. When the CCCria started, only a few people on the team had gone through the training, and even Heather, the actual coordinator, wasn’t trained in that methodology. There were days that Heather would come to me, and I could see that she was dealing with the children like she used to do as a day care principal. She said: "But if I let it be, they will break everything! So tell me, you went through this training on protagonism, right? So, what is it? Then I explained to her the dialogue, you know, let them do something but at the same time you don’t? Because we have to know how far the child will go, we have to follow him or her, to see how he's participating. Because if you think the children will break, destroy everything… they will not, as long as you are beside them, giving them some pointers, telling them about the importance of it, then, not much happens. For example, punishing a child, sitting her down in the office, this should never happen here. This type of punishment belongs in school. Do you really think that the child will think about what she did? No! So instead of punishing her, let's talk, let's think about what you did. Let us reflect on it. And from there the child will resume her play, and soon she won’t be doing this anymore. Or maybe she will do it again, until she finds out that here it is not the place for it. It is a space that she will make friends. It might be hard at first, but then you will see that it will become easier. So today, I see the way she*
deals with the children and she has incorporated protagonism.

Summary of Question One

CCCria developed several strategies, practices, and interaction patterns between children and adults to implement the three basic principles of their protagonism methodology: the promotion of protagonism, autonomy, and children’s rights. The door windows, the tag system, and the children’s freedom to come and go according to their interest, while being mindful not to disturb others were important elements that supported all three of those principles. Those elements helped children use the space while respecting the right of others to do the same. The fairness of the system was kept by the children and the adults were called upon in situations of conflict.

For protagonism, the practices developed inside the rooms encouraged children to lead the activities in the room, promote changes that improved the environment, suggest solutions to problems they identified, take initiative, and dialogue with adults regarding these issues. Adults developed an attitude of listening, understanding, and negotiating while always respecting and giving weight to the children’s opinions and views. They encouraged the expression of the children, while also helping them see and consider aspects that they would not see on their own. When children and adults dialogued and collaborated, they were creating the possibility to achieve what Hart (1992) would consider the higher degree of participation, “child initiated [action], shared decisions with adults” (p. 14). As discussed above, children and adults engaged in dialogue where each contribution was valued and considered critically, putting into practice the teachings of Freire (Freire, 1976, 1996, 2001).
For children’s rights, the Center promoted the rights included in the Statute for Children and Adolescents, creating strategies to make those rights become a reality. CCCria strongly focused the right to education, culture, sports, and leisure (ECA, Chapter IV), which included the right to participate and organize themselves. When CCCria created events to foster the integration with the community and family, for example, it was implementing the right the children have to be with their families and have their community valued (ECA, Chapter III, Section I, Article 19).

As for the right to participate, CCCria promoted the discussion of its own rules, with the children’s participation. The children’s views and interests were considered as well as those of the adults, as part of the community who lived in this environment. The conflicts that arose were treated by reminding everyone involved of CCCria’s rules, which they had agreed to uphold, and then deciding what to do to resolve the conflict. Sometimes a rule was not helping and needed to be changed. The assemblies were one possibility where these situations were brought to the attention of the group and where this discussion was allowed to happen.

Finally, the children were respected on their multiple needs. The Center provided for the most basic physiological and biological needs, for example, getting a drink when thirsty, or using the restrooms with autonomy (no permission needed from an adult). It provided for other needs as well: a place they felt and were safe, connection and affection, and recognition and praise for their talents and possibilities. Clearly, CCCria found a variety of ways to put children’s protagonism into practice.
Research Question 2: How Do Educators and Educational Leaders Adjust Their Practice to Facilitate Children’s Protagonism?

In the following section, I answer the second research question by first exploring the educators’ backgrounds and their description of how they struggled to understand the methodology, and, at the same time, try new ways to relate with the children.

**Educators’ Background**

As discussed earlier, at first, two of the major criteria for selection to work at CCCria were belonging to the community and liking to work with children. However, after the first few months, the coordination team evaluated that having some background in education was at least equally important. Some educators already had some experience related to the content matter in which they were going to be working with the children. For example, one of the computer educators had been trained to supervise an Internet cafe, including hardware maintenance, light repairs, and software trouble shooting; however, working with young children was entirely new for him. Others had years of experience in working with children, but no experience with the subject matter. The dance teacher was an early childhood teacher at the downstairs day care, but loved to dance. She saw CCCria as an opportunity to bring those two interests together. The library educator had worked in day care settings for more than twenty years, but had never had much contact with libraries for children.

In their interviews with me the educators talked about their background, both professional and personal, as connected to some aspect of the work they were about to engage in when they applied for a job as educators at CCCria. However, they all said that they had no knowledge, much less experience, related to the protagonism methodology.
One of the educators, Leo, who facilitated the music room, had worked with homeless people. He was the only one on the team who came to CCCria because he had heard there was a different methodology to work with children being applied at the Center. He talked about how he was searching for a new way to work with children, from his observation of a previous job:

The standard way [to work with children] still exists, and people follow it, without too much questioning, but when you engage in African studies, there is a different way, an African way, where each ethnic group has a way of being, of behaving, of talking. There are children talking loud, children who speak quietly, children who are very active, or more passive, and this is very much applicable in this [past] project, and wasn’t respected. The child could not speak a little louder that someone would immediately come and, "Oh, shut up." Same thing with the child who was very active ... then when I started to read a lot about education, especially African education, I began to form an opinion. I felt strongly for the lack of freedom of the child in expressing itself... When I realized that this (CCCria) was a social project, and even better, that I could be linking this project to my activism and everything else I believed in... So I could relate deeply with that idea of protagonism, because it was a subject I was studying too, I was reading about, I agreed with, but wasn’t finding it applied anywhere. Even in other social projects that I joined. Heck, it was a social project, it happened in the community, but it was almost like regular school, not at all what I imagined it would be. It was almost school-like. Then I met Josephine, you know, and she explained to me some aspects of the proposal developed at the Cultural Center and I immediately liked this idea of children’s
protagonism, the child having the freedom to enter and leave the room. That was very important to me because I've been on projects that I found very cruel that the child or adolescent was stuck with you for one hour, for 40 minutes. You could see that many or some or all of them weren't interested, but there they were, and they had to stay. I found it very cruel. On the other hand I was there, and had to lead the activity, but it always bothered me. When Josephine spoke about this proposal, of the protagonist child, the child free to enter and leave at any time, not having that obligation to be in the room, that for me was essential, that was what attracted me most to come to work at the Children's Cultural Center, this children's protagonism thing.

Yet, even for Leo, who had been studying other ways to relate to children and found at CCCria something he was searching for, understanding protagonism and putting it into practice was not easy. CCCria’s methodology made him deal with some of his own limitations and face the challenge to align discourse and praxis. He said:

*As I was starting to align myself with the methodology, I noticed that I was not so used to this protagonism thing, to the child coming and going. I caught myself several times saying "Hey, where are you going? Hey! No, you, come back here!" (laughs) [then I realized] there is no “come back here,” if you want to go, then go, get out. The door is always open. I realized that I had to start to change my behavior regarding the child protagonism, which is a novelty, for me at least it was a novelty, I was not used to the children having this freedom, of wanting to stay in or to leave.*

**Trying to Understand the Concept**

For most educators, the first difficulty was to grasp what protagonism was. They
all had conversations about this new methodology with CECIP team members or with the
CCCria coordinator in charge of explaining to them what it was. As they started to put it
in practice, however, they saw themselves full of doubts as to whether they were acting
according to the methodology. They began questioning if, in their interactions with the
children, they were taking the right actions.

When I asked about how they learned about the methodology, and what kind of
support they found helpful in their learning process, the educators I interviewed all
mentioned the monthly workshops as an important source of learning, where they could
get support. Another source of information and support was the networking with
colleagues that had been there for a longer time and could give them tips when they were
unsure about what attitude would be more appropriate. This would happen informally
during breaks or at snack times. Watson described well this process of getting to know
children’s protagonism:

*It was explained to me in many ways. I had several conversations with Josephine,
then on the first day that I met Antonina, too. They talked with me, and so on. I was
coming from another CEACA project where I worked with children as well, but it was not
related to protagonism, it was slightly different. Then I went on to adjusting... I know that
at first we worried about how to handle things, but then we adjusted, we came to
understand better and the work became easier, you know, how to react in certain
situations in the room. Because at first I didn’t know what child protagonism was. Then I
got to know better and understand better, and perform better...During the training
sessions, I came to a better understanding. At first, during the first training workshops,*
they talked a lot about protagonism; almost everybody didn’t understand what it was, so we talked about it many times.

Also mentioned as a strong support strategy were the CECIP team’s weekly supervision visits in the activity rooms, followed by a professional conversation where a professional from the CECIP team discussed the interactions observed in the room and reviewed how the planning was being implemented. Luciana told about this strategy in her interview, and how having already built a trusting relationship with the support team was important to feel comfortable to ask for advice:

*I had full support of CECIP to develop the activities, even with the new methodology, which for me it was all very new, so I was always uncertain. Is it the right way? Am I doing it right? Then Malu would come, and I knew Malu from the daycare, you know, she did this training in the nursery, so I had more intimacy, more affinity with Malu and Padma, then I was always counting the days to their visit. When the day would come, I would lock them in my room, and ask all my questions... Malu came during the week, two or three times a week, to the Cultural Center. That was the time I had, and I took advantage of this time to get information, then tell her about some situations that happened within the room. She would also be with me in the room many times, to call my attention on certain points; it was a very good experience, very good indeed.*

The essence of CECIP’s role was to support the team in their learning process by establishing a professional dialogue with them in which they would be questioning attitudes they observed and looking together for answers to the questions raised. The CECIP team was there as experts, but mostly as a sounding board. They would not judge,
but ask questions. They wouldn’t have ready-made solutions, but the willingness to think together until collective solutions, coherent with the methodology, could be drawn. When encouraging the team members to ask questions about their practice in order to produce learning, the CECIP team was providing an example of a model proposed by Freire and Faundez (1985):

What matters most is connecting, whenever possible, the question and answer to actions that were committed or actions that may be practiced or redone... It is necessary that the learners discover over time the dynamic, strong, live relationship between word and action, between word-action-reflection. Taking advantage, then, of some concrete examples from the learners’ own experiences during a morning’s work within the school, in the case of a school for children, encourage them to ask questions about their own practice and the answers, then, would involve the action that led to the question. Acting, talking, and knowing would then be united. (p. 26)

The CCCria team knew that the solutions they designed during this moment of reflection would be tested and that CECIP support team would help improve on them when needed. This relationship between CECIP and CCCria teams was based on mutual trust, an important element in Freire’s pedagogy of autonomy.

In summary, the support system implemented at CCCria used three strategies that complemented each other: (a) an introductory individual meeting, where the methodology was explained (this session usually included a guided visit conducted by a child), (b) CECIP team member observation of the educators in activity followed by a feedback session, and (c) a monthly actualization meeting. These combined strategies
gave a sense of security and built trust among the team implementing the new concepts. They created moments to give each other support and feedback on the issues they had to deal with on a daily basis.

The support system described and analyzed above confirms Senge’s (2000) theory of sustainability in two regards. First, CCCria’s practices demonstrate the importance to foster a commitment to change by creating learning systems to bring about transformation to the organization. Second, they demonstrate capacity building as a key element. Fullan (2005) suggested that to attain sustainability, the innovation implementation must include both vertical support from external consultants, and lateral support from other schools or partner organizations, which would foster a network of peer learning and collaboration.

Protagonism Is...

In general, all the educators interviewed believed that now they understood well the concept of children’s protagonism, and were comfortable applying it. When asked to define protagonism, they did not have exactly the same definitions. For example, Chloe defined children’s protagonism as: “to let the child be what it is. It is freedom, so I'd say freedom to be what you are, to follow your desire, always...,” which is very similar to what Erica said in her definition: “So for me child protagonism is this, a form of freedom for the child.” Leo also highlighted the freedom to come and go:

This thing of the children's protagonism, of the child having the freedom to be able to enter and leave the room at any time, not having that obligation to be in the room, that was essential for me, freedom of wanting to stay, of wanting to
play the instrument he likes, of wanting to stay there without playing anything.

Also speaking of freedom, Bernardo’s definition added the need to set limits and the idea of the responsibilities that come with freedom:

*Children's protagonism to me is how the cultural center treats children, with freedom. This isn’t the adult’s space, it’s theirs, to use as they wish. Of course we advise them to take care of their space, the materials, because it all belongs to them, we never interfere in a direct way, we let it go with the flow, so they work freely, they unleash the imagination and we encourage their creativity. That’s why they love it here, because of that, you know, that freedom they have, and they themselves are very aware of this.*

Luiza’s definition stressed the development of the child’s autonomy:

*Protagonism, I do not know what the word protagonism means exactly, like the definition in the dictionary, but from what I understand it is the child’s discovery, the independence of the child, the child figuring out what it can do alone, without ... maybe with some interference of the adult, but she can try to do things by herself, you know, learning to communicate, experiment, try, (discovering) she can do it alone.*

Luciana included the notion of child’s rights in her definition:

*Child protagonism is for the child to have the right to come and go, to have free will, to have choices, really. We're giving children free will to be saying what she wants, expressing her wishes, desires, satisfactions, and the things she does not want to do at that moment.*

The educators usually illustrated their definitions with examples of protagonism they saw in their rooms or by comparing and contrasting the CCCria way to handle the
interactions with what happens in traditional school settings. The educators mentioned that in schools, for example, children lack the freedom of choice in terms of the activities in which they participate. In addition, children have to be doing the same activity, at the same moment, and for a predefined amount of time. Another difference educators pointed out was where the teacher stands in relation to the class in school versus where the CCCria educator stands in the activity rooms: one is at the center of the action, leading the activities, while the other is facilitating the children’s activities, while the children are leading the action. Also mentioned as differences between how traditional schools and the CCCria dealt with autonomy were the restrictions to leave the room to use the restroom or drink water, depending on the teacher’s authorization to do so. In general, the lack of trust in the children’s ability to be responsible and to offer suggestions to improve the way the institution works were some of the examples mentioned by CCCria educators. Another way educators expressed their understanding of the CCCria methodology was by comparing it with what they hear from the children regarding how the figures of authority in their families handle the children.

As seen above, although the CCCria educators did not have one official definition of children protagonism, they all mentioned similar elements pertinent to the methodology: autonomy, freedom to come and go, freedom of choice, freedom to express themselves and follow their desires, the focus on children-led activities, the educator as a facilitator, dialoguing with children, and listening to them. They also mentioned that having the freedom of choice does not mean doing everything the child wants. They stressed in their interviews that there are rules and boundaries the children need to
respect, and it is part of everyone’s job to see that these limits are respected. However, the adult intervention has to be as non-authoritative as possible. In his interview, Watson struggled to explain this sensitive balance between respecting the children’s desires and encouraging them, but also looking out for eventual excess:

Define children’s protagonism? ... I think it’s ... to let the children express their desires, but not always do whatever they want. There needs to have some boundaries, not just let them go overboard, but make it so they feel comfortable to do the things they want to do, but not everything they want, you know? Some things, actually most things, however still have that limit, but without saying “you can’t do this” or “stop that”, no, it’s more “let’s sit, and talk about it” and leave them as much at ease as you possibly can.

In conclusion, the educators may not have been able to define in precise words the concept of protagonism; however, their examples clearly show their understanding of the concept. They developed a shared language and set of practices that translate the importance of listening to the child, and created proper conditions to stimulate the children’s expression of their opinions and occasions to lead the action. This understanding of the concept was a process that happened through dialogue based on Freire’s theories. The educators could process the information, plan activities and analyze the results using the group’s understanding of the concept of protagonism as a reference. By doing so, the CCCria strengthened its capacity of learning and overcoming possible barriers to the implementation of the new concept, and increased the chances of the change becoming sustainable, confirming Fullan’s framework.
Limits and Boundaries

Bernardo told me how he sees children dealing with limits inside the CCCria – how they know and feel responsible for enforcing the agreed upon rules. He talked also about how this participation and dialogue opportunities end up influencing the children’s behavior outside the center:

Surely, they will become better people, better citizens, they have that sense, that good feeling of helping others, to rectifying a problem, something wrong, be more careful with their personal objects. They are dealing with the protagonism now, not in a mechanical way, they truly understand it, they feel good doing a good deed, making decisions, organizing things, organizing themselves, inside the cultural center, outside, resolving conflicts, disputes among themselves. There is always one who takes on the role of saying “you can’t do this, this is wrong.” Since it is a cultural center, each educator has his or her way of conveying that message, "this is wrong, you can’t do that, because..." but always in a... carioca way, conveying the message to the children, without overwhelming them, without oppressing them, letting the child decide what is the best way, but making it clear that this is good for you, and that might be bad. Then the child ends up adapting it for herself and having the feeling that it is right. Knowing what is bad for him or her, the child starts avoiding behaving that way, and learns to occupy their time with more productive things, and not just be running around all day, staying out there late at night.

Finding where the boundaries are, who should enforce them, and how it needs to

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19 Carioca – people who are born in Rio. The cariocas have the reputation of being laid back, cool.
be done to still be aligned with children’s protagonism was probably the biggest challenge for the educators. Chloe told how she struggled with this issue at first, and how she reached another understanding of her role:

How does a library work? At first, we couldn’t get anything done in here. Kids coming and going, each with their own way of being in the room...and I was not getting anything done, I had trouble even to read them a story or doing a creative activity. That was when I stopped everything, I gathered many children, some 30 children to talk. From that day on, everything went on a lot smoother. They wanted to come in here to play with board games they got in another room, and I said no. Let’s stop here, because this is the library. So they had to learn what was appropriate in a library. My difficulty was to help them understand that space. [At first] they would come and do whatever and I wouldn’t say anything, and then I discovered that sometimes we have to have a limit. It is still child protagonism, but it is limited. There are certain things that I cannot let them do, right? So, the limit, the main challenge for me was the issue of setting the limits... The children are there but, can they rip apart or scratch books? I don’t think so. I would place books and other objects out there and they would take them, over and over, and leave them scattered all over the place. Is that OK? So little by little we started setting some boundaries, so the children could use adequately the library, use it within that limit, and... “you took something from the shelf? Put it back when you are done!” Those little rules like that, and what I find interesting is that we talked about the rules, we agreed on them, and then they went on passing the rules one child to the other.

In the educator’s perception, finding the balance between stimulating children’s
autonomy and protagonism and their own role as educators in the room was the one of the hardest challenges they faced. In fact, it was there that educators demonstrated in practice their understanding of the methodology. Freire (1996) said that educating demanded from the educator the use of his or her common sense, to be the living example of what they were preaching, and engage in critical reflection on the practice. The CCCria educators’ discomfort with some of their own attitudes revealed how deeply involved they were in their own learning process.

Changing How Educators Deal with Children

Understanding protagonism was the first step. The second challenge the educators faced, especially for those with experience teaching young children, was experimenting with a new way to be in the room with the children. Erica talked about how she had to change to adapt and the skills she had to learn to work in the educational toy room:

*It was a totally different experience for me. Because I am a teacher, and I am so accustomed with the room, with students, you know, I still work in school, with that traditional organization: time to play, time to have a snack. Not here, here you spend all your time in activities, you know, giving space for children to play, you're interacting, you learn to catalog [the toys]. One thing I did not know, because for me in my mind, it was just a room, full of toys, and children playing, and that was it. But that isn’t it at all. You have a whole process of cataloging, caring, observing the children as they play, also be offering new games to play, games they do not know, then you know that you're bringing something new… This has changed me, and also my practice as well, because I had to look things up, I had to study a lot, buy magazines, look for new games, something*
they would find interesting. And they bring me new games as well. I ask them, please teach me that game! Sometimes they are playing in the corner of the room, some game I had never seen, and I would just go there and ask them to teach me. They teach me, and I write it down, so I won’t forget. So it has been very rich for me, I am learning a lot about the culture of playing, and also about the physical part, the movement of the children.

Erica elaborated more on the differences between her work at CCCria and the work she still did in a traditional school setting, and talked about the challenges of adapting her behavior as a teacher to a new methodology, where she no longer is at the center of the action:

So for me this was the challenge – changing my practice, so I wouldn’t suddenly trip on a concept of mine that was already consolidated. As an educator, my concept was that “children, today we'll do this and that” and this wasn’t possible at CCCria. I had to change and get this new vision: the child will be the protagonist of the action! (laughs) “So, wait, how will it be? They will boss me around? They will do whatever they want? Oh no! It is going to be a mess!” So, truly, my challenge was to realize that it was not such a big deal and see that it is much more pleasant to work when the child is the protagonist of the action, and that we can learn much from it.

I learned with them to exercise the protagonism; that children have a voice, that adults can sit down with them and find out together: “how are we going to solve this problem?” This issue of respecting each other as people, and be open to learn more about the children, not “the teacher be the center of attention, the teacher is the one who knows, who owns the room, the one who says: I command, I want, and I do.” No, to be
sharing this moment with them too, and we learn much more with the children, I have learned a lot with them, to let them voice their opinions, listening to them more, be open to play, to observe them playing, observe them acting as protagonists, playing on their own. Of course, there are moments when I propose an activity I prepared for them, but sometimes they don’t pay much attention to me, because they are entertained in their own play, and even sometimes I am left ... a little on the side! (laughs) So all this is very new. To me, protagonism is a form of freedom; I see it as a form of freedom for the child. Because we see so often in schools, the child is restrained from doing what she wants to do, you know, sometimes she wants to play but she can’t: “No, now, we are going to do this.” So here it’s like: I'm in the playroom for a while, then I don’t want to be here anymore, I think I want to make a drawing. Well, then I just go! I grab my tag, put it back on the door and I’ll be on my way to do my drawing. It's something that you can’t find out there, not even in teacher training courses and such, and I think that for children having this type of experience is really cool.

For her, as a teacher, not being the center of attention, having children not participating in the activity she is proposing was quite a shock. She had to adjust her behavior and find out where and how she could contribute. What was the role of an educator, if not to conduct the activities? Later in the interview, she elaborated on the role she found for herself, raising another issue that differs from a traditional teaching setting: on top of having children from different ages, she did not have always the same group of children in the room. She said:

*It was a challenge! (laughs) Because it's like I'm telling you, it is a change in my*
attitude and in the whole environment, which is a different environment, a different setting. It is different from a classroom, where you have that same class, that same group of kids Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. Here, today you have this one kid, tomorrow you don’t. So I learned a lot on how to deal with differences, with diversity: “Gosh, this little dude came in, wait, let’s work more in groups because he still has trouble sharing. And look over there, this little girl, I know that she is pretty autonomous, so she will be ok playing there.” So, this was quite different! Here I know well 30, 40 children, not just 9 or 10. You learn to know everyone and see everyone’s needs. Then when you see that child coming in, it comes to your mind: what you could stimulate, what you should be working on with that child, what she needs to be developing. So that too was a challenge.

Although not leading the activity, she realized her role as facilitator, one who creates the ideal conditions for the children to fully enjoy their roles as protagonists.

