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Early Childhood Education: perspectives of mothers, fathers and other adults who are responsible for the care of children at Rocinha

Eliane Gomes, Leandro Castro and Renata Mena Brasil do Couto

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**Early Childhood Education:
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The International Center for Research and Policy on Childhood (CIESPI) is both a research and a reference center operating in conjunction with the Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio). It is dedicated to the development of studies and social projects about children, young people, their families and their communities. Its goal is to inform policies and social practices for these populations thus contributing to children's full development and for the promotion of their rights.



Rio de Janeiro, November 2023

This publication is part of the Participative and Inclusive Early Childhood: Increasing the Educational Opportunities for Children Growing up in Contexts of Vulnerability. The project, in Brazil, is coordinated by professor Irene Rizzini (PUC-Rio/DSS/CIESPI) and, internationally, by Kay Tisdall (Moray House School of Education and Sport, University of Edinburgh). The project is developed with the support of the UK Global Challenges Research Fund of the United Kingdom. Text by: Eliane Gomes, Leandro Castro and Renata Mena Brasil do Couto. English version by: Malcolm Bush. Editors: Irene Rizzini, Maria Cristina Bó and Malcolm Bush. Design: Carolina Terra (CIESPI/PUC-Rio) and Comunicar Agency / PUC-Rio.

1. Introduction

Since 2020, CIESPI has been involved in the international project Participative and Inclusive Early Childhood: Increasing the Educational Opportunities for Children Growing up in Contexts of Vulnerability. The project is coordinated by the Moray House School of Education and Sport at the University of Edinburgh in the United Kingdom and includes university-based research teams in Brazil, Eswatini, Palestine and South Africa.

The CIESPI team also undertook concrete actions for young children in Rocinha which included training young people to become involved in early childhood education centers; organizing play sessions in those centers; assisting campaigns in the community to promote vaccination against COVID; and establishing a community advisory group to assist in all phases of the project¹.

The ongoing field research in Rocinha will carry out approximately 80 consultations with residents and professionals who work in the community, including small children, fathers, mothers and guardians, Early Childhood Education Centers (ECECs) and preschool professionals and key actors related to different services and initiatives available for children. We will also consult experts and professionals at municipal, state and national levels to support actions and understand the challenges and opportunities concerning education of children

aged 0–5 years.

As part of the project, CIESPI staff interviewed twenty parents or adults living in the low-income Rio community of Rocinha. We started conducting interviews and collecting data in November 2021 using semi-structured scripts. Interviews were carried out with fathers, mothers and other adults who are responsible for the care of children, all residents of Rocinha². The 20 interviews conducted during this stage were of women and men, aged between 17 and 53 years old. Interviewees have different levels of schooling some are illiterate and others with higher education. They also have different family configurations, single mothers and nuclear families. Mothers, parents, grandparents and godmothers were asked about the education of small children, aged between 0 and 5 years.

The majority of interviews were carried out with families whose children attend ECECs or preschools, whether public, private or 'conveniadas' (centers that receive per-diem payments from the city). Some families highlighted the challenges of caring for children who do not attend educational institutions and/or have disabilities³. Interviews covered a variety of themes relating to the education of the young children in their care. The following account summarizes the adults' views on the three major topics of the research project. Those were how safety, inclusion and participation promote early childhood learning. Depending on the circumstances, the adults were either interviewed in person or online using

phone or WhatsApp. We note that inclusion and participation are overlapping terms and that the parents' responses reflect that fact.

We are grateful to those adults for their cooperation in the project and have made every effort to keep their names confidential.

2. The Community of Rocinha

Our community site is Rocinha, a steep mountain-side low-income community in the southern zone of the city of Rio de Janeiro. Population estimates vary but reach as high as 180,000 inhabitants. These people live in a community measuring less than one square mile. While house floor plans are very small, some at two meters square, the buildings are multi-story with many having three or four floors.

CIESPI has a long history of contact with the community, has two community residents on its research staff and two more who have worked or work there. CIESPI has also help the community establish a community memory library and play and reading programs for young children.

Rocinha has a very active small business life with over 200 small businesses including bakeries, bars, convenience stores, hairdressers, beauty salons, pharmacies and bank branches. It has three public health clinics. It is surrounded by middle income neighborhoods, a source of jobs for women as domestic workers. It is closer to

downtown than most low-income communities in Rio and hence access to public sector and service jobs.

Most homes are accessible only by concrete steps or alleys. There are very few outdoor places for children to play.

The dense profile combined with homes with small floor plans is fertile ground for respiratory diseases. Rocinha has very high rates of leprosy and tuberculosis.

Rocinha's main problem is the violence caused by drug traffickers and by the police responses. The community is controlled by one major gang. Violence is endemic. Shootouts are frequent. Many of the traffickers are young men and they are very heavily