As mentioned previously, some stories also showed that sometimes the methodology was either not yet fully understood or at least not applied as it should be. Chloe told a story that illustrated the difficulty of applying the protagonism in everyday situations:

The other day Roger came to my room... He wanted to put on women's clothing; it wasn’t only him, but quite a large group of boys. Then they came dressed as women, and asked “Auntie, can we parade in your room?” I said “Of course, come to my room, I'll call people to watch, you are all very beautiful!” Then when they returned...to the playroom, the educator said: "Put away those clothes, I don’t want any mess in my
room!" Roger came back to my room so upset! He said he no longer would go to the playroom, he didn’t like the educator there anymore. I asked him: “Roger, did you make a mess?” He replied: “But she never let us!” I thought: “I got to find some way to talk to her.” Because, when these things happen, you have to let them, even if they mess up a little, because they can straighten things out themselves, as they do here... Sometimes with the protagonism, the children make a mess, of course there is a limit. It’s not because it is protagonism that they can do whatever they want, right? But there are moments they will bring the house down, literally! – I say – “You put it down, now raise it up again!” (Laughs) “You put everything in place!” So he left very pleased, very pleased because his wish was fulfilled at the time. There are people who have not yet learned protagonism or did not understand it well and sometimes they get carried away, they repress kids a bit. So I thought of saying something, then decided not to say anything because it may cause some animosity, so I just dropped it.

While she described the story, she made the assumption that the other educator reacted the way she did because of the mess children did or might have done if she had let them do their parade. An aspect she either missed or maybe felt uncomfortable discussing with me was the fact that having boys dressed as women, using makeup and heels, and parading around was frowned upon in the community. Chloe was, in fact, advocating for the children’s freedom to play and express themselves beyond adults’ prejudices.

Chloe could identify that in this situation, the educator did not act appropriately. Her large past educational experience, first as daycare worker, then as a day care
coordinator, plus having participated in the original team training at CCCria, resulted in her having a better understanding of the methodology. Her professional background also gave her legitimacy in front of her peers. They referred to her and trusted her advice on how to handle the children’s requests differently. Another interesting aspect of this story was that being one of the longest on staff she felt a responsibility to discuss these situations professionally with other educators. However, she did not want to upset her colleague by directly interfering and giving unsolicited feedback or advice. Nonetheless, when an educator would come to her with some question or issue, she was glad to help:

_Another who asks a lot of information is Luciana, from the art room. "Chloe, I brought this activity for them today, but the children don’t want to do it." “If they don’t want to do it, you jump in their wagon, and see what they want to do. We always have to look for that perspective, what do the children want the most? What do they prefer? There are days when they don’t want to do anything. Good, they don’t have to!" And she said: “Yeah, you’re right.”...I think she is becoming better and better at applying the protagonism. And whenever there are questions about it we try to talk it over. I realize the educators always come to me and ask about the protagonism, related to an attitude, like, how would you do it? Then I remember things that happened during the training, all those examples, I remember well things that Malu told me._

This example shows that CCCria’s educators were creating a network of support among the members of the team and not just looking for support in CECIP team of experts or in the figure of the leader. The horizontal collaboration, where team members recognized the expertise among themselves was of crucial importance regarding the
sustainability of the methodology. Educators valued Chloe’s experience in applying the methodology in her room with the same kids they were dealing with. She was always willing to share her experience, and help them reflect on the situation that arose to see what options they had and how to improve on their work.

*Keeping It Real and Alive: Notes on Leadership*

A final aspect of fostering the kind of methodology explained here demands a sensitive, dedicated type of leader. In her interview, Heather, CCCria coordinator at the time, tells about the challenges to lead the team into applying a methodology she was learning herself:

*The challenge was the actual protagonism methodology...the professionals had a lot of insecurity, and also I as the coordinator. It was new to me and we had to be trained as we go. The training's being done. It is still not yet complete of course, but it is happening as trial and error; “Oh here, this doesn’t work, this does.” Then over time, the professionals have been acquiring more confidence and building up some structure around this methodology.*

She showed on different occasions how she saw herself as a leader, and while recognizing that she was in charge, she was aware that especially in times of uncertainty she needed to build relationships of trust all around in order to be successful:

*As a coordinator you must show to the professionals that you're there as a partner, you're coordinating, I mean, at least this is my way to coordinate, I think a team only contributes with you when they trust you, when they trust what you say, you gain credibility, they see that you trust them, what you ask of them, that you manage to get*
things done, because when one doesn’t believe in the work, or doesn’t make their best effort to get things right ... And then there was this issue that they were having trouble not because they didn’t want to get it right, but sometimes they were unsure, and then you have to convey to them that this method is a good thing, that it will work, that it can be difficult, [and tell them:] “Look, let's try it this way.” Over time when they were getting better at it, getting some success, then it became more concrete to them.

This is an example of what Burns (1978) defined as a transformational leader: "leadership occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality" (p. 20). Heather engaged in the effort of continuously improving the work and advancing the collective purpose, while connecting with the needs of the Macacos community. In the above excerpt she demonstrated her sense of responsibility toward the educators, her understanding that support and trust generated success and celebrating those results increased her credibility, and at the same time built up the courage to continue trying. She showed that she was also a partner in education, accepting that it was a learning process, allowing for mistakes while trying to get it right, and enjoying the challenge it represented. She said:

As a coordinator, it is very rewarding, because I’ve been dealing with children for many years, but this methodology is challenging for me too. Because I went in not knowing. Of course, as a pedagogue, I deal with education, I don’t have the problems I see sometimes in the educators. I have to reassure them: “folks, you don’t have to worry,” because actually I always thought education is trial and error-based...so I am
very relaxed about... it at the Cultural Center, I never felt this anxiety. If someone comes to me and says: “I think that’s wrong there, why did you act this way?” I am okay about it too, no problem. Because if I think that [you learn] based on trial and error, then I have to accept that I can make mistakes too, and give myself a chance to make mistakes...

I can make mistakes and not torture myself over it. Now we have to be always looking for the right path within a set of practice.

The next excerpt of her interview shows the coordinator’s concern and awareness about her responsibility as a leader toward the children’s demands, once they have expressed them, once they have organized themselves to the point where they need the leader or another adult to take their actions forward. She said:

And this taking action, as the coordinator, it worries me. Certain things that we have to do, to take actions, to make it happen, and then ... it is more and more work, more actions ... because action is what is going to give this process credibility.

It seems that Heather saw her role as leader inspired by the Greenleaf (1970) model of servant leadership where the leader sees his or her role as to serve the interests of the community first. Working in a community is a life choice, and Heather had made that choice long ago, bringing to her work all her energy and dedication. She enjoyed being there, she enjoyed building a relationship with each child, and had her way to establish a dialogue with the children. To achieve this, she made a point of going with them on field trips on weekends, for example, so they could bond outside of the ordinary routine. I could see that she gave her all to provide the center and the children with as many opportunities she could find. She did it not as a way to promote herself, but as a
way to promote the growth of the team, for the good of the children and of the community. The educators felt inspired by her dedication, telling stories of her interventions in their interviews. She did not live in the community, but had worked there for many years and they knew she was there for the long run. Her dedication inspired her team and the parents as well. Heather said:

I have here professionals that leave a lot of their personal lives aside to do this work at the Cultural Center. I can count on this as well. So it's very good. And the parents also, the experience that I have of talking with the parents, especially when we realize that one child is being very aggressive, right, because one thing is the child's being mischievous, that's not a big deal. Children are mischievous, that's ok, but when one begins to have issues like fighting... To fight with their friend, this is also normal, they fight often, brothers and sisters have fights, too, adults, too, sometimes have disagreements, but when it starts to be too much, and also using excessive force and violence, that is something [out of the ordinary] is happening. The child is transparent, she will reflect what is happening around her, [if she is behaving like that it is] because she's going through something. And every time I call a family member to talk, I find out what is going on. Something is always happening. Hence parents are also asking for help, you know, not only in that conversation, I have parents who come here to talk, to learn how they can help. They say, “Ah, it was so nice talking to you right now,” I mean, you see that you’ve actually contributed to a relational issue, you know, so this is very gratifying.

As discussed above, it was clear through my interviews and observations that the
caring nature of the relationships was part of what made the Center a place where children felt protected and free. Other experiences found in the literature connect a nurturing and kind relationship to better results in schools. Ladson-Billings (1994) highlighted factors such as the non-hierarchical character of relationships between adults and children and collaboration among children as important to culturally relevant practices in the classroom. She also found out that, similar to CCCria, the teachers extend the reach of their concern for the students beyond the school walls into the community. In the same sense, Palmer (1998) said, “…good teachers possess a capacity for connectedness” (p. 11). Heather explained how she saw herself as a mediator and the importance of considering the community where the CCCria is embedded, while looking at every child, knowing and respecting their individuality. She said:

Of course everything is a challenge, because in fact the Cultural Center is dynamic place. We have kids today who are not going to be here for very long. Then each new one that comes brings a new world with him, so this is a challenge every day. And the community also, some hard times the community goes through, or difficulties the child goes through, with her family, she will bring it all here. This is pretty cool, too, because we see that they have great confidence on us. This point is also challenging because we have to try all the time to mediate, the right word is mediation, and it is the mediation that builds up the work. Mediate with the family, mediate with the child, and this mediation is going to build an entire relationship, between the coordination and the group of professionals, the professionals with children, with the families… Each one has its specific characteristics, each one is different. The professional has his way of being,
the child has his way of being, and sometimes the child is best suited to a professional than the other. This happens a lot. Because it is dynamic, and allows a lot of freedom, the child will not be tied to one person, she will be connected to that person because she wants to. There isn’t just one teacher, so it gives the child the possibility of choosing. And not only the child, the professional will also have children that fit better, and some that will be more challenging to deal with.

The CCCria children’s ability to make choices (of activity, of educators they want to connect with), made with freedom, reinforces Lansdown’s (2005) notion that children are experts in their own lives. This is particularly important in a community where the children were often offered the opportunity to follow the path of drugs and violence.

Also significant was how the leader understood the importance of her role in connecting the Center with the community. This connects with Baldridge and Burnham’s (1975) study on organizational innovation in which they argued that although individuals might not affect success in implementing change, the role within the organization had an impact on the involvement of the whole organization in the innovation process. Of the three roles connected to innovation implementation mentioned by the authors – initiators, evaluators and mediators – the CCCria’s leader engaged in the innovation process as a mediator making the link between the outside ideas and what was in fact implemented, and between the Center and the community as well. This connection was an important contribution to the sustainability of CCCria.

_A Methodology in Constant Evolution_

When asked if the methodology had evolved over two years of implementation
CCCria’s coordinator answered:

*It changed a lot. Because you see, it is a construction. To implement the protagonism, in my experience, you have to build it together. At first you have to break the paradigms... Then, you have to believe that it may actually be the methodological framework. Once you believe, once you see it can happen, then you start creating mechanisms to bring it to life, to cause the gears to turn, you know? Of course, at first, it feels a little stiff, because you have to break the paradigms, and then it is like you are putting some grease on the machine, oiling the wheels and it starts working better, smoother. And I say, we still have to change many things, because it is all very dynamic.*

Her answer spoke of an endless process of revision, improvement, discussion and change to adjust the practice to new demands, new children, and new challenges, while upholding protagonism, autonomy, and the utmost respect for the children. It also shows a constructivist vision of how knowledge happens. It seemed that for her, protagonism was not a content out there to be learned, but a concept to be built and refined through practice and reflective interaction. As Vianna & Stetsenko (2006) stated:

*Because of the emphasis on human action as it develops in the world, within changing contexts, all versions of psychological constructivism are de facto contextualist: none of them completely ignores sociocultural and relational dimensions of human development. For example, social interaction involving cooperation, collaborative problem-solving, conflict, and communication is important in theories by both Piaget and Vygotsky. In addition, because development is a contextually embedded process of interactions, it is not pre-programmed; innate, blueprinted mechanisms are by definition*
inappropriate for tackling the tasks imposed by an emergent, constantly changing reality of humans acting in contexts. (p. 85)

At the end of her interview, Heather stressed how the CCCria experience was promoting transformation:

*I feel honored to be the coordinator of the Cultural Centre. I feel fortunate to have entered this project that really made me take a broader view of education, of that protagonism that is being built not only in that space, but inside me, inside the professionals, inside the children themselves. This brings about change on people, believing in new possibilities. It all makes you grow.*

In conclusion, the methodology has evolved, proving that reflection and dialogue truly effect change in the organization. The core principles that guide the CCCria, however, remained true. The coordinator saw her role as connecting the Center to the community through strategies like the Fun Saturday or individual parent meetings. She was open to listen to staff and children’s suggestions, encouraging leadership at several levels. At the same time, the search for continued improvement through constant critical reflection on the praxis (Freire, 1996) kept the implementation process open and dynamic. These elements (core principles, shared leadership, community involvement, and reflection on praxis) strongly resemble Glickman’s (2002) findings in his study about schools that managed to sustain democratic focus: “The framework of covenant, governance structure, and action research provides vital support for sustaining the school's focus” (p. 42). This framework laid the foundation for sustained change. Another factor that he found relevant was for leaders to demonstrate commitment to the core
principles and involve others in overcoming obstacles, as part of building a team of supporters to the innovation. This I saw on several occasions at CCCria, especially during the actualization session. The more success stories were shared, the stronger the team was to face collectively the challenges they found.

Research Question 3: How Did Children Act in Response to the Autonomy Provided by CCCria’s Children’s Protagonism?

In this section, I introduce my findings related to the third research question by presenting some emblematic stories collected over the data collection period and the views that children shared with me during their interviews and other activities.

Children’s Protagonism

On the following pages I present emblematic stories in which children demonstrated their will and ability to organize themselves, discuss issues, express their concerns, and participate in finding solutions to problems. I found many examples where children showed initiative and capacity to organize themselves and achieve their goals. There are examples where small groups of children decided to pursue a desire they had and organized themselves spontaneously, planning every detail, counting on the support of adults. The first story told here is an example of this kind. Other stories portrayed more structured forms of participation. CCCria used the assembly format, discussed earlier, or the petition, an instrument of participation that was familiar to some of the children and was part of their culture. The CCCria coordinator shared how the assembly, an unfamiliar instrument of participation, was introduced at CCCria, and how it evolved over time, adjusting the format to that audience. The process of trying something new, listening to the children responses and continuing to muddle through to get to a better solution
showed a dynamic that was peculiar to CCCria.

The first story was told by Teresa, the dance teacher. Her definition of child protagonism was about knowing what you want and taking the initiative to seek your goal. The context is a dance presentation in which a group of girls, aged 7 to 10 years old, decided not to participate. Sometime later they changed their minds and decided to schedule another presentation. Their decision had consequences. From the time they made the decision to organize a new presentation, to the actual day of the performance, there wasn’t enough time to rehearse counting only on the days the dance teacher was available to assist them. To deal with the situation, they took matters in their own hands. Teresa recalled:

*I was putting the chairs away and left them alone, discussing what to do. They decided to dance on Monday. So they said: “Oh, we'll come Friday, aunt, and we will rehearse on our own, so leave the CD.” I forgot to leave it.*

*On Wednesday they came after me at CEACA-Vila to pick up the CD, they took the initiative to call Heather, and ask her to book the room, and to allow them to rehearse on their own in the dance room. Laurence reserved the room so they could have it for themselves, and they rehearsed, and made all the props, something colorful to put on the wrist, then they cleaned the whole room that was very messy [with the craft activity to prepare the props]. They cleaned everything up, and came to tell me about it later that day, when I was picking up my daughter at the daycare: “Aunt, we were in your room, you can not imagine, we soiled the whole place,” and I said: “Oh my! And then what?” They said: “Auntie, we cleaned everything, we used rubbing alcohol –*
window cleaner for the mirror, we swept the entire room – you should see the dust cloud, aunt! It was so dirty! But we're gonna dance on Friday, because we got everything right.”

And that's like ... they didn’t wait on me for that. It is like: We want to dance, so we go after the things we need to make it happen, we fight for it. One will bring the make up, and so on. [They say] “Aunt, bring the hair conditioner, we don't have any” [and I answered:] “Yeah, I'll bring the conditioner, the comb,...” When I came to work today, I stepped out [of the bus, in front of the children's school] and Ray saw me and said: “Auntie, don’t forget to ask Heather for a new costume for us, we do not want to dance with the ribbon costume again. See some other costume.” Me: “Yeah Ray, I will not forget” Ray replied: “I will arrive early!”

The above story shows that young children are able to get organized, seek their goals, and it also shows they need the adults to support their intents, as partners. The children did what was possible for them. They did not have money to buy the hair product or to get the costumes, but they can count on the adults, who see their effort and want them to succeed, to provide what they need. It is a good example of how children and adults can work together.

The following excerpt of an observation session shows a spontaneous discussion among children about day-to-day issues that mattered to them. The discussion evolved into an organized action to reach solutions in which children were encouraged to pursue their intent.

I was sitting at a table in the cafeteria. Sabina, Jessie, and Davidson sat by me and started talking about the difficulty of getting a tag for the computer room - a complaint I have been hearing from numerous children. There are far more children than computers. Even pairing up, many children seldom get to have a turn, which generates a high level of frustration. Getting a tag that will guarantee your spot at a computer is therefore a daily hassle. Some kids manage to arrive early, but not everybody can do that. The three children were completely engaged in the discussion about the access to the computer room, trading experiences and stories about their struggle. I began to write what they were saying in my notebook, as part of my observation. They soon entered the game, and started dictating to me, making sure I was writing faithfully everything they were saying.

Amid this improvised “activity,” 10-year-old Vicky arrived, leaning on her walker, sweating profusely from the effort she had to make to arrive at the Cultural Center. She had to come down hill from her house, and then climb the elliptical stairs to access the Cultural Center, a difficult path for someone with a handicap, and a challenge she faces daily. I asked if she wanted to sit down and rest a bit, which she gladly accepted. I pulled up a chair and she joined the conversation. She said for her it is an even bigger problem, because to get a tag she needs both hands, and therefore she has to let go of her walker, and may fall down. She usually asks her cousin, but he is tiny and gets beat up in the process. They all laugh with her, and add her concern to the list. Here is the list of suggestion to improve the organization of the access to the computer room compiled by the group, to which they added some suggestions to other rooms:
- One day only the younger kids, the other day only the older kids.
- Bernardo [computer room educator] delivers the tags to the educators [in other rooms] - they distribute them to the children - to avoid a mishmash [at the computer room door].
- Before snack time, only the younger kids; after snack, only the older kids
- Do not keep pushing the others in line and learn to get in a proper line!
- You cannot, when Aunt Heather is in the office, go in the queue of computing
- Dance class: first let the younger kids dance, and the older kids watch them. Then, the older kids dance and the little ones sit to watch the dance
- [Added to attend Vicky’s needs] One needs both hands to get the tag, and she may fall if she takes both hands from the walker. She asks her cousin but every day he takes a beating in the line of computers, every day.

Sabina was dictating and emphasized that last part. When they finished dictating, I asked what they wanted to do with it. After all, I had written in my notebook. I offered to copy it on a blank sheet, so they would have a copy. They liked that idea.

I started writing and speaking aloud while I copied. They were very attentive, and now and then changed some words. A few more kids had passed by and stopped to see what was going on, joining the small group. In the end, I handed the list to them, and those around the table decided to sign the paper. Vicky said: “It should not be signed only by us, we should make a petition out of it!” The others gave enthusiastic and loud support to her idea. I asked: “ok, then what?” “Then we’ll deliver it to Aunt Heather!”
And they ran to the corridor leading to the rooms (art, playroom, and library).

I was surprised ten-year-old Vicky knew the word “petition” (in Portuguese: abaixo assinado). This is not a typical everyday vocabulary. Apparently they all did know the word “petition” as well, since no one asked what it was, knowing it was related to having people signing up to support an issue. Later, I was in the dance room when the group of children, some of the same, some missing, and some that had joined, rushed in the room with the “petition” in hand, trying to deliver it to the CCCria coordinator. From afar, I noticed that there were far more signatures on the list. The coordinator received the paper, looked it over, said something to the children and stuffed it in the back pocket of her jeans. The children looked at each other and ran out of the room.

(End of observation).

I felt the children were expecting some sort of reaction, a comment from her (or maybe I was, having followed up the process) – but Heather was busy with something else at the time. However, she did read and take into consideration what they had suggested. She told me later that on several occasions she had talked to the children and asked them to make suggestions on how to solve the bottleneck problem of the computer room. What I observed was part of a process to solve a problem that adults and children alike were aware of, and that had no easy solution. In the following months I saw some of their solutions (and others) being tested: educators distributing tags; younger children getting all the tags on days where the older kids went to soccer practice; a list, organized by the children, of who would go to the computer room on that day. For every solution, new problems would arise that generated more discussions and new solutions. The
important point was not the specific solution, but the process of being part of the problem solving process, including some frustration when the solution didn’t work.

Another episode where children used the “petition” instrument happened during July 2009, when the winter break was about to begin. During both summer and winter breaks, CCCria opened in only one shift, either in the morning or the afternoon, and all children were united during that time. The Center organizes the routine in this manner mostly for administrative reasons. By having all children for half the time they freed half the staff to have their vacation time, since CCCria is open all year long. During the breaks, there were fewer children attending CCCria, either because some of the parents also take breaks and are available to take care of them, or because it is a chance to spend some time out of the community, visiting relatives for a few days.

One morning, about a week before the winter break, two boys came running into the office and said to the secretary that they would like to have a different activity during the holiday. CEACA-Vila used to have some sort of camp for the winter and summer breaks, sometimes taking the children on field trips, but there was nothing planned this year, in part because the organization’s budget was tight. The question they were asked was: Is it something just the two of you want? What do the others think about that?

They immediately started to go from room to room, explaining their idea, and collecting more suggestions from other kids. As Daphne, CCCria secretary, reported in an interview, when I asked about an example of some children-led initiative.

Daphne: Ah, one recent was the camp. Speaking to you now I just remembered.

Juan came to me: “Aunt, we want to have a camp!” And they had already
decided. Of course, it was just a small group at first, then they opened the discussion to a larger group, and then to the kids in the afternoon shift.

I: And how did they open it to the group?

Daphne: First, they talked to the morning children, right, because they were still in different shifts. When they came to us, it was a small group. And they brought us this desire they had. Then we asked them, but you have already asked other friends about that? They rushed to the dance room, Teresa’s room, and gathered there. When I got to her room, they were putting on paper the activities that they wanted, and what would be the prize.

The activity chosen by the children was a competitive game or more precisely a tournament, with several tasks. The teams had to perform the tasks related to the contents of the CCCria and get scores for each one. They had listed a song competition, a dance contest, a math contest, a spelling contest, a poetry contest, speed race, potato-in-a-spoon race, sack race, and others. The teams had to cheer for whoever was competing, but also had to be on good behavior – no name calling, no horse playing, no cheating. The adults would give scores, and the teams could lose points for behavior, a rule that was created by the adults and discussed with the children. At the end, there would be a winning team, who would get a special prize.

I: What did they choose for a prize?

Daphne: Oh it was great, it was a snack. A special snack, only for the winners - and it was pretty cool. And then we took their idea to the kids in the afternoon shift and they agreed.
I: They couldn’t do it themselves because they were not here in the afternoon – they were in school.

Daphne: Yeah, then they accepted. On the day [camp begun], they were all here, and we had no problem. We joined the two shifts in mixed teams and it was pretty cool.

I: They got along well.

Daphne: They mingled.

I: And who won?

Daphne: The orange team won.

I: And then they had the special snack?

Daphne: They had it, yes...they had very nice things, they had hot dogs, popcorn, chocolate cake...

I: Here at the Cultural Center?

Daphne: Yes. Everyone was aware that the winner team would win a special meal – that was the prize they had chosen. Still, there were a few children wanting some, looking inside the room, saying “Oh, auntie, can I have some too?” We would say: are you from the orange team? No. So let's hope next year your team will also be champion, right? (Laughs) Chilled guaraná [soda], you know, everybody want some of these goodies, but it was pretty cool, they couldn’t even believe it, I think they did not expect to get that much, so you know, they thought ... maybe a cake with pop, but it was something so different.
I: It was very fancy

Daphne: It was, and they loved it.

Children’s opinions and their organized movement affected the course of events at the CCCria in meaningful ways. The past example shows the children’s capacity of organization to put forward a tournament. On other occasions, the children voicing their opinions and presenting substantial arguments affected the CCCria structure in important ways. CCCria was designed for children from 4 to 10 years old. The original plan already included the regular visit from younger children, as young as two years old, coming from the Patinho daycare. During the first year, the first group of children that were about to reach the age of 10 didn’t want to leave after such a short time. They created a movement to stay longer, arguing that a child is 10 (the age covered by CCCria) until the next birthday, and therefore they were entitled to stay until the day they turned 11. After considering the children’s argument, the CCCria coordinators, together with CECIP team, agreed to change the rule, and children were allowed to spend one more year at the Center than they would previously.

Another example of children negotiating changes with the adults regarding CCCria’s internal policies happened also during the first year. As mentioned earlier, children were free to choose an activity room and stay there as long as they wanted, changing freely from one room to another. CCCria also had an external area, which they did not count as an activity room. In communities like the Macacos, built on hills, the flat (and safe) areas to play are scarce. Children immediately saw this rather small area as a place to play soccer and many other games that involved running around. As a result,
especially on sunny days, the rooms were getting empty. In an assembly, the problem was discussed, showing the children that the adults there were preparing interesting things for them, and that the CCCria was also about learning new things. Finally, a compromise was reached: the children would all go to activity rooms before snack time, and after snack, they could choose between playing outside or go to activity rooms. This rule was still in place during my research and I observed only a few occasions where children needed to be reminded of it. The way it was handled helped the children reflect. The new rule was made together with them, made sense, and ultimately helped organize their day.

Another case of children contributing to improve the activities at the Center showed how observation can lead to important learning. This story was told by the educators to Josephina:

One day, two young girls decided to try on a new role. They went to the toy room, asked the educator if they could observe the room for a while. The educator was puzzled, since children didn’t need permission from the adults to enter a room. However, seen that the children were serious about getting her permission, she said yes. Having got permission, they stood in a corner, looked around, holding a paper and pencil. One would take notes, and the other would tell what to add. After a few minutes, they thanked the educator and left the room. They repeated this routine in five rooms. At the end of the day, they had done evaluation sheets of each room, describing the activity and climate of the room, and giving feedback to the educator. One room would have congratulations to the educator, if the activity was going well. Or have the description of a messy room, and
a gentle scolding on the educator “What a mess! Get real, educator!” Once they had finished their work, they decided to turn their evaluation in to CECIP coordinator.

By doing this, children were showing how much they were observing the adults, educators and researchers both. They reproduced the routine of asking permission to observe, as they had seen researchers and evaluators do. They were very competent in describing the room situation first, and then make a judgment on the quality of the work. This demonstrates that the children had a clear idea of what an adequate room looked like, and could compare their idea of an adequate room to what was indeed happening. Finally, they translated this judgment into an evaluative comment, positive or negative, and delivered it in a sensitive way. The criticism statement conveyed the message but used gentle words and many hearts pictured on the side. These two children took the initiative and followed through, on their own. These evaluations were presented and discussed during the following actualization session, and educators were amazed at the precise description of the rooms, of how they were perceived by the children, how important their role is and how children expect certain attitudes from them. Their participation in improving the center was valued by the educators, who took in both the criticism and the praise with good humor.

A fifth case of children’s participation was emblematic because the children took their claim beyond the CCCria walls. The children spontaneously organized themselves to go after what they considered was their right, confirming the direction Dewey (1944) discussed, that by stimulating children’s participation and initiative to solve problems, the institution (school or not) would help form better, more participative citizens able to
transform society. This story was told by the CCCria coordinator as a sign of real
protagonism. In her interview, she said, “Truly, for me, the protagonism, is in fact that
action.” I paraphrase the story below.

The story involved Dona Anastacia, community leader and charismatic authority,
who was part of the team who created and still runs the CEACA-Vila. As the Center
manager, CEACA-Vila has made decisions in the past that affect the CCCria, its
educators, and children in several ways. The decisions are made considering what was
best for the institution, having at heart the interest of the community and making the best
use of their scarce resources. These decisions were then communicated in a top-down
fashion to the different projects, and CCCria was no exception. For example, they were
usually told something like, “Dona Anastacia wants the kids to have a camp, starting next
week.” Nobody questioned the order, very likely out of respect for the many years she
dedicated to the community. The issue was then “how is the team going to handle it and
prepare for it.” I had seen this happen a few times already in my previous experience with
CEACA-Vila and CECIP. However, CEACA-Vila had never worked with the idea of
protagonism in their projects before. This time, the decision was that the dance teacher
was going to split her time between CCCria and the CEACA-Vila’s teenager project to
serve both groups. As a consequence, instead of being at the CCCria four times a week,
she was going to be there only three times a week. As Heather, the CCCria coordinator
recalled during an interview:

Heather: Teresa, the (dance) teacher, had her schedule changed and it was pretty
quick, on the account of being the president of the organization asking,
right, and so the change happened from a Friday effective the following Monday. Monday she didn’t show up [at the CCCria], and it was explained to the children. And when it was explained to them, the children simply didn’t accept it (laughs). Really, the correct procedure would not be like that. The way we do things, the Cultural Center way, was to discuss the issue before hand, so they have some time and can understand, but this time, it was something more abrupt... however, it is in these moments that we will see, right, because when we're talking, dialoguing, things are being mediated, right? However, when we actually see the child as a protagonist of the action, is when he or she acts, because you will only see if he or she is a protagonist if he or she is, in fact, acting.

I: What did they do?

Heather: They made a petition [to have their teacher back full time], and they went as a group, walked across the community all the way to CEACA door, asking to talk to the president, (laughs) saying they would not back out and would stay there until they got a solution. In the end, the decision wasn’t changed, but they understood, although they still did not like it much, you know. However, they provoked a change in how the president acts. Now if she has to change something she’ll think twice on how to do it, how to conduct the process. I think this is an example that even if... despite not having achieved what they wanted, they went as far as they could go... because the children are almost always “directed,” by the adults, they
need the adults, of course they need them, because they are in a developmental stage. But we have to give children this space so they can also take a stand in that way, you know, because we’ll only see it [protagonism] in an action, because everyone can say “I am this” but it will only be true if you really act that way.

This episode shows the attitude of the CCCria leader, who understood and supported the movement initiated and organized by the children, even if this might have gotten her into some trouble with the central administration. It shows also the children took initiative because they knew that they mattered and decisions that affected them shouldn’t be made without consulting with them – which translates precisely to what the UN Convention discussed in Chapter III advocated.

In the same interview, Heather talked about the relationship between educators and children. The children called everybody “tia” or “tio,” which mean aunt and uncle. This is a strong deeply rooted trait of Brazilian culture. Every adult that is somewhat close to a child, even if not related, even if just an acquaintance of the parents, a neighbor, a vendor, is called aunt or uncle. It expresses respect, most of all, but also affection. This habit spread to the schools as well, where for decades the teachers, especially in the younger grades, are called “tia” by the students. Paulo Freire (1997), among many others, fought against this habit in schools. He was deeply engaged in discussing the importance of valuing the teacher’s professional identity, calling teachers by their names. However, even if children are taught to address the teachers by their names, when kids talk about what happened in school they refer to “the school’s Aunt.”
At CCCria, this tradition was allowed, not even questioned: many times, we asked children about the name of an adult with whom they have daily contact, and all they knew was that she was a “tia.” Or they would add some characteristic, for example, the “tia” from the library. Some others would call tia and add the name, for example, “Tia Daphne,” or “Tia Luiza.”

In this context, Heather highlighted trust and strong bonds as a sine qua non conditions for nurturing children participation. She said:

[At CCCria] The child abandons him or herself in the act of playing, gets into it, deep into a fantasy world, puts on a costume, and this is magical in the sense that he or she is putting him or herself out there, he or she is being protagonist of the action, forgetting all the outside worries. But also, sometimes, they bring their concerns here, from home, from school, sometimes it’s a homework they have to do. Yesterday there was one that was trying to do some research and wasn’t finding what she was looking for, then the educator from the library brought books and helped her out. So they can find here people to help them with mediations. I think that what sums it up is the term "Protected Space" in all this, you know, within the community. As I see it really is, as much for the children as for the families. It is a place where there is trust. And to be a protagonist, you have to trust. You will only be a protagonist on something if you can trust. Because to be a protagonist is to take a stand. How are you going to do this in an environment where you don’t trust people? You can’t, right, because people say, Ah, here it’s a place for children and children say and do what they want anywhere. That’s not true, it really depends. If the child doesn’t get the support he or she needs, he or she may
take a stand, encounter some heavy barriers and close down on herself like an oyster.

Heather referred to the term “protected space,” which was the name of the project sent to the van Leer Foundation and still referred to in the CCCria mission and other documents. Safe was used here as a place where the children are protected from harm in all possible senses, where they cannot be harmed in any way, a place where they are safe from violence, from the shootings, from being enrolled in the drug traffic, safe from domestic violence and domestic accidents as well. This dimension of the CCCria is extremely important to the community. The story below shows what children observed and how they react to what they saw:

Julie asks to draw in my notebook, and I allow it. She draws a house with thick walls, with an “x” all around it. She says her father taught her how to draw houses this way. The house has lots of details: windows, door knob, a chimney. She holds the pencil firmly, her drawing comes out strong on paper. In the sky she draws clouds and a sun with rays, eyes, nose and a smiley mouth. She laughs. On the wall she scribbles something. She mumbles it to me, but I don’t understand a word of it, and ask her to repeat. She says louder that it’s the graffiti that the police draw on the outside of the street door, when they found marijuana in the house. A friend scolds her – ”Don’t say these things – those are ugly things.” Julie signs her full name on the drawing, with firm handwriting, writing fast. (Observation by CC:23/05/08, Toy room).

Summing up, children’s protagonism was observed at CCCria in a range of policies and actions. There children not only felt safe from harm but also safe to express themselves and advance their demands. They participated in decision making to the
degree they wanted to and developed their autonomy. They did engage autonomously in actions ranging from their own participation in activities of their choice, to initiating movements that would take their requests outside the CCCria’s walls. The current literature on the subject associates several benefits to children participating, as for example developing skills of cooperation, improving self esteem, increased involvement (Miller, 2003; Hart, 1992). The examples presented above, and the strategies developed to encourage this participation described below, show that even in an environment where violence is the norm, and where poverty and poor urban living conditions exert stress on the community, children get involved, had things to contribute and want to be part of the solution to the problems they identify.

**Participation through Children’s Assemblies**

Participation was also a key issue in protagonism. One instrument CCCria used to facilitate children participation was the assembly, as described earlier in this chapter. When I asked children about the assemblies, some were a little confused by the word and didn’t remember right away what it was. However, Anderson (8 years old), for example, recalled with great detail a recent assembly held at the dance room. He remembered that there were approximately 20 chairs placed in a circle, and that a microphone was used so everyone could hear what was said. Children had to signal that they wanted to speak, and an adult was in charge to keep the order in which children would give their contributions. He said, during an interview:

*I: Do you know what an assembly is?*

*Anderson: An assembly? It is when we go, ... yah, I’ve been to one. About the*
environment. So, it was like, the aunt said something, she had the microphone, then whomever has something to say, she would call on them, you had to raise your hand, and then you would go there, and get the microphone and talk to everybody. There were lots of chairs, in circle, and the others were seated. The children and the aunts.

I: Did you say something?

Anderson: I talked six times.

I: Wow! What did you say?

Anderson: Can’t remember! (laughs)

I: But did you enjoy talking?

Anderson: I did. I remember that we talked about three things: marbles, cards and... the planet.

I: And tell me, what was decided on the issue of cards?

Anderson: Cards... only on Fridays. I said Monday and Friday, and the aunt chose only Friday. I thought a little bit and said, it’s better to do it on Fridays then the Aunt said ok.

I: What about the marbles?

Anderson: We’ll play that on Mondays. Monday only.

I: So Monday is marble day, Friday is cards day. Why do you have to have one day for each thing?

Anderson: Why? Because if it was every day, everybody was going to play those games instead of going to the rooms.
I: The rooms were getting empty.

Anderson: That, and the aunt had nothing to put on the displays, to show what we are doing.

I: And children agreed with those changes?

Anderson: More or less. There are people bringing them everyday anyway.

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. For the marbles they are respecting the rule a little bit more. That's all. Respecting more or less.

During the interview, Anderson showed his enthusiasm. He was thrilled to participate and to be able to speak up. However it seems that the adults brought to the assembly some ideas already set. Anderson didn’t seem entirely happy with the result. Interestingly enough, the deal they reached wasn’t being fully respected by the children, as it maybe did not make a lot of sense to them. It seemed to be a valuable learning process for children and adults alike.

In her interview, Silvia (7 years old) remembered issues dealt with in another assembly. Her memories were related to one type of assembly where issues related to the good functioning of the Center were brought to the attention of all children, aiming to improve these aspects. She said:

I: Have you gone to an assembly, Silvia?

Silvia: An assembly? Yeah.

I: How was it?

Silvia: At the assembly, the aunt told us about the bathroom, that they [the
children] don’t flush, don’t wash their hands, and leave the bathroom all wet.

In 7-year-old Emilia’s interview, in August 2009, I asked about the assembly. She started to explain to me the assembly and I realized she was confusing it with the Fun Saturday, where families are invited to the CCCria. When I asked about the children’s assembly, she got back on track, and said:

Children Assembly... It’s the same thing as the one with the mothers. Well, actually, children assembly, when it is not on Saturday, it is not the same thing that the mother’s, because it is only to talk about the fights, about the field trip that we are going to have. Always, at Christmas, we get toys here. And I always wished for a bike, at Christmas, but the fact is that Aunt Daphne said that at Christmas, for the kids that have been good, they are going to raffling off a bike for those who want to.

It was clear the adults seem to be making an effort to promote participation through the assemblies and some educators were enthusiastic about them. Chloe, for example, who saw the beginning of the Cultural Center, misses having more of them, as she said in her interview:

I told Heather we needed to do an assembly. Because I really find the assembly interesting, they [the children] participate, they say what they want, the child speaks freely, gives his or her opinion, and complains also. It is a chance for them to complain about something, and we haven’t had many assemblies anymore, but I thought it was pretty cool. Having that moment – not every day. Now and then, Heather does promote one, at times when there is a field trip coming, or a meeting of some sort. Then she takes
that opportunity and talks with them about stuff that is happening at the Cultural Center and asks them: what do you think about that? Sometimes there is a lot of fighting over soccer and that calmed down somewhat.

In his interview Leo, also an educator, agreed with Chloe that the assemblies were an innovative element, and raised questions about why they became scarce. He said:

*I think that's the thing of putting into practice, too, I don’t know. ‘The assembly was nice, real nice, but I think ... something was missing. Better planning, perhaps, before starting the assembly. When they thought of in having an assembly, [decide] how is the assembly going to be, who will do what, ... because there are things that need to be said, someone need to have the gift of oratory, someone has to know how to lead an assembly. Because there are key questions, right, also key answers. An assembly, for me, can not be done by anyone at anytime. So I guess what I am saying is that there is a lack of planning, I mean, when is it going to be? Conducted by whom? Will it be a meeting with the children only? Children and the educators? Educators with the children, and so on. So I guess what is lacking is this basic organizational stuff, and we can do it. But really, it got lost. And I won’t remember why either. But I think it is something that comes from practice. This is the first project I see doing assemblies. I guess nobody is used to these new things either. The Cultural Center is very modern about this stuff, I think we have to prepare the educator, too, the educator has to be prepared for these innovations.*

This last sentence seems to indicate that despite the existing training opportunities the team has had over the years, some of them believe that they still need more support, more knowledge, and more discussions before they can implement the assemblies
In recent years the literature on child participation has been growing, stimulated by the promulgation of the UN CRC. Most of it, however, is published in English, limiting the team’s access to it. In fact, participation through assemblies is being tried in several parts of the world in schools that want to open to children’s participation. Lansdown (2001) said:

If children are to be able to express their views, it is necessary for adults to create the opportunities for children to do so. In other words, Article 12 imposes an obligation on adults in their capacity as parents, professionals and politicians to ensure that children are enabled and encouraged to contribute their views on all relevant matters. This does not, of course, imply that children should be required to give their views if they are not willing or interested in doing so. (p. 2)

At CCCria, at first, children had to participate in the assembly. Asking CECIP team about it, they argued that children needed to know what an assembly was to then have enough information to decide if they wanted to participate or not. Once they became familiar with the procedures, the assemblies became optional, and children who participated did it by choice. Some did in a regular fashion, some participated only when the subject was interesting to them (soccer rules, for example, attracted many boys) and their opinions and priorities were respected.

Summing up, the assembly was considered by all as an important part of the methodology, since it promoted participation; however it was a strategy educators had trouble implementing. It took time and, effort, and sometimes the procedures were
inadequate. Other strategies for participation were implemented at CCCria, for example the already mentioned petitions, often created by the children themselves. The permanence of the assembly as a strategy to promote participation, keeping the discussion on how to improve it, confirms Fullan’s (2005) theory that an innovation’s sustainability depends on how it relates to the local culture. The assemblies were unfamiliar to children, staff, and leadership of the organization, therefore more efforts had to be made to incorporate it. On the other hand, the CCCria team and its children were encouraged to try the novelty, reflect, and improve. This allowed the team to reinterpret the novelty and progressively adjust it to meet their need for a structure that promoted an opportunity for adults and children to listen to each other, valuing and considering everyone in the solutions they reached.

Children Organize Themselves

I observed several ways children organize themselves routinely, especially in the outside area, where they played freely after snack time. They organized their games, inventing the rules and playing by them. No adult interference was involved. It was self-regulated and worked well most of the time. For example, the children organized themselves to get in line, spontaneously, for jumping rope. It happened that one of the children took it upon herself to announce it – and the others followed her lead. Their goal was spending minimum time on organizing and maximum time on actually playing. When the children (mostly boys) played soccer, there was a code of rotating the team. For example, after two goals you had to leave, and let someone else get a turn. Because of their extreme love for the game, this was probably where most conflicts occurred,
sometimes needing the interference of an adult. It was very interesting to observe the way they shared such a small space, allowing for a soccer game, a jump rope game, a game of tag, and a group of children sitting on the floor talking, all at the same time. Now and then there were small accidents, children running into each other, but it was mostly children in action that I observed.

An episode of a special kind of children’s organization caught my attention as something of a different nature. It happened related to the computer room and the everyday dispute to get a spot there. I identified three contributing factors that explained why that space became the most disputed in all of CCCria. The first was the children’s fascination for learning about computers, technology, and playing the games. They clearly enjoyed being there, the skills they learned, the interaction with the educators and the time spent on games, especially on internet games, was a must. The second factor was that there were few available spots. While the other rooms easily fit 20 children, the computer room had, for the two first years, only four computers. With two children per computer, the room served only eight children per hour (sometimes the session lasted 45 or 50 minutes). Even having three slots of time, that meant that 24 out of 100 children would have a turn in any given day. The third factor was the locked time. As opposed to the other rooms where the fast rotation of children means that they rarely have to wait long before getting where they want, the computer room has a set time. That means that when eight children were in the room, many of the 92 others wished they could be there. This caused frustration, sometimes expressed by kicking the door.

The combination of these factors created the perception of the computer room tag
being more valuable than the others, and therefore it became an object of desire and dispute like no other tag in CCCria. After snack, when one group of children would leave the room, the educator would try to put the tags back on the board, but a small mob of children would dispute, sometimes aggressively, to get to the tags. To deal with that issue, the adults got involved many times, designing different solutions with the children.

In early days, the educators noticed that some tags for that room were missing from the board at the end of the day. Soon the team found out that children were taking the tags home, to guarantee their spots the next day. An assembly was held to deal with this issue, and the discussion centered on how this behavior would affect other children’s chance to participate, as well as reminding why there were tags, what was the rule, and what would happen if everyone started acting this way. Children came to the conclusion that that was not fair play.

The petition story told previously also described how the children tried to solve the problem. One way was to create a list (with the children involvement) with the names of children who would have a turn that day. They would mix younger and older kids, girls and boys, especially targeting kids who seldom had a chance to be in the room. However, some unexpected things happened. Older children would go to younger kids and beg them to give them their recently acquired computer room tag, in exchange for favors or friendship. Sometimes, the tag was exchanged for an extra cookie at snack time or even for the whole snack. Bernardo told this story:

*On the first slot of time, there is no way, the tags go to the kids who get here first, and the older kids get here first. But on the second slot, I have a better hold on the tags.*
They already know that they got a turn, they can’t come back that same day, to give other children a turn, and that allow for some mix [age wise]…They know the difficulty, they know that the younger children fought for that tag and won’t give it up. So they have to think of some strategy to try to earn that tag. Of course sometimes I’m near and I see it, “Gee, let him have a turn, you go there everyday, he never gets to go, come on, man” but generally I’m not around, when I see they have already traded tags.

I watched this scene closely and never saw or heard accounts of intimidation, or bullying regarding the “acquisition” of tags. But these strategies of buying tags were certainly inspired by the adult world, systems the children know and reinterpret adapting to their reality. As Bernardo said, one strategy used by the older children, who have more autonomy at home, was to come early in the morning. The children woke up earlier to get to CCCria as soon or even before it opens, and therefore have better chances to get a tag. This strategy was used by the afternoon group as well, some children skipped lunch to be there early. The tower entrance only opened at 1 p.m. and children got there sometimes as early as noon. I often saw a group of ten or fifteen children playing at the entrance of CCCria, inside the downstairs gates, interestingly, a large number of them barefooted. The CCCria coordinator called my attention to it and explained what it was. The children interested in going to the computer room had made a line, according to arrival, but instead of being stuck waiting in line, they had agreed to place their flip flops in line, each pair of flip flop sandals representing its owner, who was then free to play while waiting for the gates to open. At 1 p.m. sharp or as soon as they saw the educator getting to the door, they all ran back to their flip flops, and the line was in perfect order.
This type of spontaneous organization may very well happen in other spaces children go. The difference that I saw was that at CCCria the team of educators and the leader asked questions and took interest in such practices, encouraging kids to be creative and autonomous in how they solve the problems they find. They listened to their solutions and established a dialogue with them. On occasion, I witnessed discussions where the adult seemed to have his or her heart set on reaching certain solution, and, therefore, used his or her power of argumentation to do so. In many other accounts, some of them already presented in this chapter, I saw adults truly amazed at things children notice, aspects they feel need to change, and solutions they design. Those occasions seemed to reinforce the team’s belief on children’s ability to handle problems and decisions in a mature fashion. These stories were then told in meetings, in informal situations, passed on to parents, told to newly arrived educators, and become part of the CCCria’s story inventory. Those helped consolidate the culture, the “CCCria’s way” to handle situations.

Closing Remarks

This chapter was composed of four parts, aimed to give an accurate account of an innovative experience that can hopefully inspire other educators. First, I described how CCCria came to exist as a project and the struggle to create a place inside a poor, urban community, involving the community members, and daring to implement an innovative methodology never tried before. Setting the stage where the experience happens, in the first section I shared the story of how different organizations came together and built a relationship based on trust, on common goals, and on listening to each other’s needs,
possibilities and limitations. The highlights of this passage were the methodology used to involve the community in designing how a cultural center would look like, as well as the importance of creating strong partnerships, respecting each partners’ knowledge and role.

The second part addressed the first research question, that is, how the concept of children’s protagonism was put into practice in CCCria. Starting with the selection and training of the educators, the basic concepts were exemplified through the creators, the educators, and the leader’s discourse. I described strategies and activity rooms as concrete examples of this methodology. I also offered some views on methodological and financial sustainability, a concern for the years to come, and what mechanisms were in place to address it, including the important role children play as keepers of the methodology. A more in-depth analysis on this aspect will be offered in Chapter VI.

In part three, I described the challenges educators and their leader faced in their learning process. The solutions they found to overcome those challenges are offered to the reader as suggestions for other practitioners. This part relates to my second research question – emphasizing how the educators adjust their practices to implement this methodology, using their previous experiences. These educators many times, questioned and changed the way they saw and interacted with children both professionally and in their personal lives. Finally, in the fourth part I respond to the third research question, presenting some of the children’s view and how they respond to this methodology. Stories offered tell how children are skilled at organizing themselves and solve problems they identify.

I have shown that children are amazing at organizing themselves, given time, love
and the proper support. The ability to listen to children and considering their point of view is not easy, and always worth it. As a result of their experience at CCCria, children had the opportunity to acquire a know-how of participation they did not have anywhere else, neither in the community, family, nor school. The benefits from this experience could be seen in the development of these children, how their participation matured over time, how they mastered the rules and incorporated the culture. Children self-regulated their activities and participation level, becoming more autonomous in their choices. The children and educators who belong to the community are the ones who will make CCCria methodology sustainable. In the next chapter I discuss the implications of these findings.
CHAPTER VI
DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I will discuss the implications derived from what I presented and learned about the CCCria for educators who work with children in schools or in less formal education settings. I bring to the table aspects that emerged from the analysis of the data collected in the field and in the literature that I found relevant to include in this discussion. I offer three theses and present themes and evidence to support them.

The first thesis I propose is that protagonism, autonomy, and respect for children’s rights, once implemented as a methodology, led to children having more initiative and contributing solutions to problems that affect them. This thesis proved true even in the most difficult conditions, like those described in this study done in a favela where poverty and violence were the norm. In light of the CRC convention, this is no minor finding – it shows a concrete way to achieve children’s participation, which 198 countries around the world signed off to do. Later in this chapter, I offer a conclusion tying the theme to the CRC and Brazilian policies.

The second thesis I advance is that adults learn when they are supported, when what they are learning makes sense to them, when it considers their feelings, beliefs and needs, and when they are not afraid to make mistakes. The learning process transforms them deeply, altering some core values. This confirms the most current theories of andragogy.

The third thesis I offer is that, even in trying conditions, children learn best when they feel they belong to a community, they are trusted, loved, and have freedom to make
choices. They learn when they are seen for their potential and not for their shortcomings, when they can try out new things without being judged. Violence affects children in many ways, but their creativity in looking for solution to problems remains a resource that can contribute to change this environment.

In the following sections, I will highlight aspects that made this experience unique yet quite universal. I will reflect on the benefits of fostering children’s autonomy, protagonism and citizenship for the children themselves and for the community. Finally, before my final considerations, I will discuss the issue of sustainability, using Fullan’s framework, which was presented in previous chapters.

The Children’s Cultural Center and Its Context

One of the aspects central to my research at CCCria was to investigate how the concepts of children’s protagonism and children’s participation were created and its tenets translated into a series of strategies implemented by community educators. I had the idea of exploring this innovative experience when I first heard of the discussions that lead to the creation of the CCCria. It seemed challenging to implement a complex concept as children’s protagonism, especially with young children and especially in a context of poverty and violence. The Morro dos Macacos where CCCria is located was, at that time, one of the poorest and more violent communities of Rio de Janeiro.

As described in Chapter V, at CCCria the concept of child protagonism was translated into practice through strategies that promoted children’s autonomy (tags, ownership of the time to stay or leave) while encouraging citizenship through facilitating their participation. CCCria’s team put in place strategies to encourage children’s
participation, as for example, assemblies, creating opportunities for dialogue, and conflict resolution strategies, discussion of rules, and the outmost respect for children’s rights. Those strategies implemented at CCCria promoted opportunities for children to develop as protagonists, leading the action and getting involved in identification, discussion and resolution of problems.

The Center’s educators identified with and valued children’s experiences living in the community. In addition to valuing the positive aspects of the life of this community, the Center offered opportunities to explore cultural opportunities outside the community and establish a dialogue with different forms of culture. Children and educators shared the experience of engaging with new cultural spaces (museums, theaters, circuses) together, and bring these into their creative work. Educators and children interacted to create meaning, building together a way to cooperate that made sense for both of parties, based on solidarity and respect for different knowledge and experiences. The relationship built between children and adults was key to creating a learning environment where children felt ownership, while counting on the adults to help them and partner in their discoveries and pursuits.

CCCria in the Context of Previous Experiences in Democratic Education

During the review of the literature for this study, I found that CECIP’s proposal was connected with early examples in democratic education – especially with the work of John Dewey. Important educators in Brazil were influenced by this American philosopher’s ideas. I also recognized many aspects of educator Paulo Freire’s work as well, and made connections with other experiences (usually in schools), like the early
childhood Reggio Emilia schools in Italy, Summer Hill in England, and recent experiences with democratic public school in Brazil. These examples and experiences share at least two common threads. One was encouraging children’s curiosity in building and exploring the curriculum. Another was stimulating children’s participation on many levels. This brought me to an important question: why wasn’t CCCria called a school? Or why didn’t CCCria call itself a school? Despite having 93.5 percent of the youth population in schools for an average of four and a half hours a day, Brazil ranked 88th out of 128 nations, with an EDI\textsuperscript{20} of 0.883, which is medium according to the UNESCO (2010) classification. If children can’t master the curriculum, maybe there is something to be said about how educators are going about teaching it, and about how the schools are conceptualizing knowledge and organizing themselves to promote it. Making learning more child-oriented, more child-led, more connected to the children, their reality and interests, more fun and less repetitious might be a way to keep the children in schools for longer. The high dropout rate from first to fifth grade is reason Brazil received such a low international ranking (UNESCO, 2010).

The practices implemented at the CCCria reminded me of another UNESCO report called Learning: The Treasure Within (UNESCO, 1996). This report postulates that life-long education for the 21st century should be based on four pillars: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be. In my observations and

\textsuperscript{20} Education for All Development Index (EDI) provides a composite measure of progress, encompassing access, equity and quality. Because of data availability constraints, it includes only the four most easily quantifiable goals, attaching an equal weight to each: universal primary education (goal 2); adult literacy for those aged 15 and above (first part of goal 4); gender parity and equality (goal 5). The EDI value for a given country is the arithmetic mean of the four proxy indicators. It falls between 0 and 1, with 1 representing full EFA achievement. (Unesco, 2010)
in each of the stories told by educators or by the children I could always identify one or more pillars being worked on with and by the children. I saw children learning skills in all the rooms, from music, dance, arts, computer, and later English and cooking workshops. I saw them learning to get along with each other, discussing rules while playing games, or whenever there was a conflict, or proposing strategies to improve their environment. I saw them expressing themselves using several means, discovering who they were and what they liked and disliked, what their strength or weaknesses were, while invited in working on both. Finally, I could identify occasions where the children followed their curiosity, being helped by the educators.

The following story exemplifies well the process of dialoging with the child and encouraging its autonomy in the search for answers, helping him or her learning how to learn. A seven year old boy wanted to know what glass was made of, a curiosity that started in the art room. Not knowing the answer, the educators suggested looking for the answer at the library. Not finding the answer there either, but having a few more people interested in his problem, he ended his quest in the computer room. Interestingly enough, the adults didn’t know the answer the boy was looking for and were as curious as he was to know the result of his research. The answer he found was passed on, and everyone discovered that glass was made of sand, processed in a certain way, as well as many more facts that enriched their knowledge.

According to Edwards, Gandini and Forman (1999) Malaguzzi, Reggio Emilia’s school pioneer educator, said that children were capable of making meaning from their daily life experiences through mental processes involving planning, linking ideas and
facts, and abstraction. In his view, as I saw happening at CCCria, the central role of the adults caring for their education was to activate, especially indirectly, the meaning-making competencies of children as a basis of all learning. According to the authors, the Italian educator Malaguzzi believed the work of educators involved capturing the right moments, then finding the right approaches for bringing meanings and interpretations together into a rich dialogue with the children.

As the above sections demonstrate, the CCCria was a place of learning; why not call it a school, then? Maybe a school as Dewey would have liked schools to be. It seems that the lack of designation as a school was a matter of identity. Children and adults did not associate schools with what happened at CCCria: fun, games, visual arts, dance, music, and freedom to make choices. Children did learn at CCCria, and they gave examples of what they had learned not only during the interviews, but through their artifacts and presentations. Adults learned too, as they showed in their interactions with the children and in participation in the monthly actualization meetings. The children recognized the skills they learned more than the other aspects, while the adults perceived the children’s social development, as well as their own learning on how to deal with protagonism. However, they described CCCria as a place to have fun and play, while the school owned the role of being the place of learning, where learning acquired a more formal, less flexible, and less creative connotation. As a young interviewee said: “…the school has to be serious because we need to learn how to read and write and count.” The children valued the role of school and skills they were supposed to learn there. As progressive educators have said for more than a century, another kind of school is
possible, and some elements of CCCria may inspire the way.

In my years living in different parts of the United States, I found few traces of Dewey’s methods in public education. For example, I was surprised by the lack of autonomy children of all ages had in schools. Far from claiming my limited experience as constituting a representative sample, I had nonetheless the opportunity to visit urban and rural schools, schools with more and less diverse populations. I also had the chance to meet many teachers, principals, and superintendents during my studies, participating in the same classes and having, on occasion, time to debate some of their practices in Michigan schools. It seemed to me that the emphasis was always heavier on control rather than trust, on blind obedience rather than on fostering thinking, questioning, and understanding. I saw few examples of dialogue, of partnership in learning between children and adults, with both parties having fun while doing it, thereby increasing the children’s self-motivation and initiative supported by the adults.

Why is CCCria an exception? Pires (2007) said: “…the shelves are full of books dealing with the promotion of participatory pedagogy, but the schools are empty of these practices” (p. 230). One hypothesis for the cause behind this absence of participatory practice in schools would be fear. As Hill, et al. (2004) said:

Probably the foremost barriers to participation comprise adults’ perceptions, including their images of children’s capacities, and their self-interest in maintaining their own position with respect to children. Linked to this is a view of children’s rights as undermining adults’ authority and rights, with a zero-sum assumption that transferring responsibility to children inevitably takes something away from adults… Parents,
teachers and others are afraid that children will exercise their rights irresponsibly and in a self-centered way. (p. 82)

My research shows, through the experience of CCCria, that when children participate and their participation truly affects change, everyone benefits.

Findings as Theses

To present the findings of my research, I used Foss & Waters (2007) format dividing the findings into three theses, supported by themes that emerged from the analysis of the data. Thesis one, discussed below, shows how the concepts of child protagonism and participation were implemented, and how children responded. Thesis two reflects on the learning path the adults did follow to understand the concepts and learn to look at children and their contributions in another way. Thesis three considers how important relationship building is to create an environment that fosters the children’s engagement, and how the children’s contribution can improve their environment.

Thesis One
Protagonism, autonomy, and respect lead to children being proactive and having initiative. Young children are great communicators and contributors, willing to take on responsibility to lead when assured that their participation will have an impact on the outcome.

This thesis is supported by three themes that emerged from the analysis of the data presented in Chapter V. Those themes are (a) children handle well having freedom to choose and self-regulate their participation in activities; (b) children can learn new forms of participation; and (c) children organize themselves spontaneously when listened to and respected regarding their contributions. They seek ways to participate and solve
problems that affect them and their community. I discuss those themes and the pertinent evidence below.

*Theme 1a: Children Handle Well Having Freedom to Choose and Self-Regulate their Participation in Activities*

Children seemed to have fully incorporated autonomy regarding the choice of activities offered by CCCria. Children mastered the mechanisms to get in the rooms, they were fully aware of the rules (do’s and don’ts), were able to explain them to adults and peers which helped in the process of adapting the newcomers. Most children seemed to accept well some limits to their rights, related to the rights of others. For example, sometimes they would not get a spot at the computer room and have to deal with the frustration and find something else to do. Or they had to deal with not going to a field trip, but trust that they would be included in a later one.

Children seemed aware of how much they were learning and took advantage of the opportunities that were offered by the CCCria. This was true inside and out of the community, on field trips organized aiming to open other possibilities and cultural experiences to the children. CCCria Educators, coming from the same community as the children, served as mediators between their culture and other information they were accessing, listening to their comments and helping the children in applying this newly acquired knowledge in their creative work at CCCria.

An aspect that struck me as I was observing the children was how they could concentrate on one activity for hours while so much was going on simultaneously. For example, in the art room, not only were several activities being offered, but also some of the children were talking or singing loudly, the music in the dance room next door could
be heard, and from time to time one kid would peek inside and announce where he or she was going, or announce something was going on elsewhere. Some kids would leave everything and go. Despite all this noise, some kids wouldn’t move from what they were doing. There is something to be said about the ability to concentrate on a project (or a game, or a book) just because the child chose to dedicate him or herself to this activity. In contrast, there is also something to be said about the discipline and silence often imposed in schools, with the argument that children would only concentrate this way. Children seem to work well in CCCria activity rooms in such a busy and highly stimulating environment.

This observation points to the same direction as Boykin’s studies on African American students learning preferences, especially regarding the theme of verve – defined as the “preferences for multiple classroom activities taking place simultaneously along with an ability to work on several different projects” (Boykin, 1983, as cited by Tyler, Boykin and Walton, 2006, p. 999). Those young children seemed to be so engrossed in their work that exchanging comments with a neighbor, or discussing any other subject while drawing didn’t seem to be challenging for them. On the contrary, it seemed to make the activity more playful and interesting. This seems related to the other themes conceptualized by Boykin and Bailey (2000), i.e. Communalism and Movement. During the few moments that I saw the educators address the whole group, it was about something that would be of interest for all to hear, and this moment would last only a few minutes. The focus was on having the children leading the activities, not the educator. Maybe this was why the silence wasn’t so needed. Sometimes one child would start to
make some noise that would be annoying to others, and they would convey the message immediately. The noise level was therefore self-regulated.

The idea that generated CCCria was to allow children to experiment in the world autonomously and learn from it. As Malu, member of CECIP team that created the methodology implemented at CCCria said in her interview: “We first had as reference Paulo Freire: children reading the world, children thinking critically, socially aware (conscientes), reading the world by themselves, supported by the educators.” At CCCria, children enjoyed the freedom to follow their preferences in terms of how much time they wished to stay in the room. Entering and leaving as they desired, either because they were done with the activity or because they wished to drink, use the bathroom, or see what else was available was often mentioned as a feature they really enjoyed. It was mentioned as one of the pluses of CCCria when contrasting it with their schools. It was notable to see even very young children having control over their time. There was no set time, bells, or pressure to move from one activity to another or from one room to another. Each child could have his or her own time respected. Some children would repeat the same activity or the same gesture many times, just concentrating on something that I couldn’t grasp but that was a source of learning and of pleasure for that child, not to be interrupted.

The fact that people have different ways of learning and different rhythms is well known and well accepted (Boykin & Bailey, 2000). However, there are few opportunities for children live and learn at their own pace. At CCCria, children had materials, opportunities, and time to enjoy them according to their own timing and interest. They had the time to master whatever it was they were interested or ready to learn at that
particular time. This fostered their engagement on the task they had decided to do.

The time not to be engaged in any task, observing the world around was also allowed. In many rooms I saw children just looking around, staring at other children, or seemingly lost in their thoughts. The same perception was confirmed by more than one educator in the interviews. Some children got a tag, entered the room and did nothing, just observed the activity of other children. These were children who are likely to start their learning process by observing. I observed this in the computer room, the art room, the dance room, and the music room. Children had the opportunity to stay there and watch. Or just stay there and think. They would later show how much they were in fact learning while apparently just staring at others.

Theme 1b: Children Learn New Forms of Participation

The concept of protagonism cannot exist without the active participation of everyone. The way CECIP team designed CCCria, participation was insured using two strategies: the first, through the interactions between educators and children in the rooms; the second, through the weekly realization of assemblies, in a town hall meeting format, where all would gather to discuss issues and ideas. Both forms demanded a learning process for all involved.

The interactions in the rooms will be better described in Thesis 2, in how the educators adjust to a different way to interact with children. They struggled to understand and design a role for themselves, as facilitators of child protagonism. They had to review their practice and change from teacher-led to children-led activities. Children had to learn to be autonomous in their actions while respecting the rules and the rights of others. Both
had to learn to express themselves, listen, and be listened to.

There were also many challenges to implementing the assemblies. An important aspect was that the educators in charge of implementing the assemblies were also going through a learning process since participating in assemblies was not part of their culture. They needed to find their role in the assemblies. The procedures of the assemblies had to be fined tuned several times: the children often had trouble listening to each other, going through the process of making a decision, and feeling ownership of that decision. This process, action-reflection-action, also involved, at CCCria, listening to children and educators to identify what was not working, and why, and then work on improving it collectively. This was done during day-to-day conversations in the activity rooms or in more formal gatherings like assemblies. Those were opportunities to get everyone’s input to arrive at original solutions.

In one assembly I observed serves as an example. The educators brought the subject of the bathroom that was not being kept neat by the children (no flushing, water spilled on the floor, and so on). Children agreed that the bathroom was indeed in need of some changes. They also pointed out to the adults that there was often no toilet paper, seldom soap on the dispenser, and nowhere to dry their hands. They added that the soap dispenser was placed too high for the little ones to reach. The adults recognized that it was their responsibility to provide the conditions so everyone could use the bathroom properly. Children decided to make a campaign on proper use of the bathroom and the children in the art room made plastic butterflies to decorate both bathrooms. The adults kept their end of the negotiation and the bathroom improved greatly.
Despite the difficulties, children interviewed said they enjoyed participating in the assembly, and were proud of having expressed their opinions and contributed to solutions to problems that were discussed. The educators also mentioned the assemblies as a challenge, but one that was worth taking on. According to them, each time the assemblies became scarce, an important element of the methodology was lost. The assemblies were reformatted several times, using the feedback from children and educators, looking to become more child-led.

*Theme 1c: Children Organizing Themselves*

One recurrent theme in my observation during the visits to the Center was the ability children had to organize themselves. The movement among children would start spontaneously without the interference of adults. At some point the children would either consult or deliver their product to the adults. The common characteristic was that children were taking action to either solve a problem or pursue a goal they had set for themselves. Examples of many kinds were presented in Chapter V and fall into three categories presented below.

The first type of spontaneous organization involved initiatives geared to solve a problem. For example, the petition the children wrote to solve the bottleneck situation at the computer room. They were able to sit in a small group, talk about the problem and how it affected different people, and then think of solutions to solve it. It was part of a spontaneous movement toward improving their center.

A second form of spontaneous organization was when children had a desire for something, setting a goal for themselves, for example, the talent show they created for
summer camp. In this illustration, children had the idea, submitted to the adults in charge, were encouraged to pursue the idea, and got a group together to organize and realize the activity, while also consulting with all the children. In this case, children took action and saw through every detail, counting on the collaboration of adults as partners in their undertaking. Using Hart’s (1992) scale of participation, this is probably the highest level there is, when children are taking the lead, supported by the adults, who share their experience and contribute to make the children’s vision true.

A third type of spontaneous organization discussed in Chapter V was seen when children showed their ability to get organized and take action outside the Center. Although it happened less often, one example stands out as it shows children felt the need to express their feelings and take action to try to reverse a decision that was made arbitrarily by the organization. A group of children felt strongly when an educator’s schedule was changed, eliminating one day she would work at the Center, without any previous notice or consultation with them. Children felt disrespected and organized a protest against the decision, going to the organization’s headquarters to make their voices heard. This was a clear display of how children learned to be more critical and active citizens, pursuing a solution to what they saw as their rights being violated.

Connecting Thesis One with CRC and Brazilian Policies

There is a growing literature of initiatives looking to implement the CRC. In urban planning, for example, there have been initiatives encouraging children’s participation, based on the CRC’s right to take part in matters affecting their own lives. The lessons learned from these experiences are congruent with what was observed at
CCCria. Knowles-Yánez (2005) cited four reasons for involving children in designing, planning, and executing processes: “...because of (1) their abilities lend themselves to the process, (2) the process provides opportunity to them, (3) the methods of involvement are available and (4) because it is their right” (p. 12). Those reasons apply to CCCria as well.

In Brazil, the Statute of the Child and Adolescent and other important educational policies represent efforts to turn the Convention into reality, improving the life of children in all layers of society. Since they were created almost simultaneously, with the same political orientation and the intention to put the CRC into practice, it is no surprise that both CRC and the ECA Law have strong connections. Both operate within the same framework: considering the child as a rights holder and having included the children’s right to express their views. Both texts include dispositions indicating that the child is capable of forming and expressing his or her opinion, and should be guaranteed the right to be heard. Participation was used in both texts in three different ways. In the first sense, participation was mentioned as the right to have a say in decisions that affect them, mostly but not exclusively in the juridical realm. The second use of participation was the right to take part in cultural activities. Finally the third sense was participation as the right to influence in the political life of their community and country.

The CRC, in Article 12, claims that “States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views, the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child” especially the right to “be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings” regarding the child. The Brazilian ECA Statute says in
its measures of protection when the child’s rights have been violated, that the specific measures to be taken have to consider the pedagogical needs of the child, preferring those that aim to strengthen family and community ties (Title I, Chapter II, Article 100). This article includes in its list of principles: the children’s and adolescents’ right to be fully informed of their situation (Item XI), and their right to participate in all legal matters concerning their well-being (Item XII).

Regarding the children’s participation in cultural activities, the CRC, Article 31, stated that by signing the treaty, the nations affirmed the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational age appropriate activities, and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts. It also said: “States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity” (Article 31). The ECA affirmed the same principles in its Chapter I, Article IV: “It is the duty of family, community, society in general, and the government, to ensure, with absolute priority, effective implementation of the rights to life, health, nutrition, education, sports, leisure, professional training, culture, dignity, respect, freedom, and family and community interaction.” Article 58 stated that in its educational process the child’s cultural background will be respected, and that creative freedom and access to cultural sources will be assured. Article 59 stated that it is the government’s duty to find resources to promote cultural, leisure, and sport related activities to children and youth. Article 71 also dealt with the issue, assuring the children’s right to information, culture, leisure, sports, fun, shows, products, and services that consider their
characteristics as people in the developmental stage.

Regarding the third aspect of participation, the ECA Law guaranteed, in its terms, powerful words connected to the idea of protagonism as autonomy and respect for the children’s voices and ideas. Title I, Chapter II (The Right to Freedom, Respect and Dignity), Article 16, described the right to fully participate in the life of the family and community, without being discriminated against (Item V) and the right to participate in the political life (Item VI). Article 17 stated the right children have to be respected, assuring the inviolability of their physical, mental, and moral integrity, including the preservation of image, identity, autonomy, values, ideas and beliefs, and personal objects. Chapter IV (The Right to Education, Culture, Sports, and Leisure), Article 53 guaranteed, among other things, to children and adolescents the rights to be respected by their educators (Item II), to contest evaluative criteria (Item III), and to organize and participate in student organizations (Item IV). All these last items presuppose that children are aware of the conditions and have room to debate. The same ideas were present in the CRC, in its Article 13, which stated the child’s right to freedom of expression: “…this right shall include freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.” Article 14 stated: “States Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.” Article 15 addressed clearly the issue of political participation, when it said: “States Parties recognize the rights of the child to freedom of association and to freedom of peaceful assembly.”
The fact that this legal framework was in place didn’t mean, of course, that these rights have been fully achieved. Although some improvements could be seen, many challenges need to be faced. One independent preliminary report, submitted to the UNESCO in 2010, listed serious issues that still needed to be addressed (ANCED, 2009). It showed how Brazil was falling short on guaranteeing the rights of the poorest (and mostly black) children’s population. As Pires (2007) wrote:

Despite the fact that civil society has included in its legal documents all the principles of participation, putting them into practice is far from being a reality. This intense legislative output, however, can also work as a catalyst for cultural change... The most important aspect to be highlighted at this time, however, is the legal existence of such legal principles in Brazilian law. (p. 40).

The implementation of such advanced laws is indeed a long process, which depends on several factors, including, in the case of ECA in Brazil, raising awareness in the general population to promote its participation, ending the prejudice (the ECA law is perceived as lenient towards young people who break the law), and advocating and articulating of government actions.

In conclusion, CCCria seems to be an example of how to implement the participation rights in all three aspects included in both CRC and ECA. Through the community organization CEACA-Vila, CCCria was connected to the legal system of child protection. CEACA-Vila had social workers on its team that would act on behalf of the child. The team first tried to bring in the family and help the family solve the matter. However, in certain cases where the well being of the child was at risk, the families were
referred by the social worker to the judicial system. CEACA-Vila’s team would then
dialogue with the proper authorities, following up on the case.

On the second aspect, the stories and documentation provided in this dissertation
offer many examples of how CCCria provided access to cultural opportunities, inside and
out of their community. These opportunities respected their values and art expressions,
while at the same time providing access to a wide range of information about different
ways of expressing culture. The children’s production in reading, acting, dancing, music,
and other activities evidenced how much they enjoyed and took advantage of the
opportunities offered there.

However, it is in the third realm that I find the most exciting contribution is being
made. Regarding the involvement of children in policy making (even if mostly at the
institutional level) and problem solving, I saw children building a set of competencies
involving clear articulation of their opinions, advocacy, and mobilization of peers. Even
when schools invite children to participate, it is most often adult led. At CCCria, I saw
adults both teaching ways to participate and also encouraging children who were
protagonizing spontaneous initiatives or taking action to solve problems. In both cases,
there was an intense learning process and collaboration between the adults and the
children. Adults were truly learning to listen to children, and celebrating their ability and
creativity in solving problems or conflicts together. The children’s willingness to get
involved and follow through on the solutions they created to the problems they identified
is of great inspiration, I believe, for schools who constantly complain of the lack of such
involvement.
In Thesis One I reflected on the strategies used to promote participation and on the benefits for children and adults. In the following section I analyze the process educators went through to bring about the vision of young children acting autonomously, participating in decision making. Thesis Two brings to light the development of learning systems and methodologies of capacity building and support to coach the educators while implementing these new concepts.

**Thesis Two**

Deep transformative learning happens when adults feel supported, trusted, and when it considers their feelings, beliefs and needs.

This thesis is supported by themes that emerged from the analysis of the data collected through interviews and observations, and confirms what is known in andragogy (Knowles, 1975, 1984a, 1984b; Reischmann, 2004). A collection of stories presented in Chapter V exemplified the changes educators made both professionally and in their personal life regarding how they relate to children. These stories illustrated the extent of the educators’ learning experience professionally and how it affected their personal beliefs to the point of changing the way they related to children in general, on the job, inside their families and in the community. The added factor in this case was that it happened under an adverse set of conditions, already largely explored in this document: the violence of the surroundings that often permeate relationships, the context of poverty, lack of public investment, and resulting poor quality and insufficient public service.

According to Freire (1996), in order for people to learn they need to be trusted, they need to feel that their experiences are valued, that their contribution is part of the new learning that will take place. They are "the subject of construction and reconstruction
of the knowledge” (Freire, 1996, p. 29) based on their previous professional and personal experiences. They need to know that when in contact with a professional challenge, they will have the support they need to learn and apply what they are learning.

Thesis two is supported by three themes: (a) valuing the local culture and adults’ backgrounds, (b) the importance of professional coaching and support and finally (c) the importance of building trust

Theme 2a: Valuing Local Culture and Adults’ Backgrounds

The first theme supporting Thesis Two is the importance of valuing the local culture and the adults’ backgrounds when implementing a new concept. Most educators I interviewed had at most a high school level diploma, in a country that struggles with the quality of its public education, especially in the favelas. Even those who had more years of study, a pedagogy college degree, for example, or had self-taught readings on the subject, struggled. Most educators did not have the habit of reading or discussing sophisticated ideas regarding education theories. To grasp and apply concepts of as great a complexity as protagonism and autonomy was extremely challenging for all of them. They expressed these difficulties during the interviews.

On the other hand, the team had a deep knowledge of the local culture. They understood the children’s culture and their needs; they spoke the same language, same slang, had the same ethics and often had similar life experiences. These experiences were highly valued by everyone involved in implementing the CCCria. CEACA-Vila considered the educators’ experiences its best contribution to the project. As a result, CCCria was a place at the same time deeply rooted in the community and connected to an
international body of knowledge brought by CECIP and other partners. These connections include the ideas of educators (John Dewey, Paulo Freire, Loris Malaguzzi, Anísio Teixeira, Constance Kamii), and those of artists (Kandinski, Monet, Picasso), writers (Monteiro Lobato, La Fontaine), musicians (Noel Rosa, and other samba composers), and scientists (Vital Brazil, Albert Einstein).

Regarding the emphasis on hiring people with the attitude of openness, community identity, and some experience with groups of children, I reached the conclusion that this was an adequate choice and became an important part of what made CCCria such a special place. Adding to these qualifications a more formal background in education (on the second round of recruiting) helped hire people who were able to deepen the discussion and make connections with other theoreticians. This combination of educational skills and community connection worked well, providing that professional support during the process was given, offering opportunities for reflection and growth to all people involved.

What was created was a true dialogue between different bodies of knowledge, as Freire (1976, 1979) advocated. Not surprisingly, since Freire was one of its founders, CECIP uses Freirean concepts in its work in education and communication, based on dialogue and trust: “We have always trusted the people… We have always believed that we had something to permute with them, never exclusively to offer” (Freire, 1976, p. 10221). The first sign that CECIP valorized the community knowledge was that they included “being from the community” as one of the criteria to recruit the team members.

21 My translation, since this sentence was omitted in the English version of the book.
Even if not all of them were from the Morro dos Macacos, they had ties to the community, lived there in the past, or belonged to other poor urban communities.

Added to the sense of belonging to the community, the adults often expressed their belief of contributing to give opportunities to a new generation through their work at CCCria. These opportunities, they believed, would foster a new generation, more aware of their rights, with skills (artistic, but also computer and English skills) that would make them successful in their endeavors. The educators referred to these children as the future of the community. To invest in them meant for the team to be working for the improvement of the community as a whole. A sense of mission was strong among them. The proximity between educators’ and children’s background, plus a desire to work with the children of the community, and the above mentioned sense of mission resulted in a combination conducive to the educators’ will to persevere especially when dealing with their own limitations. Implied there is Freirean’s notion of people’s unfinisheness – people are always forming and transforming themselves (and others) through their experience and the reflection on them.

Theme 2b: Professional Coaching and Support

The second theme supporting Thesis Two is related to the professional coaching and support during the implementation of the concepts. In order to work at CCCria and apply its methodology, educators had to break old paradigms in the professional realm, regarding how educators and children interact in an educational setting. They had “to do everything the opposite as I used to do” as Malu said, quoting an educator’s moment of sudden understanding of what was being asked of her. This quote illustrates the process
the professionals underwent: investing in a new way to relate to children. Promoting the children’s protagonism was only possible, first and foremost, because the educators believed it was possible. Secondly, and as important as the positive attitude, it was possible because of the built-in strategies of collective reflection and support.

It is important to notice that the educators at CCCria had only a vague idea of what CCCria’s methodology was. While the understanding that children have rights and knowledge of the ECA law was prevalent, both the concepts of autonomy in Kamii’s (1994) terms, of protagonism and of how to transform the three of them (children’s rights, autonomy and protagonism, called the CCCria Protagonism methodology) in daily practice were entirely foreign to the members of CCCria’s team. The first step in that direction was to encourage the educators to become more autonomous, with an understanding that one cannot promote others’ autonomy or protagonism if not working on his or her own autonomy first (Kamii, 1994).

For the CECIP team, while the concepts were very clear, based on years of previous experiences in daycare and school settings, the translation of those concepts in routines and interactions in a CCCria-type of setting were unknown. An intense experimentation and learning process took place, where the CCCria and CECIP teams built a strong bond of trust between them. This relationship was based on a mutual understanding that they were all aiming to achieve the best for the children. As important as this common goal, the educators learned by experience that they were never left alone with their difficulties. This special relationship between CCCria/CEACA-Vila and CECIP was built in the first training, during the bi-weekly sessions of observation in each
room, professional feedback, and informal situations (lunch time, closing rooms, cleaning while chatting). The monthly actualization sessions also contributed to create the feeling that the team members could step out of their comfort zone and still feel secure that they would not be alone to face their challenges. It was based on recognizing everyone’s opinion and experiences as valuable, in order to establish a Freirean dialogue: “It is a horizontal relationship between A and B… It nourishes itself from love, humbleness, faith, and trust” (Freire, 1970, p. 107). The essence of Freire’s method is dialogue (CECIP - APS International, 2009). CECIP followed this approach by listening, acting as a facilitator, provoking people to express themselves, and building a common knowledge based in shared values and principles.

The role of the leadership in supporting the team coherently followed the same line of thought described above. The leader was open to dialogue with the educators and to learn from them, establishing a professional dialogue in Freirean terms. Many of the educators had more experience with the methodology than the director. She brought to the team her previous experiences as daycare principal in that same community, and her higher studies in pedagogy.

Another important component of the support theme was the building of a network among educators. More experienced team members would serve as references and sounding boards for the newly arrived, being an important source of support and information, especially when CECIP team reduced its presence at CCCria. Evidences of the importance of such network were present in the educators’ and leader’s interviews.

At times, the educators had to make hard calls on the protagonism and autonomy
principles while dealing with the situation at hand. The question they asked when looking for support was: “This is how I handled the situation. Am I keeping true to the methodology?” In situations involving conflicts they were tempted to use a punitive approach. For example, they might ask a child to leave the room or use some kind of bargaining system, such as earning or losing points for behavior and linking the amount of points to the participation on a field trip. Team discussions reached the conclusion that a punitive approach was contrary to the methodology, because this system didn’t lead to the moral autonomy aimed for at CCCria. For that conclusion to be reached, there was a need to refresh the team’s discussion on what was autonomy and how it linked with children’s protagonism as one of CCCria’s principles. As a conclusion of this discussion, the educators gained awareness that other strategies to deal with discipline and conflicts in the activity rooms needed to be found. A specialist was brought to one of the monthly meetings to discuss ways to deal with conflicts in a restorative, non-punitive way. Educators were taught to have restorative circles, called “cirandas restaurativas” where all children and adults involved would sit, discuss, and design a solution. The educators practiced during the workshops and taught the children how to do it. This story serves to illustrate that without those discussions and professional support, in time of crisis especially, the educators would tend to go back to behaviors learned through their own life experiences.

It was crucial to create situations where the educators had the opportunity to reflect on their praxis – as Freire (1996) recommended. The CECIP team of specialists, together with the CCCria’s coordinator, built strategies to identify what were the
problems and established connections with authors and specialists that can help address the issues. On occasions it was done involving the team and the children as well.

This internal and external support system and capacity building kept the Center connected with outside resources and tapped into knowledge existing among other projects in the community. It brought up-to-date information from other experiences, connecting the Morro dos Macacos’ CCCria to other models of alternative education (Dewey, 1944; Reggio Emilia in Edwards, 1999; Freire, 1996), while also valuing the community wisdom, always discussing and questioning both. The importance of continued capacity building is discussed further in this chapter, in connection with sustainability.

Theme 2c: Building Trust

The third theme supporting this thesis that transformative learning happens when adults feel supported and trusted, and when learning considers their feelings, beliefs, and needs is related to the concepts underlining the educators training. The educators were involved in learning through a cyclical process involving action – reflection – action. This is strong evidence of the Freirean influence in CECIP’s approach used to train professionals. For Freire, “the best way to reflect is to think about the praxis and return to it in order to transform it. Therefore, [it is imperative] to think the concrete, the reality, and not to think thoughts” (as cited in Gadotti, 2005, p. 254).

CECIP applied that concept by making the training concrete. For example, when introducing a new concept, the CECIP team created situations where those practices could be discussed from examples brought by the educators, instead of discussing pure
theory and expecting the educators to build the bridge between the new idea and their praxis in the activity room. The monthly workshops were planned to allow educators to expose their recent experiences with CCCria’s methodology, their past experiences, and the doubts they had about certain attitudes or actions. Then new content was brought forward to contribute to thinking differently about the situation and come up with new, creative solutions, aligned with the principles of autonomy and protagonism, promoting children’s rights. As Freire (1996) said:

The critical teaching practice, implied on the idea of right thinking, involves a dynamic, dialectic movement between doing and thinking about doing… For that reason, in the permanent education of teachers, the most important moment is the reflection on the practice. It is by thinking critically on today’s or yesterday’s practice that we can improve on the next practice. (p. 43).

Scriven and Paul (2007) defined critical thinking as “the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action” (p. 1).

Implementing critical thinking at CCCria implied trusting educators, accepting mistakes as part of the learning process, creating room for trial and error, creating opportunities for sharing, with individual and group time for reflection on the practice, leading to new practice. The process of fostering critical thinking was hard for people not used to engaging in such activity. The educators often felt the reflection portion of the actualization day was heavy and tiring, though necessary.
One example was the assembly, which changed format many times due to discussion on what took place. Each time they had an assembly, the coordinator sought feedback from children and educators on how they felt about it. The strong and weak points were reviewed critically, comparing them to the assembly’s goal, and together they designed new strategies to make it more children-led, more participative. At first the assemblies were mandatory, and then they became optional for the children. Some assemblies looked as if children were gathered to be lectured on something, then in later ones the children had more voice and leadership. The process of learning from the team reflection on CCCria’s practice also meant to allow for flexibility, an example of the assembly being reformatted many times because it wasn’t working well.

**Summarizing Thesis Two**

Deep transformative learning happens when adults feel supported and trusted, and when it considers their feelings, beliefs, and needs. CECIP managed to transform Freire’s ideas and concepts on adult learning in practices that foster trust, care, and learning. Valuing the local culture and the adults’ backgrounds created a climate of trust that was fundamental to keep the team engaged in trying new professional behaviors. The coaching and support system in place made the team of educators feel that they could dare to experiment, knowing help would be available when needed. Finally, by implementing an approach to learning through a cyclical process involving action – reflection – action, CECIP and CCCria together managed to foster intense learning, improving their practice by reflecting upon it, enriching it with new information.

This array of practice led to deep leaning and profound changes that affected the
educators both professionally and personally. Educators talked about how they learned to listen to children’s voices, value them, and allow those opinions and actions to change the status quo. This provoked changes in all realms of their lives. It made them change the way they related to children in their families and in the community. They used different ways to deal with conflicts, refraining from spanking and learning to establish a dialogue at home. They felt and valued their own transformation, and began to be seen in the community as people who knew how to talk to children and could help other families as well.

As professionals they changed as well. Those who also worked part-time in more traditional schools felt backwards when forced back into the teacher-as-the-center of the learning process model, and told about ways they incorporated parts of CCCria’s methodology even in those settings. The new way made more sense to them and it felt incoherent not to use the children’s knowledge and wisdom as resources in other settings. A change in their subjective theories had happened as a result of this experience.

Thesis Three

*Trust and caring relationships of mutual respect create a rich learning environment that fosters children’s engagement*

Thesis three is supported by three themes. First, how caring and trusting relationships influence children’s choices and their relation with the subject matter they are learning. The evidence collected mainly through observations and interviews shows that a connection established between an adult is key to get children involved in the activities. Second, the importance of establishing relationships with peers. The evidence for that theme came from observation of the children’s play and from stories told by
educators during the interviews. Third, valuing the community to which the child belongs. The evidence of this theme was collected mainly through artifacts – children built their community in as many forms of media as they could, highlighting the positive, while also recording the violence and aggressions to the environment.

*Theme 3a: The Importance of Trusting and Caring Relationship Between Children and Adults, Especially in a Context of Poverty*

Many teachers believe that underprivileged children, who live in poor communities or in favelas are harder to teach, don’t learn or behave adequately (Paiva & Burgos, 2009). I have heard this discussion repeatedly in my experience facilitating capacity building workshops with teachers and principals. Recent research comparing public school teachers’ perceptions of their underprivileged students in 1950 and 2000 in Rio de Janeiro showed that both groups of teachers had negative ideas about their students even before meeting them (Paiva & Burgos, 2009). The study showed that teachers associated their students of poverty with deficient or inadequate family structure, lack of hygiene, and violence, then linked those characteristics to expectations of low achievement, low retention, and early drop out. “The way people interact in the favela is represented as antagonistic to the school routine” (Paiva & Burgos, 2009, p. 207). Maybe the students’ poor academic success comes from the fact that teachers expect so little of them. Would children’s performance and behavior look any different in a place where they feel trusted, at ease, loved, respected, and where their participation was highly valued?

At CCCria, the surrounding context of poverty, low literacy, and violence did not affect the children’s eagerness to learn new skills, their interest in reading, or their
willingness to engage in cooperative endeavors with and without the adults. One of the keys to explaining their different responses is the relationship built with educators, coordinators and peers. Educators, especially those belonging to the community, spoke the same language as the kids. This seemed to greatly facilitate the communication between children and adults, as well as between CCCria’s educators and the families. There were no barriers, no censorship for “speaking poor Portuguese”, no misunderstanding of expectation. The few educators who came from outside the community were the ones having to “learn” and value the local culture.

The relationships children and educators established were important to both parties. Educators told stories about how the children opened up to them, and how they found time to give support, listen to the problems, give the attention many times children did not get anywhere else. According to the educators, parents were often too tired or too stressed out by their living conditions or did not know how to address their children, and frequently came to the educators for advice. Many parents felt there was something different in the relationship built between educators and the children, and asked them to give advice to the children, believing the educators knew better how to get the message across.

Many times, the fathers were absent; the mothers were young and had little support and often children represented an added stress factor in their lives. Or they believed that it was their responsibility to be strict and to educate properly, so children would not stray. The way to achieve this “education” was often through yelling and physical punishment, as the parents were taught as children. One consequence of this was
the relationships between parents and children were often marked by abusive behavior, which was mentioned with sadness by the educators.

The changed way in which the educators saw and related to the children affected them deeply. It changed their lives inside the Center, inside their families, and in the community at large. For the children, the establishment of a caring relationship with an adult who listened to them and was there every day certainly seemed to represent some stability in the affective domain. Children referred many times to an activity room by the name of the educator, showing that the relationship was for them, at that moment, possibly more important than the proposed activity itself. For some children, spending time in Aunt Chloe’s room had more to do with Chloe than with reading, and reading was possibly made more enjoyable by the connection with Aunt Chloe. When I presented this finding to two groups of children, they confirmed that sometimes they chose the room for the activity itself, but they often chose the room to be able to hang out with a particular educator. The caring and affectionate relationship was key.

Once the affective connection was made, the educator could get across the content or behavior he or she needed to convey. Some educators mentioned that some children carried a history of violence, neglect, and rejection that affected their interactions. However, that did not seem to mean that those children were less likely to enjoy CCCria.

The first contact of any child with the Center was a delicate moment, where the educators needed to get to know him or her and make connections. The work of the team of educators at this point consisted of finding out who would have a way to reach that child and starting to work with him or her through that connection. Sometimes the
content would help. A child who had a special love for music, for example, might connect with that educator through this activity. The child would be looking for a place or a person with whom he or she would feel more comfortable. During the actualization sessions I heard many success stories of children who couldn’t stay in one room for a minute without picking a fight, breaking something, or blurting insults, and months later were participating, had learned the rules, and enjoyed teaching the rules to younger children. They turned their story around and were seen differently by the community. The child’s experience of seeing him- or herself as a person to be respected, trusted, listened to, someone that could contribute positively, that had things to say, changed them deeply.

While establishing a connection between the child and the adult was needed for every kid, this connection was critical for the ones who had a hard time following rules. I observed that this connection was sometimes hard to make with children presenting aggressive behaviors. One strategy used was calling the adult responsible for the child. The child who did seriously hurt (physically or morally) someone (child or adult) was responsible for bringing a parent to CCCria before being able to attend the Center regularly again. At first, the parent would come with a defensive attitude. In the presence of the child, the coordinator would start by talking about all the positive things the child was doing, how creative he or she was. Building a relationship between CCCria’s staff and the parents based on trust and positive feelings was very important. According to the coordinator, parents did not seem to expect to be called and hear good things about their child. The child was seen, therefore, for the positive potential he or she had, not for his or her shortcomings. Being from the favela wasn’t an issue in the subtext of the dialogue.
because all children there were from the favela.

In one episode, when a father came to the meeting, nine-year-old Michael asked the coordinator in a very soft voice: “Tell him, tell him that here I am a story teller!” Michael was asking CCCria coordinator to mediate the relationship between him and his dad, showing his dad that at CCCria he, Michael, had a positive identity and his contribution was valued, and it was a reason to be proud of his son. This possibly affected positively the way the father looked at his son. Once the trust was established, then more delicate issues could be discussed. In these conversations, the child was present at all times and part of any deal made to improve the situation. It is important to say that it was not an easy task for CCCria’s educators, just as it is challenging for school teachers. Nonetheless, rather sooner than later, the results started to show and were shared with other educators during the monthly actualization sessions.

Children had their preferences, and enjoyed being able to make choices according to their own criteria. One criterion used when choosing a room to stay in was their emotional connection with the educators. Children often chose one particular room because they connected with the educator, who provided emotional support to handle sometimes difficult home situations. Freire (1996) highlighted the importance of caring, loving the children while encouraging them in their discoveries (amorosidade). Freire saw developing an affective connection with the child as a condition sine qua non for teaching. He wrote: “This opening to loving the children does not mean that because I am a teacher I have to like all students the same way. It means, in fact, that affection doesn’t scare me, that I am not afraid to express it” (Freire, 1996, p. 159).
As a result of these relationships, children who are seen in school as clumsy or unable to perform well at physical education class were seen at CCCria dancing. They might have had difficulties, but the safe environment encouraged them to try and enjoy themselves as they practiced. They were not judged, no grade was assigned to their performance, but the pleasure and safety they experienced increased the chance they would try again. The same mechanism was described in Chapter V regarding the pleasure to read in the book room. The skill of reading was less important than the pleasure to read and use creativity to invent new stories. As children became more familiar with books, as books became more friendly, they would spend long hours in the bookroom. Another criterion for choosing a room was related to the next theme, regarding the children’s desire to accompanying a group of friends, or creating associations (as for example the “Grupo da Pimenta” or “Pepper Group” a RAP group created by the children).

Theme 3b: The Importance of Building Relationships with Peers

An observation of how children reacted to each other’s discoveries revealed the sort of relations children build that lead to spontaneous learning and cooperation. In the art room, sometimes one child would have an idea, for example, making a play dough moustache. For some reason, either because the child felt it was funny or that it would please others, the child would show it to his or her close neighbors. Immediately, other children would see and do the same, and then instead of a moustache it would be a bow, a tie, a belt, and the idea evolved and went around fast, everyone experimenting with it and adding to it. The children’s process of observing, trying out, using their imagination, and re-creating was a spontaneous behavior that generated new ideas and new productions.
And it was fun.

This supports some of Corsaro’s (2003) findings on the importance of peer culture. He wrote: “I saw little solitary play in my many years of observation in preschools. And when children did play alone or engaged in parallel play…it seldom lasted for long. They were soon doing things together” (p. 36).

This brings up the subject of how much children learn through relationships they establish among themselves. At CCCria, children aged four to eleven years old all played together, running around, making choices and sharing the same toys. Many children came to the center for the first time brought by a brother, a cousin or a neighbor. For the first few days or weeks, this new child would stay close to that person, change rooms with him or her, and cling to the more experienced child’s group, until he or she felt comfortable or felt free to make other choices. The children were the mediating agents between the community culture (or family culture) and CCCria’s culture. They often started sentences with “here, this is how we do…,” or “here you can…,” or yet ”here you can’t…” They contributed to passing on the CCCria culture – the rules, the history, and the way to enter or leave the rooms. The CCCria’s team of educators encouraged this connection, and at a certain point, encouraged also the separation. In fact, after a few weeks, they started showing the child that he or she no longer needed to cling to the older child. The child could stay longer in a particular room if she wished to finish an activity, for example, and join her friends later. This also freed the older child.

This dynamic, as both educators and children said in their interviews, was often started by parents, worried about the young child being lost in the new environment,
where children from 4 to 11 years old were playing together, without being separated in class by age. It started with a connotation of protection, and became a transition strategy. This strategy became so ingrained that when children from the daycare came up to visit CCCria once a week, the older children sat and played with them, taking them under their wing. The patience they showed toward the little ones, the way they tolerated this sometimes invasive group was really impressive. Sometimes they formed families, choosing one child and pretending: “I am your father today, OK?”

This rich contact between 24 to 36 month old babies and 8 to 11 year old children reminds of how extended families use to interact. The older children had the role of easing the way and teaching how things work, while playing and caring for the younger children. However, in contrast to what often happened in the community, where parents have to work and leave their older children caring for the younger ones, at CCCria the older kids did not have the responsibility to care for the younger kids. There was always the presence and support of an educator, an adult who was in charge. Six to ten year old children cared for the little ones because they felt it was fun, and they did it when they chose to do it. I observed both groups enjoying immensely this interaction. One group feels protected, and in awe of the older kids, who feel powerful and wise, and they learn from each other. The CCCria was conducive to and encouraged this interaction.

In the episode of selling the tags or trading tags for a cookie at snack time, discussed in Chapter V, children were reproducing among them the logic of the adult world, where things valued by them get a tag price or a bargain price. In doing so, they were showing their understanding of the adult world and exercising their abilities to live
in it. Corsaro (2003) synthesized:

Children are active agents of their own socialization. In fact, kids creatively take information from the adult world to produce their own and unique childhood culture. In this sense, children are always participating in and are part of two cultures – adults and kids’- and these cultures are intricately interwoven. (p. 4)

It is crucial to look at this statement in the light of the culture of violence these children were immersed in. The role of educators was then to help them reflect on their behaviors and see if values considered important at CCCria were being respected. Among the children, the space and time to exercise these competences, with the opportunity to dialogue about it in a non punitive fashion, was priceless.

The Pepper Group was an example where boys of different ages were bonding to mess around. They called themselves “the evil tramway.” The word tramway is slang for group (Rodrigues, 2005). It was used in “Bailes Funk” parties often promoted by drug dealers in favelas for the community and outsiders. Young people would dance in groups, one behind the other, with a hand on the others’ shoulder – those groups were called “bondes” or tramways (Piccolo, 2006). The term was also used for drug dealer groups joined to attack another community, or to rob cars called “evil tramways” or “bondes do mal.” After some discussions about what using this term meant, what model they were reproducing, these CCCria boys turned into one of the most creative RAP groups at the Center, often performing for the community. They decided to change their name from “evil tramway” to “Pepper Group.” in Brazil, the word pepper is related to being zesty, edgy, and nonconformist. They kept an identity that distinguished them from the other
kids, but turned their energy into artistic and activist endeavors.

The relationships children established with others from different ages and genders in an environment that encouraged diverse grouping allowed for intense learning across the board. They learned skills, and they learned behaviors and moves (at soccer or dance) that were valued by their peers. Through these relationships they also learned the culture of CCCria.

*Theme 3c: Feeling Good about their Community and Expressing it*

The third theme is connected to the pride of the community, which was encouraged in many ways by the educators. The image of favelas constructed by society at large focuses on the negative, grouping the favelas all together and denying their identity. Souza e Silva (2010) reflected on the construction of this image:

In the case of Rio de Janeiro, …a set of elements merged together to constitute the hegemonic forms of representation of the favelas and their inhabitants: its association with economic poverty, lack of educational training, the predominance of manual labor, the phenotype of the residents – in their majority blacks and browns, the precarious nature of living, of urban services, migrant from the Northeast, a region considered “problem” in the country, the illegal occupation of the land, the lack of payment of taxes and bills, etc…

Specific profiles of slum dwellers and their territory were created that became widespread among the common public, in the legal definitions and even at the more formal and academic level. In the process, the slums and their residents came to be perceived in a homogenous fashion, despite their rich diversity (type of site; population density, access
to services and facilities; population profile, degree of community organization, etc.) as spaces lacking basic conditions of citizenship, in fact, as sub citizens’ spaces. (p. 4)

It safe to say that the image of the Morro dos Macacos community projected in the media was extremely negative. Over more than a decade, only accidents, mudslides and crimes in that community were reported on the news (Piccolo, 2006). In October 2009, the fall of a police helicopter, brought down by the drug dealers during a police raid, broadcasted an image of violence and war to the entire world, and reinforced the image that Morro dos Macacos was a community where it was impossible to live. Although the violence made many families dream of moving away to protect themselves and their children, in general people liked it there. The Morro dos Macacos dwellers often declared they wouldn’t live anywhere else (Piccolo, 2006). They highlighted the aspect of community life and solidarity, where one neighbor always helps the other in need. People valued the fact that they know and are known by everybody, that the favela is a place where people still have time to chat with the neighbors. They reported that they felt safe once they stepped inside the community, as long as there weren’t conflicts with the police or other rival gangs. One of the stronger complaints heard in the Morro dos Macacos was that people outside only know the negative side of their community, and that the positive – for example, the work of the CEACA-Vila and the talents and creativity of the people – were never shown.

In this context, the third theme – pride in the community – reinforces the thesis of the importance of creating caring, respectful relationship to create an environment that fosters children’s engagement. By stimulating the children to express their views of the
community, they valued what was positive there, and emphasized what needed to be done in order to improve their community. The educators stimulated the children to produce a vision that went beyond the limiting and prejudiced view of their community as (only) poor and violent. The images and objects produced by the children expressed the exact opposite of the vision described by Souza e Silva, cited above. Children built, over the years, a rich repertoire of representations of their community in different media (three and two dimensional sculpture, painting, collage, poetry, music, audio recordings).

The common trait of the representation in images was to depict main elements important in their lives and in the life of the community. For example, children always represented the Cruzeiro – a cross that can be seen from everywhere, built on the top of the hill, an important landmark of the community. They pictured the CEACA-Vila and the CCCria buildings. Each child’s house was different from the other, and children could tell whose house it was based on the color or other features. They included the houses of the educators, showing their appreciation for having their educators living close to them. They also depicted the trees to show that there were still plenty of green areas in there; many kites in the blue sky were also an important element, always present, symbolizing leisure and fun. The result was always very colorful and gay, expressing feelings of happiness.

In the production of written text children often expressed their sadness for the violence or the damage in the environment they saw, but also showed a strong connection to where they live, engaging in campaigns or making recommendations on how to keep the community clean. Their lyrics talked about how proud of their community they were,
and of the importance of caring for it. An example that illustrates well this theme is a RAP lyric, composed by the children in the book room, a parody of the RAP da Felicidade (RAP of Happiness), from famous MC Cidinho and MC Doca:

I just want to be happy
Walk around in my favela
Stench free and clean
And be able to be proud
Walk around in my favela
I will clean the environment. (Grupo da Pimenta, 2009)

At CCCria, children could build self esteem and express their feelings, both positive and negative, about their community talking about the current situation and creating a vision of a new, improved and possible future.

Summarizing Thesis Three

In Thesis Three, dealing with the importance of creating relationships of trust and respect to fosters children’s engagement, I showed that when children were supported by caring adults and created positive relationship with their peers, they were able to improve their feeling of self worth. Adults helped them and supported them in their discoveries, discussed ideas and the meaning behind them, took seriously their questions and assisted them in looking for solutions to the problems they identified. The connection with one or more adults drove their attention to engage in the activities, and, therefore, learn new attitudes and skills. The children were encouraged to find answers on their own, and this process was made fun by the support from the adults, as well as from the interest shown
by other children, who joined in and added their contributions to the mix. The children were encouraged to be the protagonists of their own learning process, while also involved in thinking about the larger community.

*Reflecting on Sustainability*

Sustainability is a challenge for many social projects. Valadez and Bamberger (1994) defined project sustainability as “the capacity of a project to deliver its intended benefits over an extended period of time” (p. 185). In the context of international cooperation, often the innovative projects and results cease shortly after the grant’s end. Valadez and Bamberger cited a World Bank Operation Evaluation Department (OED) 1985 study on project sustainability that found that “only nine out of twenty seven of the agricultural projects studied were classified as ‘sustained’, eight more were ‘doubtful’, and the remaining ten were ‘not sustained’” (Valadez & Bamberger, 1994, p. 183). Especially when the project involves some experimental, novel aspect, the process of consolidating the innovation is a delicate one. Understanding sustainability as the capacity of a project to deliver “a continuous flow of outputs, benefits or services throughout its intended lifetime” (Valadez & Bamberger, 1994, p.185), means, in this case, what was at stake was CCCria’s ability to continue to offer a safe place for children to grow and develop their autonomy and protagonism beyond the current grant funding and after CECIP team’s direct involvement.

According to Fullan (1991), an innovation process takes place in three stages: (a) initiation, divided in phases, typically needs assessment, design, planning and dissemination; (b) implementation, where the plans are implemented, evaluated, and fine-
tuned; and finally (c) institutionalization, which I will discuss more in depth here. Kirschner, Hendriks, Paas, Wopereis, & Cordewener (2004) suggested that the institutionalization is the logical sequence of the successful implementation of an innovation:

The implementation phase may continue for a period of time, but eventually there should be a point at which the new idea becomes institutionalized and regularized as a part of the ongoing operations. It is now no longer an innovation process, but rather a normal process. And whether or not the innovation becomes a durable part of the organization depends on the commitment and action of the participants as well as on other factors. (Kirschner et al., 2004, p. 364).

Whether or not CCCria will remain a place where protagonism and autonomy are the main features of the methodology will depend on the leading organization CEACA-Vila, the CCCria’s team, the children, and the community. However, there are signs that this innovation (the methodology itself) has become part of the everyday operation, and that some sustainability has been built along the way.

Fullan (2005) synthesized important findings on sustainability in an elegant framework that I used to reflect on CCCria methodology's implementation. He defined sustainability as “the capacity of a system to engage in the complexity of continuous improvement consistent with deep values of human purpose” (p. ix). Fullan divided sustainability into eight elements. On the following pages, I will apply his framework to CCCria’s experience to assess where strategies in place increased the chances of the methodology’s sustainability.
The first element, moral purpose, i.e., to serve the community, offering quality services to all, or “acting with the intention of making a positive difference in the (social) environment” (Fullan, 2002, p. 4) was at the very core of CCCria’s existence. The educators as well as the CCCria coordinator were committed to serving the children and the community to the best of their ability. They saw the children as the future of the community, and hoped to give them better opportunities than they had had as children. They also expressed a belief that these opportunities would take the children to a better future and help them make better choices. They were implying, on the one hand, that the children would have ambitions for themselves and pursue them, and, on the other hand, that the children would not get involved with criminal activities. The everyday work of educators was geared to fulfill a moral purpose. The organizations involved had the same goal, which was to serve the people, and to contribute to achieving a healthier, stronger community. These institutional goals did not depend on any project, and they will be carried on independently of the ending of any particular financial grant.

Fullan’s (2005) second element was commitment to change. He described it as the institution’s ability not only to adapt to external demands or changes in the environment in which it is located, but also to develop a culture where, as an institution, it becomes capable of continuously generating its own transformations, in short, a learning organization. By its very nature, the methodology used at the Center demonstrates this element. The CCCria methodology demanded that staff often revisit and change policies and decisions based on discussions and reflection. When asked if the protagonism had changed over the short period of time it was implemented, some educators said that they
know better the methodology; others recognized that some elements had slipped through the cracks and need to be rescued. A good example of this ability to rethink CCCria practice and promote change was the evolution of the assemblies’ format, mentioned earlier. At first they were mandatory, then they became optional, but more adult-centered, focused on discussing problems perceived by the adults, then children were included in raising the issues to be discussed. After each assembly, the discussion, mostly among educators, but taking the children’s evaluation into account, would lead to changes in the format.

The team showed evidence of a culture being created that placed value on discussion, evaluation, and experimentation to improve the work. The fear of making mistakes in the process of improvement was gradually replaced by more assertiveness in their attitudes. In CCCria’s case, a profound change was acknowledged by the educators as to how they perceive children, and how they relate to them. They report that they now listen to children, accept their opinion and learn to reach a negotiated agreement. Many of those who had children of their own said in their interviews that this new way of relating to children affected their relationship with their kids at home. CCCria, its policies and decisions were affected by the children, after the educators listened and debated ideas with them. In its past history, CCCria showed several examples of this change of mentality, which seemed to have become an intrinsic part of their work, indicating some stability in the methodology.

The commitment to change is related to the third element in Fullan’s (2005) framework, which is providing capacity building. The capacity building strategy at
CCCria was, since the beginning, very well established using both external consultants and other partner organizations. Every educator interviewed acknowledged the value in participating in the monthly training sessions, and mentioned it spontaneously as a means to get important information, solve problems, and get support from and coordination with peers. A sign that it became part of the organizational culture was that in the last months of 2010, the CCCria coordinator was already preparing the meetings with at least one staff member. This was an important milestone towards its autonomy, considering that CECIP had been planning and conducting these meetings since CCCria opened in 2006.

The role of CECIP became more of a coaching role, giving feedback and suggestions for improvement on the planning, as well as offering resources (other sources of information on the chosen subject). On a more horizontal level, capacity building using the network between projects of the same nature – with the exception of other CEACA-Vila projects – was incipient. There were a few signs of interaction between CCCria and other cultural projects outside CEACA-Vila. The Pontos de Cultura Program that CCCria became a part of has a strong networking component that was helping them progressively strengthening this element. A representative of the Center was designated to attend to all the meetings, participate in an intense email network, and bring back information and opportunities to be discussed in the monthly actualization session.

Fullan’s fourth element of sustainability advocates for intelligent accountability, achieving local autonomy while strengthening vertical relationships that offer support, resources, and monitoring strategies. On the first part of this element, local autonomy, it seemed that CCCria had room to make internal decisions to a certain extent, even if there
seemed to be a vertical and authoritative relationship of subordination of CCCria to CEACA-Vila, as shown by decisions that were made by the latter without consultation, interfering with CCCria operation. The strategies for self-evaluation included the periodical revision of the attendance list and the reflection at the actualization meetings. With regard to the second part of intelligent accountability, monitoring, CEACA-Vila had a strong monitoring and evaluation tradition. They used as their monitoring model the Shewhart Cycle of Continuous Improvement, called PDCA (an acronym standing for Plan, Do, Check, Action), inspired in the Total Quality movement in business, and adapted to fit CEACA-Vila’s social projects. This system helped CEACA generate qualitative and quantitative data that allowed the organization to keep financial partners and other constituents informed, giving their work great credibility. In addition, in 2009, a team was implementing a qualitative evaluation, where the educators were asked to write their observations of the children and record them on a sheet, classifying them according to established indicators. Then, periodically, a review of these records was made in groups, to triangulate the data. This process allowed for an intense discussion and the data was used to define changes in the organization.

The use of this model is conducive to the fifth element, deep learning, that, according to Fullan, involves all levels of the system in a process involving experimentation, evaluation, and learning. The author insisted that it is imperative to allow people to take risks, help people lose the fear of making mistakes, and create a habit of using the information coming from several sources, including the results of evaluations, to plan the next actions. Finally, Fullan spoke of the need to involve other
levels of the system, i.e., other projects inside and outside of the community. At CCCria, mechanisms to promote learning and integration between different projects were created to address the need to promote a better understanding of CCCria methodology among other CEACA-Vila projects. The partnership between the daycare Patinho Feliz and the CCCria came naturally. CECIP had worked with the daycare team already, the two- and three-year-old children attended CCCria regularly. Thus, it was a natural step to have a representative of the Patinho Feliz educators participating in CCCria actualization sessions. However, the need to promote the integration of CCCria and CEACA-Vila teenagers’ project was felt when the information came from CEACA-Vila that children who left CCCria (when turning eleven years old) were not enrolling in CEACA-Vila’s teenagers’ projects. The methodology was too different, and children did not adjust well. After realizing that children were having a hard time adjusting, members of the other projects came to participate in these monthly training sessions as well. The main goal was to allow the discussions and the challenges faced by CCCria to be shared with other projects, and get their feedback on the issues. At the same time, other projects would be informed and understand better the methodology used at CCCria. This process generated intense learning across projects and resulted in creating joint initiatives, for example, a visitation program aimed to ease the CCCria children’s transition into the teenagers’ project.

The sixth element proposed by Fullan is to commit both to short-term results, which build trust and create a positive climate, and long-term results. An image to explain the concept would be caring for the tree, while thinking of the forest, and of the
oxygen it would generate for the earth. CCCria’s short-term goal was to remain open and keep its mission alive. The energy generated by 200 children playing safely, actively participating in activities, learning and interacting with caring adults was what keeps the organization in place. Every event they planned and implemented, every child that improved the way she related to others, helped keep up the positive climate of the institution. As for the second part of the sixth element, the commitment to long-term results, it was in CCCria’s case closely connected to the first element presented here. As I perceived during the interviews, the long-term results for them were directly linked to their belief of creating a better generation, due to the effort and opportunities the children were given.

The seventh element, cyclical energizing, is to monitor energy levels, avoiding both overuse and underuse. Fullan (2005) argued that sustainability is cyclical, not linear. There are moments of intense learning and evidences of increasing success, and others where the same efforts seem to be producing no change at all in performance. Although making the argument for any system, the author refers mostly to changes in schools and on their mandatory accountability to higher authorities in a “No child left behind” policy context. However, he argued:

If we want sustainability, we need to keep an eye on energy levels (overuse and underuse). Positive collaborative cultures will help because (a) they push for greater accomplishments, and (b) they avoid the debilitating effects of negative cultures… What we need are combinations of full engagement with colleagues, along with less intensive activities that are associated with replenishment. (Fullan, 2005, p. 26)
Reflecting on the ideas presented above and on what I have seen at CCCria, the greater risk for CCCria is the burnout due to overuse of energy for sustained periods of time. Several factors contribute to the need for spending all this energy. The first was that educators and coordinators work with few resources, attending and caring for numerous children. A great amount of energy was required to be able to connect with the need of so many children, while at the same time implementing a new set of practices. Even as educators became more secure in the methodology, the energy level required to keep the everyday activities in place still took a toll. Often new requests were added to their load, for example, participating in networks, assuming other functions inside the organization, or welcoming visitors (media, university groups, financial partners), all of which disturb their routine. Burnout was possibly one of the reasons for the high turnover rate and a threat to sustainability. At the same time, the turnover in itself was a factor of added stress among the team.

Another relevant factor, mentioned by many of the educators was that they worked under considerable amount of pressure due to external violence. The violent outbreaks happened frequently and were stressful. Staff members had to find and spend energy to deal with the children in a way that would calm them, often putting aside and not taking care of their own feelings. They also needed to deal with the pressure from their family members to quit their job because of the violence, especially if they lived outside the community. Some people had to come to terms with the fact that dealing with the violent scenes to which they were exposed was too demanding for them. On a daily basis those factors added up and took energy from the team.
There were also intense and constant processes of re-energizing. Some were closely related to the staff’s sense of mission, for example, seeing the children doing well and noticing their progress. Another important source of energy was when they received the praise of colleagues, children, and parents for their work. The events where the parents were invited to the CCCria (Fun Saturdays) were a great opportunity for families to give encouraging feedback to the staff and build positive relationships. The fieldtrips with the children to museums and other cultural events, as well as the fieldtrips done in the monthly actualization sessions, also helped re-energize children and educators. The collaborative culture created at CCCria indeed played an important part in continuously improving their work, feeling good about their accomplishments, and creating a support group to deal with the difficulties, confirming Fullan’s theory.

Finally, Fullan called the eighth element long-lever leadership, which includes the idea of leadership at all levels of the system. Fullan stated that “the main work of these leaders is to help put into place the eight elements of sustainability; all eight simultaneously feeding on each other” (2005, p. 25). Leadership was found in the figure of the CCCria coordinator. As said before, she was a dedicated educator, who bought into the vision and mission created for CCCria, but also had her own ideas of directions she wanted to see developments. For example, in her interview she spoke of the importance of having children taking advantage of cultural opportunities outside the community and saw her role as gathering information and looking for partnerships to make it happen. Another way she saw the work expanding was to have the Center open at night to offer adults in the community arts and leisure opportunities. She invested effort in building
relationships with parents, children and educators to tailor her actions to their needs. She saw the value of what the project had for the community and was committed to that endeavor. Children and educators recognized her efforts and good intentions and looked up to her. Since she came after the initial training, she was, in part, taught the methodology by other educators, trusting them to lead her way. She showed openness to listen and act upon their feedback. This attitude strengthened the collaborative culture of the organization.

I also found leadership in other places. Asking the children, I learned that leadership was spread throughout the organization. For specific tasks which relied on adult authority, such as dealing with conflicts, children pointed to certain adults to lead the conflict resolution process. They mentioned several figures they sought help from: the educator in charge of the room, the CCCria coordinator, the soccer coach (who was also the handyman), or the office manager. When asked who was in charge at CCCria, children said that they were the ones in charge, or that CECIP’s coordinator, Josephine, was in charge, or still, that Dona Anastacia, the community leader from CEACA-Vila, was in charge. The children identified several leadership figures that influenced decision making at CCCria, including themselves. Tasks like organizing a fieldtrip or an actualization session included the participation of a team, which sometimes incorporated the children. The educators were encouraged to lead activities during the monthly actualization sessions. Decisions were mostly taken as a consensus, after discussing the issues with a larger group. Important to notice, this more democratic way to run the Center conflicted sometimes with the more hierarchical approach to leadership seen at
CEACA-Vila.

According to this framework, CCCria seems to be headed for the institutionalization of its innovative methodology. The challenge left is to find ways and partners to keep CCCria afloat financially. As of 2010, CEACA-Vila had found the funds to cover the costs for that year. Some important partners had finished their grants, not renewable after a certain period of time. This placed a huge pressure on the organization to find new partners. Some governmental resources were being tapped, but the financial stability of the Center for the long run was still an unresolved issue.

How Does this All Fit in with the CRC?

This question was present since the beginning of the study. The first idea I had for my study was a policy implementation approach, where the CRC implementation was the major focus. I found an easy connection between what was being done at CCCria and with the ECA law (presented here as part of Thesis One), which is explicit in its documents. I also found a strong connection between the CRC and the ECA. However, I couldn’t find the connection between the CCCria and the CRC in CECIP or CEACA-Vila’s documents, or even mentioned by any of the interviewees. Nonetheless, what I observed in terms of educational practice and interactions between children and adults were clear examples of the kind of participation referred to in the CRC (specifically in Articles 12 and 31). This is no small result. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is a major milestone for guaranteeing the rights of children, and the right to participate in decision making processes is one of the aspects that organizations are struggling with all over the world.
The United States, as of October 2010, had signed but not ratified the Convention, although many children’s rights advocacy groups have been campaigning for it, a movement that got momentum with the CRC’s 20th anniversary, in 2009. Researching the arguments for taking such a stand (non-ratification of the treaty), I found that American advocacy groups against the ratification, such as parentalrights.org or homeschool360.com, mostly conservative groups, use legal arguments questioning the impact that some important principles underlining the CRC would have on society (Farris, 2008). According to these groups, the Convention is incompatible with the American legal concept of the relationship between state and child. Also, as an international treaty, it would override the U.S. Constitution’s dispositions if they were to be in conflict. The same conservative groups argue that CRC would supersede parental rights and sovereignty. Farris (2008) cited those arguments including:

Children would have the ability to choose their own religion while parents would only have the authority to give their children advice about religion… the best interest of the child principle would give the government the ability to override every decision made by every parent if a government worker disagreed with the parent’s decision… A child’s “right to be heard” would allow him (or her) to seek governmental review of every parental decision with which the child disagreed. (p. 1)

Farris (2008) also stated that “According to existing interpretation, it would be illegal for a nation to spend more on national defense than it does on children’s welfare” (p. 1) and that “children would acquire a legally enforceable right to leisure” (p. 1). Finally, the CRC would prevent the teaching of Christianity as the sole true religion, and
opting children out of sex education (Farris, 2008).

These arguments reveal an agenda, a set of values and beliefs, where the children and teenagers are seen as the propriety of their parents, therefore, powerless to think or act for themselves until they reach the age of 18. This conception, in fact, is truly incompatible with the Convention. In face of these arguments, it seems that even the discussion about CRC and US ratification, bringing in the children and adolescents could stir some needed change.

Final Considerations

This dissertation presented an informal educational experience that transformed participation rights into the real practice of children’s protagonism. I have learned, and hopefully conveyed, how competent even very young children are to reflect, discuss, and act to solve problems. Their contributions, even when at first dismissed or overlooked by adults, once reviewed showed wisdom and an extraordinary sharpness of analysis, especially considering their age.

I wish to stress here that the community was going through a period of violence, mainly because of the conflicts between the police and the drug dealers inside the community. This study was done before the Pacifying Police (UPP) occupied the Morro dos Macacos in October 2010. Those circumstances were extremely difficult. This context affected the children in their basic sense of feeling secure to play and grow. They had stories about the violence they saw, sometimes gruesome scenes at a very young age. They had relatives involved in both sides of the conflict so discussing right and wrong was a delicate endeavor. It did not, however, stifle their curiosity or desire and ability to
learn, play, and have a good time.

For the children, learning to participate in several ways was also part of the process. Learning strategies, behaviors, feelings and negotiation skills meant also accepting that sometimes you engage in a discussion, fight for your opinion, and lose the issue. The fact that this learning process happened in a place where they can play, enjoy many art forms, and feel at ease to express themselves did not lessen the amount of skills involved.

Listening to children, considering their views, accepting that they are able and competent, and, finally, establishing a relationship of partnership with them is an exercise that demands from the adult a deconstruction of very well established paradigms. From what I learned, that is where the work begins. It changes the way the adults relate to children professionally and personally. The adults need to (re)think about their own autonomy in order to understand and encourage the children’s autonomy and be able to draw strategies that contribute to the process. This is yet another large step required to adjust one’s professional behavior to this new way of relating to children. The importance of having in place capacity building structures which allow educators to get information, reflect on their practice and plan for new interventions cannot be underestimated. To building caring relationships, based on mutual respect and trust, is a key part of the needed collaboration. This also means adults and children need to learn how to deal with conflicts in a non-violent way. Therefore, information updating and networking was also an important part of connecting the Morro dos Macacos’ CCCria to knowledge existing in other educational experiences.
Finally, this experience has brought hope to a community seriously and constantly subject to violence. To create educational processes of peaceful and respectful participation has given hope to the children and their parents of raising their families in an environment conducive to peace and personal growth. I would like to conclude by presenting the work of two children, made the week after a terrible conflict in the community:

There once was a book that called for peace in the Morro do Macaco.

One day there was a big surprise. At midnight the book created legs, arms and a face and fled the CCCria library and went to the Cruzeiro. From the Cruzeiro, he saw everything that was happening at the Morro. He saw people crying, he heard gunfire, death, cries for help and sad people, so the book decided to open its pages and a light came out of it and the hill was all clear, and everybody got to read the book and listen to its stories. The book told a story that if the war continues the world might end, so he showed a few things that could be done to end wars, and also beautiful things we have in our Rio de Janeiro and in the community. He showed pictures of Christ the Redeemer [Corcovado], the beaches, the forests reserves, the school, the children’s cultural center, the children, and all that is beautiful.

Something happened, a magic dust came out of the book and everything that was bad disappeared from the planet Earth and people learned that is not good to kill, to soil, to cut trees, to pollute and to do mean things. The next day, all the people planted trees,

22 The children are making a reference to the Cruzeiro – a cross placed at the top of the Morro dos Macacos hill. It can be seen from afar, and is a landmark very often represented in children drawings and other artistic representations of their community.
flowers, cleaned up the Morro and there wasn’t war ever more in the Morro dos Macacos, and they lived happily ever after.

Authors: Letícia (10), Laura (8), and Ana Beatriz (7)

The contribution of children to dream and help make a better world cannot be neglected. On the contrary, we would be lost without it. I am glad there are places where these contributions shine. I hope this research may help to multiply these dots of light.
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Distinguished Schools use change to implement positive new outcomes. Santa Barbara: University of Santa Barbara, California
Appendix A: Interview Questions

Protocol: Verbally read the questions, record on a voice recorder, and/or digital camera and take notes of participant responses, and transcribe the voice recordings at a later time.

Questions for educators and CECIP Staff

1. Origin of the Center
   a. Were there previous experiences or projects for children in the community? Please describe briefly
   b. How was the process of implementation of the Center?
   c. What were the challenges in creating the Center?
   d. How were you involved in the process?
   e. What benefits, if any, do you see for you personal and professionally? And for the children?
   f. Anything you would recommend doing differently?

2. Children’s protagonism
   a. How was the concept of children’s protagonism introduced?
   b. How did it fit your previous experiences as an educator?
   c. What are the challenges of implementing it?
   d. How has this been successful?
   e. What does children’s protagonism “looks like” for you?
   f. Has it changed over time? How?
   g. Is it important in this particular community? Why?

Questions for children

1. Origin of the Center
   a. When did you start coming here?
   b. Tell me about your first day here – what do you remember?
   c. What do you like about the Center?
   d. Before the Center, what do you use to do after/before school?
   e. Did you participate in other projects before?
   f. How is the Center different from school? And from home?

2. Children’s protagonism
   a. Tell me what you do when you enter the Center?
   b. How do you decide where to go (what room, what activity) when you enter the Center?
   c. If there is something you don’t agree or you don’t like here at the Center, what do you do?
d. Have you participate in a children’s assembly? How is it like? Why do you think there are assemblies? Did the children ask for assemblies or is it the adults?

e. Are there rules here at the Center? What are they? What happened if somebody doesn’t follow the rules?

f. What happened if for example two kids want to play with the same toy? How do you decide who will have it?

g. Do you ask for help from the educators? Give me an example

h. Do you ask for help from other children? Give me an example

i. Do you feel comfortable (happy) here?
Appendix B: Observation Protocol

OBSERVATION – (title – for example: Dance room – rehearsing for the Fun Saturday)
Observation made by: Claudia Ceccon
Date:
Room observed: ………………..(For example, Library; Computer room, etc.)

Observation: (Some comment about the general climate of that particular day. For example: close to mother’s day, or IF a Police invasion happened and therefore children might be more agitated than usual, etc.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>Impressions / Feelings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Start and finish of the session – or of one scene</td>
<td>(Detailed description of what is happening)</td>
<td>(How it made me feel, what were my thought at the time of the observation)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Final considerations (On the 24 hours following the observation, while entering the data on the computer, what sense did I made of the observation of the day, what connection could I establish with other observations recorded in the pasts months, what does it mean for future data points.)
Appendix C: Initial Selection and Training Process

Selecting and training the team that was going to put into practice a methodology that didn’t exist anywhere but in the brains of experienced educators presented a major challenge. The CECIP team was composed of three members – Josephine, the team leader, Malu, pedagogue with more than forty years working in early childhood education settings and in communities, and Padma, occupational therapist, who participated for the first two years. Malu indicated that the challenge was to make people understand the content and characteristics of children protagonism. Unfortunately, there wasn’t a place that had implemented the concept of child protagonism that they could go to visit. As ML stated in an interview:

No, there was no place to visit (...) not only there was no place, with this age group much less. I mean we did see a cultural center for this age, in São Paulo – but not using this methodology. Where could we get literature?
Where could we study? How would we conceive it as praxis if we don’t have it happening yet, and still show people that it is possible, even if they don’t see anything like this in their surroundings? On the contrary, to tell them that a child, 4 to ten years old was going to manage her activity time sounded so absurd!

It was agreed that CEACA was going to be in charge of recruiting educators and staff, according to criteria agreed upon by both institutions. According to CECIP internal documents, those criteria were: “1) To like playing; 2) to have the capacity to interact with both the children and the team of educators; 3) to have community identity; 4) to
believe that children produce culture and therefore have the right to express it, to intervene in their group, in their family, in their school, in their community, in society and 5) see the children as subjects co-constructors of the History of Humanity.”

For CECIP’s team, the specific training or knowledge of the content areas where the candidates were going to work (library, arts, music, and computers) wasn’t as valued as identifying themselves with the methodology and believing that child protagonism was possible inside the social context of the Morro dos Macacos.

Malu: “This challenge to select people was an intense learning process for all of us, very work intensive, because it demanded from us to be aware as much of subjective aspects than of reactions and behaviors, which gave indications of their profiles, on their interactions with each other, of how they acted when confronted with certain situations. As well as their past experiences (...) even when these experiences had nothing to do with “protagonism” but you could still see in that person an opening, a desire, a wish for new experiences. While others didn’t have that.”

At that point, CECIP team decided that having this open attitude toward a new way to relate to children was what they valued more. The skills related to specific areas could be acquired through training, professional visits and the effort of each professional. The abilities related to their work would be built through supervision and on-the-job training.

Chloe, an educator that worked for two years at the CCCria tells about her experience of being selected and go through the training process:

Well, I went looking for a job, I didn’t know of that project yet. (...) The girl who met with me, told me “well, you have worked in a daycare, you already directed a
daycare, are you sure you want to work at a daycare again?” I said: “yes, if there is an opening, I would like it, yes”. She said “Because there is a very good project about to begin, and they are recruiting people” and she started to put honey in my mouth, water in my mouth: “the project is very good, it will start soon, and there is still going to be training, you can leave your resume and do the interview. But the training is also a selective process.” She explained the project, and I said great, I’ll wait for this project, then. She scheduled the interview and we showed up, all of those who had left their resume. She said the training was going to take place in September (2006), during the whole month. The first session was at CECIP, on September 8th. We went there; we were about twenty to twenty five people. I liked it very much, the activities they had. So far, we had no idea that it was going to be protagonism. (...) In the first meeting they explained to us what protagonism was. But until that day nobody had worked with protagonism from that group that was there. So they start explaining, the activities were meant for us to reflect about how this work would be with the children, of protagonizing all the time, and that the child had the freedom of saying what he/she wanted, to do the things she had the desire to do, and from that it awoke something on me, and all this people with a lot of experience, with such a different work proposition... and it [the training] continued at CEACA’s headquarters, everyday, from Monday through Friday. Some people would come and leave, others would arrive, and there was a moment that I felt like giving up. I thought I wasn’t going to make it. Ah, I think I won’t go that way. For a moment I felt that I wouldn’t be able to develop such a work. And I quit. I didn’t go, one day. Then I thought: I think I should at least give it a try. I am capable. And I will go until the end. It
gave me strength, and I decided to go on. I was thinking that my experience, my potential, for a moment I thought I was nothing, for a moment I thought that I was not used to work with protagonism. Like ... it is difficult. I started to create obstacles, to keep me from ... finally I overcame them and went all the way, because the group was very good, the technicians, Josephine, Malu, Padma...

As Chloe makes reference to, the training had modules and two phases. The first phase was the interviews, listening to the educators’ beliefs regarding children and the reasons why they would like to work at a Cultural Center. Priority was given to people living in the community because they already knew the children and the parents, the local culture and could circulate easily. They would learn about the methodology and this would be the selective phase. People who did not align with the methodology would leave “naturally”. Then each participant would choose his or her area (library, arts, music, and so on). For the second phase, a second set of modules would be specific to each area.

The basic contents for phase one were called methodology, child development, citizenship, and reading/writing. An important part of the training was providing fieldtrips to cultural centers in Rio, encouraging the educators to become involved with art and culture. Many of them weren’t familiar with museums, libraries or other cultural spaces. Finally, in order to graduate to the next phase, each candidate had to prepare and perform an activity for the children of the Patinho Feliz Daycare. Chloe tells about this training and what it meant for her.

“During this training we visited several places, like the CEAT [a private school, that
has a library for children, art atelier, the drama school Tablado, other libraries, cultural trips in Rio de Janeiro, and open our minds a bit more, to better grasp this notion of culture. It was giving us a foundation of culture, and there are lots of places I got to know with the group. I am born and raised in Rio but never really went looking for cultural opportunities, so it was a real pleasure to go in these trips in the afternoon, and after that I kept going. At the Paço Imperial, for example, I had never entered the place, and we went there one afternoon, and it was very nice, very cool; we also saw the exhibits at the Centro Cultural do Banco do Brasil (Bank of Brazil Cultural Center) and at the Casa França-Brasil (Cultural Center France-Brazil), at the Teatro da Caixa (Theater), and we began to have an idea of what we were getting into.”

From the four above mentioned modules, I chose two that are more closely related to the research question, and therefore more important to analyze – methodology and citizenship – the heart of what CECIP, CEACA and the CCCria teams call “the CCCria Methodology”.

The Methodology Module

Documents from CECIP that recorded the training say that “the professionals selected would act as facilitators, which means give the children the opportunity to construct their knowledge, having as a reference the culture of play” (cultura lúdica). To fulfill that intent, this module will have fundamental importance regarding information, concepts and possibility of experimenting with new professional behaviors. The principles that guided this module are

- Cultivate cultural manifestations and value national culture
• Believe in the ability to learn
• Encourage creativity
• Believe in children protagonism
• Commit to and promote community involvement
• Value the ability to observe, listen and ask questions
• Value cultural diversity
• Put into practice the collaborative norms
• Promote integrated and integral education
• Deal with feelings and emotions on a climate of happiness and trust
• Believe in continuous improvement at the personal, team and Center’s levels

Malu tells about how they organize the themes, especially concerning child protagonism: “We organized the first block of workshops in modules, covering citizenship, methodology, arts, and creativity in general, broader than the work in art, creative movement, group interaction, team work (...) the protagonism was the methodology itself, sewing it all together. Now, of course we did one module talking about the methodology, the guiding principles, referring to Paulo Freire, and (...) certain values; the value of respect, the concept of the child as a social actor, the child being able to be the subject of his or her own learning process, being able to express his or herself, make choices, be autonomous, so I think we selected five principles that framed what it was to work with child protagonism as a methodology: autonomy, the child aware of his or her rights, the child able to learn and express his or herself, his or her desires,
and having to make choices. With that, we helped them, the educators, to go through activities where they had to express their desires, their wishes, make choices. We created activities where they had to use the characteristics of protagonism, and that turned out to be complicated for them, because many of them – we could see in a flash, in one workshop – had no experience in making certain types of choices, take a stand on something, decide, have an opinion, a critical appreciation of an object, the knowledge of creating a solution in a different situation, to assume a position based on one's belief system, but to take a stand. It was very interesting because we saw that some of them had never gone through something like that.”

The methodology created for the Cultural Center had elements brought from Malu and Josephine’s life long experience with daycare centers, mixed with elements inspired by CECIP’s core principles that can be recognized across their projects. For example, one important aspect included in CCCria’s methodology is the idea of the educator as a facilitator, borrowing the concept (although not the name) from the work of Paulo Freire (Freire, 1996, p.25). Another example is the presence among those principles of the use of “the collaborative norms”, referring to Bill Baker’s Seven Collaborative Norms (Garmston&Wellman, 2001, p.37) that have been included in CECIP’s methodology.

More specific to the CCCria Project is the notion of autonomy. The source of this concept is clearly anchored in Piaget and Kamii’s work. Malu’s account of the difficulty educators had to express themselves autonomously is an excellent example of the challenge presented by Kamii (1994): To work with children’s autonomy, the educators need to work on developing their own autonomy first. As Malu says, the team of people,
although apparently enthusiastic about the new methodology, had a hard time to express themselves, express ideas, make a critical appreciation of a piece of art, an image, or a TV commercial. She seemed surprised as how much of a challenge this was for these educators.

**The Citizenship Module**

To discuss the theme citizenship on the perspective of the rights and duties of the child was the main focus of this module. It was important for CECIP team to learn from the candidates what the different meanings and individual conceptions of citizenship they had and construct a common collective concept. The material “Statute of the Child and Adolescent”- produced by CECIP, contains booklets and DVDs where the law is discussed in details. Quoting internal documents recording the training: “This helped us discuss how to apply this law on our daily practice.”

Making the connection between the work they would be doing, when interacting and taking care of the children, and the application of a law, of a policy directed to protect children and adolescent is to help this team see their role as children’s right promoters. It is to help them perceived their work as influencing the reality in a bigger picture, and feel proud of it.

The last part of phase one was to plan and lead an activity with young children, at the Patinho Feliz Daycare, to be observed by members of CECIP team, in order to evaluate the interactions and the quality of the activities. At the end of the day, the results were communicated to the 20 candidates and the first group of eight cultural educators

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23 CECIP – Internal Activity Report, August - December 2006
was chosen. Again, Chloe tells what it meant for her:

“We had to present a story telling activity for the Patinho children as a test. And we did it – everyone had a task to do. And then and there, six were going to be chosen. I thought like, since at the beginning there were 30 candidates, then it was going to be hard to have a chance, really, so hard... But then, that day, when she said my name, then, it dawn on me, I said, folks, I am going to be hired to work at the Cultural Center’s library – and that was for me... responsibility. I thanked God, and said to myself, I am going, I am in. And I did and gave it my best, because I believe in that project, I think it is very interesting.”

At the end of phase one, the educators had to make a choice about what area they were going to work at. Some had more ability or experience with one or another area. But for all the educators, it opened the possibility of changing areas, embracing something different. Chloe remembers vividly how she made her choice:

“One day they said to us: each one of you will have to choose a place, one you think will be adequate for you. Then I was lost. I thought the art room was great, the toy room was a wonderful space, the library... finally I picked the Arts. But I kept changing my mind, trading places with one, then another. Then someone else wanted to trade rooms, and then I said – OK, give me the library. That would be a room where the training included a visit to CEAT’s library in Santa Teresa. When I got there I liked that visit so much, me and Jovana, and by coincidence, one of the teachers there had been my professor at the university, and I had my diploma with me, and an album of pictures, and she was on them, and we looked at pictures and I really enjoyed and appropriate myself
of that space, and saw myself there, working. And then everything was interesting, I could asked questions and doubts that I had, and she gave me lots of ideas, tips, ... we went there twice, and then we met with all the group and they [CECIP facilitators] asked if everyone had made a decision and I said “Hey, I want the library”. Then Josephine said – I think Chloe looks like a librarian. And I said, “Exactly, this is what I want, the library.”

After that, participants started phase two, the specific training, with modules designed according to the contents needed in each area, as for example, children’s literature, arts, and the culture of play. CECIP organized visits to educational play rooms, libraries, cultural centers to enrich the educators’ repertoire. Those who went on these visits were given an observation guide to record their impressions and what they had learned from each fieldtrip. Chloe describes it as a busy and intense learning experience:

“And that’s how we came, each one setting up their room, from scratch, each one of us picked a color for the room’s door, how it was going to be... during the training, we received the visit of people, professionals that work in our specific area. They gave us a lot of tips in how to classify: The fairy tales, the classics, the comic books, the chapter books, and that is when we learned about cataloguing, and the many ways of doing it. In our case here, there are more ‘young and adult’, ‘classics’ and ‘short stories’. Not a lot of fairy tales, and not a lot of short narratives. Children like short narratives very much – books that you can read fast.”

As she enumerated the things she learned during her training, it is clear that she had little knowledge at that time about how a library worked. As she was setting up her room,
she was learning the ropes of her new job, thinking about how to implement the fresh information together with an innovative way to relate with children.
Appendix D: The CCCria – Room by Room

I will present here one record of an observation session in each of the following spaces: the library, the computer room, the art room and the educational toy room.

The library (the books’ room).
August 11, 2008 – afternoon. Educator Chloe

The library was organized with two tables placed in the center of the room and, in a corner near the bookshelf, the children had made a kind of hut, where one side is a puppet theater. Inside it stood Arianna, Wilson and another girl. Roger, a young boy, was wearing a brown cloth tied in front and behind - like an apron. He enters and leaves the room several times.

Arianna sees me and gets all excited. After giving me a big hug, she runs from one side to another, talking nonstop. She jumps on the big stuffed bear, runs back to the table of the educator, gets a box and takes it to where the other children are. They had a verbal exchange, (couldn’t hear). It seemed that they disagreed with her, and she runs out of room.

At a table two children are looking at a picture book about the Araguaia region, with pictures of animals. They are very interested and want the educator to see it with them. Chloe is very helpful and not only looks at it, but talks with them. She asks if one of them will want to take care of animals someday. One boy says he likes the circus a lot and wants to be a circus performer when he grows up. She welcomes the news, encourages him, and calls me to join them in that conversation.

Arianna is back and into the corner of the theater. She talks with her two friends there and calls the attention of the adults for the play that is about to start. "We have a
play that is very beautiful. It is a play from the Cultural Centre" announces Arianna. She squeezes out of the small hut, and runs to the bookshelf, picks a storybook, and runs back. "It is Little Red Riding Hood” she announces from within. "Once upon a time, there was a Little Red Riding Hood." Another puppet appears. "I'm the grandma." The three children are sitting cross-legged inside the hut, Arianna has the storybook opened in her lap, turning the pages while moving the puppets. "The wolf goes to Grandma's house," she says – the rest of the story seems very confusing to me – and suddenly they say: "and they lived happily ever after"! The audience, composed at that moment by Chloe, a trainee and I feel a bit surprised by the quick ending of the story, but we clap our hands loud to their play. Arianna chooses another story (three little pigs). In the audience there is Chloe, Roger, 2 girls and I. The story begins with the three little pigs named Ruth, Gabriel and Fred. A voice from inside the hut says that Fred likes to play and beat the children up. Children are squeezed together inside the tiny hut. Two little pig puppets are made of plastic and one is made of cloth. Arianna leaves the house and begins to blow on the house to see if she can knock it down. The adults interact intensely with the children, and help keep the interest focused on the story being told. Arianna gives up one of the piggy puppets and decides to be the wolf, standing outside the hut. The trainee asks for the storybook, and begins to read to the children, as they dramatize with puppets – Arianna plays the part of the wolf, acting out her part enthusiastically. The trainee reads, skipping a few parts, and the children repeat exactly her words and play it out. When the

24 In 2008, CEACA had to close a large project. Some female employees were pregnant, therefore could not be dismissed. For a few months, they worked at CCCria assisting the educators and learning with them.
wolf blows the first piglet’s house, Arianna jumps, shakes her braided hair full of tiny beads, blows hard on the hut. She seems to enjoy enormously being the big bad wolf.

"Calm down, Arianna!" say her colleagues. When, in the story, the big bad wolf tries to climb down the chimney and burns his tail, Arianna climbs on top of a chair, jumps down on a pillow, and runs around screaming and holding her bottom, running after her friends that came out from inside the hut. Loud applauses.

They rushed back and already want to engage a third story, but Roger was waiting his turn to tell a story. There is a brief conflict there. Meanwhile, Arianna jumps up and down, enjoying the movement (the braids fly in the air) – she wants to be the wolf again. Chloe intercedes in favor of Roger, who was waiting his turn. There is some resentment in the air, and Roger finally gives up and leaves the room.

A child comes in and wants to write on my notebook – I refuse, saying that I am taking notes and need it. She asks me if she can bring a pencil and paper from the art room to write here. I tell her she should ask Chloe. She does, but Chloe says “writing should be done in the art room, because otherwise the books end up scribbled on”. Even then, the child brings in paper and pencil. Chloe makes it clear, without raising her voice, very gently but firm, that she can not bring them in that room, and why. The girl leaves the room, disappointed. Another little girl comes in and announces that she is going to the dance room. We learn that they are going to have a dance performance - and that the performers are putting on makeup.

The same group resumes their performance, starting over and telling the same story. This time Chloe is the one reading, and she reads the story with all the details, and
kids seem to enjoy it thoroughly. Another child says she wants to be a wolf too, and since she is older and taller than Arianna, she gets to be the big wolf, while Arianna gets to be the wolf cub. But Arianna does not want to be the cub; she wants to be the big bad wolf. The other girl gives up.

Chloe tells the story – and children use a big book to make the first piggy house (the house of straw), setting it on the floor, looking like a tent. Arianna blows and brings down the improvised house. The story continues and the book stays on the floor. Arianna, in the middle of the play, takes the books from the floor and quickly puts it away in the shelf.

She follows the story very well, in all its details. She understands her role, invents dialogues within the logic of the story, and expresses it with her body as well. In the end the “wolf” gets burned and runs to catch the “piglets” while the children say all together: “And they lived happily ever after!”

As the rooms calms down a bit, Chloe tells me that Roger is pretending he is a nanny - hence the apron and feather duster he holds, which he has shown me several times and used around me. Arianna plays with him, and goes into his fantasy. He picks up the hut and moves it to another place, near the educator’s table. Chloe closes the library’s door and the noise from outside lowers considerably. Chloe comments that the hut moved.

Arianna is being pushed around in Roger’s car (the car is the chair that has small wheels). Now the theater hut becomes a house. First Arianna says she is the nanny, then changes her mind and says she is the Queen, and Roger is the nanny. The two provoke
each other, and the play becomes rougher. But at no time does Arianna, who is five while Roger is seven years old, cry or shy away, as if she had decided to play rough and endure the consequences. A few seconds later, she gets some book cards from the librarian desk and distributes them saying that they are invitations to her birthday party. Roger collects most of the cards back, "disinviting" to the party. They fight (for fun) without hurting each other.

Gustavo opens the library door, stops and seems to appreciate the environment, as if deciding if he was going to stay there or not. He enters, sits and pays attention to what is going on. After a few minutes, he starts looking at the book about Araguaia. I start talking with him about the book, browsing the pages together. He looks and makes comments on each picture, especially those that have animals on them.

Laurence appears at the door. Snack time! Children and adults put the room in order; Arianna collects and stores the cards. (End of the observation)

The computer room.

March 7th, 2008, Morning, educator: Watson

At the entrance of the computer room the tags are being disputed. When the door opens, children rush in. The chairs are arranged in a circle, and the children sit immediately.

Watson asks if I want to sit (I had scheduled this observation session with him ahead of time) but seeing that there is just the right amount of chairs for the children I answer that I rather stand – which also gives me the opportunity to go around the room.

Watson asks everyone's attention. Pablo is not focusing on what is going on, and
begins to touch the computer - even without leaving his chair. His body is facing forward, but his arms are stretched behind him and he moves his fingers on the computer keyboard. Watson tells him: "Pablo, will I have to call Heather on you again? Why don't you respect me in here?" This is said in an impatient tone, but without raising his voice. Pablo stops and doesn't answer the question.

Watson talks with the children: they will do an activity about Rio de Janeiro.

"Again, Uncle?" say some children. "Let's send a message to Rio de Janeiro, what would you say?" One kid shouts: “There's too much violence!" W: “No, a good message about Rio de Janeiro”. Children start to say "Children" “There is the beach”, "There is the Christ" (Statue of the Corcovado). The children laugh, relaxed. Watson explains that they will first test the microphone, then he will go to every computer and help the pair of children there to save the message they want to send.

In the class there are 4 girls and 8 boys, for six computers. Watson tells them they can turn the chairs to face the computers ("Without dragging on the floor!"). The pairs must negotiate who puts the headphones first. In some pairs this occurs smoothly, in others not so much. In the dispute with Gael, Pablo loses, and gets a bit grumpy. He is close to me and I say: "You need to have a little bit of patience ..." Anna is close to me and overheard what I said to Pablo. She says to me with a very sweet smile: "I have no patience, I just start yelling."

The computers are turned on by the children - on some screens there are nice pictures of Australian animals. I see the kids trying on the microphones - the box on the computer screen that shows the sound is not coming up right to everyone (When there is
sound, the line in the little box moves, which allows me to see from afar if they're succeeding to get the sound). Those who managed to make it work are having lots of fun. Some put the headphones backwards and the microphone is pointed at the back of the neck, or is up in the air. They end up figuring it out and fixing the position of the headphone. I noticed several pairs in which one partner is helping the other to put on the headphones.

Pablo and his companion Gael are still disputing the headphone, and are unable to get a sound. Watson comes to help - the boys wait a little. When he is done, Pablo picks up the headphone and begins to speak - and then listen. He sings softly, "Flamengo is a winner! Once Flamengo, Flamengo is a winner! "And gives the microphone to his colleague to listen (Gael wears a Flamengo soccer jersey). The atmosphere is calm, there is no shouting. The pairs seem to enjoy making the recording, seeing their partner recording, and then listening to the result. Watson is going from computer to computer (I can’t really see what he is doing or hear what he is saying, but I guess he is helping to save the children’s “messages to Rio de Janeiro”).

Once they are done with the recording activity, they are free to play on the computer. A couple of kids have opened a coloring game/program. On another computer, a child leaves the room (there are now 11 children in the room). The partner who was left alone grabs the mouse, going on "all programs" and finding the same Crayola game the other two are using.

Pablo is a bit agitated - Gael says that he’ll break the headphone - and complains loudly to Watson, who does not see since he is helping another pair. Two children just
finished recording, and asked to start a game - but they need Watson’s help of to get there and play. The smaller one of the pair leaves the room. The one remaining goes into the Crayola game. When the boy opens the door to leave the room, an older girl sneaks in – she has no tag - Watson has his back turned to the door and misses it. Pablo is called upon again. Some children are shouting "Uncle, come here, uncle." Some just want to finish the recording activity in order to start playing. Others need help to start the games. Watson goes to the computers, one by one, very calm, without altering his voice. In the background you can hear muffled sound of drumming (from the music room).

Carlos leaves the room announcing, "I am going to the art room." Pablo holds on to the educator’s pants, pulling down, to get his attention. Watson holds firmly on his arm and tells him not to do that again.

Two girls are working very well. Although only one holds the mouse the entire time, they talk softly and consult with each other all the time about what to do, where to click, etc.. They just did a short animation, and show it to Watson.

The girl who sneaked in mid-session wants to try recording. Denzel comes in and tries to take the place of another child who left – at first he just looks around. The girl tries to record a song.

Another girl opens the door and asks, "Uncle, would you let me go again?"

Watson answers: "There isn’t room."

Gael shouts "Oh uncle! Pablo is beating on the computer!" – They get into a fight. Watson takes the headphones from Pablo and puts it on top of the computer "so it won’t break."
Gael makes an animation - Pablo says "I want to play .........." (can not hear the name of the game). Watson, "then wait a bit." He resigns himself, watching Gael, who has the mouse, and opens programs. A few minutes later, Gael leaves. Pablo stays alone on the computer. He opens a coloring software, calmly. Now there are only eight children in the room, four girls and four boys. The two girls who are together from the start, are doing well. I hear them say "Click on this box here," pointing to the screen with her finger, the other girl clicks with the mouse and replies, "I clicked." Each has a small washcloth on their laps. The other two girls are each on a separate computer, coloring.

Pablo now seems very happy - laughing and talking to the computer: "Another, another, another!" Clapping (I think he is opening another screen to color). "Uncle, may I go on the Internet?" Watson, "No, you may not." Pablo: "Yeah, OK." He turns around and continues to color.

The kids are having a good time. A little one asks: "Uncle, can you take this screen out? I want to go to the house" (referring to a house to be colored - on another screen.)

Denzel is still just looking, he did not touch the mouse. I note that children mastered the Crayola software - they have to choose a color, select it by clicking on top, take the mouse to the area to be colored and click on it again. They seem delighted to see it changing color.

Pablo says: "Uncle, look what I did! Soldier, macho!" Watson goes there and gives a quick peek. On the screen he has stamped several English Queen Guards type soldiers, and is painting each one of a different color. A boy laughs at a hat painted pink.
Denzel gets interested, gets up from where he was and sits beside Pablo. Watson comes immediately and asks him to relocate. He insists on staying, but Watson insists on him moving. He moves back, grabs the mouse and begins to play. Ivan sits by him and puts his hand on top of Denzel's hand holding the mouse, trying to guide his hand - but then let him do it by himself.

Now there are only two pairs - the others are sitting alone on different computers.

Denzel's sister has called him to go home.

(End of the observation)

The art room.

August 22, 2008 morning – Educator Renata

CECIP team and I arrived early at the Cultural Center, giving a ride to Heather, CCCria coordinator, who we met as she was approaching the entrance of the community. On our way up we saw 6 years old Silvia, half-way down the hill. Heather says that she always goes down there to wait for her and accompany her up. (...) Silvia holds my hand, and we enter the CCCria, passing through the cafeteria, where some tables are occupied by boys playing dominoes. We arrive at the art room, where Silvia shows me the CCCria logo she made out of clay. I find Emilia there, sitting at a table with Vitória and two other girls, working with recycled materials - transforming juice boxes (or milk cartons) into small handbags. Emilia is having trouble cutting the box, Vitória immediately picks up the box and cuts it for her. Vitória seems to know what to do next, the step by step procedure of making the handbag (cut, glue, make the holes, pass the wire, cover with paper, decorate), and she seems glad to help.
Josephine enters the room bringing a different type of paper, thick, suede-like and dark blue. She shows the educator, and asks how she would use this material. A few children take a piece and begin to experiment drawing with pencils, crayons, to see what works best.

Vitória asks Renata, the educator, "Aunt, pass it through for me!" (The wire into the hole. She had trouble doing it herself) Renata suggests: "Ask a friend!" However she comes over and shows Vitória how to push the wire into the hole with the round tipped scissors. Vitória resumes her work with enthusiasm – she seems to enjoy doing it all by herself (feeling competent).

The room is quiet, and I count 15 children (nine colored tags are hanging on the board, and 9 tags inside buckets, meaning that six children entered the room without using the tags), divided in three tables – in one, children are using play dough, in another there is drawing material, and the last one has recycled material, glue, pieces of fabric and other scraps. Each table is very involved in their activity. At the play dough table there is an ongoing dispute for the amount of dough each child has. They begin with the same amount, but each time a kid leaves the table, someone else takes the amount left on the table, and soon some have big balls of play dough, while others have very little. Carlos got a good amount of dough, and is quite happy (although he has to defend his dough from “attacks” by other children). A child begins to pound loudly on the table, but other kids ask him to stop the noise.

Five years old Denzzel is sitting alone at the drawing table. He's writing his name on a piece of paper with much care. He leaves the room. I know Denzzel and his
classmates have been out of school for a while. Their class teacher took a sick leave and the school didn’t find anyone to replace her. When Denzzel returns, I ask him if he misses going to school, and he says yes. He speaks very little – he communicates more by gesture than using words.

Vitória shows me the handbag she made. I ask her if she enjoyed making it, and she says - “Yes, I'll make another one.” She goes to the educator and speaks with her. Soon she is back at the table and I see she is decorating the bag she had already made (perhaps at the educator’s suggestion). Emilia remains involved in the activity of bag making. Looking into the box full of recycled material where the children get what they need for the projects they are making, she has found an empty soap wrapping, and is enjoying its smell, putting it into one of the bags she made.

Seven year old Julia leaves the room, and hides in the corner, outside the room, but still within sight range. I feel she is trying to get my attention. Then she decides to enter the room again. She goes to the blackboard and writes the name of Denzzel, of Jessica, and then tries to write hers - but the chalk gets too small. She asks the educator for another piece. She gives her a yellow chalk, but the quality of the blackboard (painted on the wall) is so bad that Julia barely managed to trace the letters. However, the names are all spelled correctly (even her brother’s name that has double letters). She seems proud to show me she knows how to write. I congratulate her.

(End of the observation)

The educational toy room.

September 22, 2008 – morning. Educator Erica
When I arrived, most of the children had just left the Cultural Center, on a field trip. Only a few stayed behind – either because they didn’t want to go, or because they couldn’t go (because they had gone to a previews trip and it was some other kids’ turn to go), or because they didn’t bring the signed authorization form and their parents couldn’t be reached. Rafaela and Lee play in the toy room with educator Erica. They are sitting in a small circle, on the floor, playing with a domino made out of wood, with painted animal figures. Six year-old Pablo is there also. Pablo plays with a big Lego boat with Daniel.

Erica replaces the tags on the panel at the door. The tags had been removed by the children who left in a hurry and didn’t put the tags back in place. I’m sitting at the table of the educator, as she sits back on the floor to play.

Rafaela seems very knowledgeable of the rule of dominos. When she sees that Erica is in trouble (that she doesn’t have one specific domino) she tries to help, expanding the options. i.e. making sure not to deadlock the game. She is paying attention to the educator, and seems happy to play in an ambience so calm. She is also enjoying the attention she is getting from the educator, with this low adult-children ratio, very uncommon in the toy room and in the CCCria as a whole. Lee wins the game, and they start a new game.

Daniel and Pablo are still playing with the Lego, quietly, without fighting each other. Each of them takes turn saying out loud what they are doing ("I’ll put this piece here"). Pablo holds the Lego boat and adds to it while his friend builds a Lego house.

Carlos (Pablo’s four years old baby brother) enters the room, grabs a tag and notices that it is chipped. He takes it to Erica and shows her. Then he puts the tag on the
basket and goes get another one at the door (as if the damaged one would not count).

Erica notices, and instructs the child to put the second tag back on the door.

Daniel and Pablo go play in the corner where other children have stretched a cloth, making a tent big enough to fit them. Pablo pulls on the cloth, bringing the tent down. He laughs at his mischief and goes back to the game of Lego. Erica draws my attention to his behavior and tells me that he likes to spoil the fun of others. "He goes there, and kicks their toys."

Daniel starts to put away the Lego. Pablo refuses to help, saying that his brother Carlos still wants to play with it. The educator asks him to help out, but Carlos really shows interest in playing with the Lego, and makes a gesture to Daniel to bring him the bucket he had just put back on the shelf. He signals that he wants the boat and the bucket of Legos. The educator encourages him to stand up, and go get what he wants. He gets up and goes to get it on the shelf, brings it back to where Pablo was playing earlier - near the entrance door - and starts playing by himself. Every now and then he says something to me.

Pablo and Daniel now play with large race cars. They hold the cars with both hands and run behind them around the room, passing quite close to where the game of dominoes is still going on. The educator asks him to be mindful of their game. Carlos immediately says that he can move to the side to give room for his brother to play. He moves back a few inches, leaving a free "racetrack". That attitude shows that while focused on his Lego game, he was also paying attention to his big brother.

Pablo puts the car back on the shelf, and sits on the circle where Erica and the
other children play dominos. He comes in and says "I want to be first, now it's my turn."
The others look at him. Erica says: "You arrived last and want to be first? You have to be the last!" He answers: “But I don’t want to! " He ends up accepting the rule anyway and participates well. As they play, Erica sings several songs in which children have to make movements according to the song, a bit like the songs for very young children, and he participates in and makes the movements, fully integrated in the activity. I notice that Erica is directing her attention especially to him, encouraging him: "Come on, Pablo! Your turn! Go for it!" He responds well to her encouragement and at the end, helps putting away the game when asked by the educator.

While this is happening, on the opposite corner of the room, Carlos lost interest in the Lego. He helps put it away and one of the children gets a puzzle from the shelf.

Emma, Daniel, and Carlos sit in a circle on the floor. Initially, each child has a few pieces of the puzzle, and individually tries to fit them. They often force the cardboard pieces into a fit, between parts that do not fit properly. They seem to have no knowledge that they are composing a picture with all those pieces, (the traditional goal of a puzzle) and show no “puzzle strategy”, as for example separating the pieces by color (blue for the sky, green for the forest, etc.). The fun of the activity seems to be to find one piece that fits into the other (even if the child forces the pieces to make them fit). They ask me to help out, and might have not gotten to use the puzzle in the more traditional way if I was not involved. Emma is the first to realize we're doing something collectively, and helps pick up the pieces. I say that we need blue pieces with one flat side (for the top edge of the puzzle), and she takes care to finding some, looking into the pile of the other boys.
They get interested in the quest as well. As we grow our puzzle, children become more and more excited. They ask for credit for the piece they did, "Auntie, it was me who made that piece there, right?" In the end, the puzzle is finished, and the kids are very happy (and so am I). Daniel holds the mounted puzzle with both hands (by miracle it doesn’t fall apart), lays it neatly into the bottom of the box, and puts it away on the shelf. The children are called for a snack. (End of observation).
Appendix E: CEACA-Vila Approval Letter

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I declare that Claudia Ceccon is authorized by this institution to conduct research at the Centro Cultural da Criança (Children's Cultural Center), under our administration, from December 2007 to November 2008. We were informed that she will be conducting observation and interviews with workers, parents and children, after obtaining the proper authorization.

Without further ado,

Rio de Janeiro, 05 de novembro de 2007.

Anna Marcelino Farte
Presidente do CEACA-VILA
Appendix F: Approval Letter From the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Date: March 20, 2008
To: Joseph Kretovics, Principal Investigator
Claudia Protaio Cezee, Student Investigator for dissertation
From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair
Re: HSIRB Project Number: 08-01-01

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled “Children’s Protagonism at the Centro Cultural da Criança: A Case Study” has been approved under the expedited category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: March 20, 2009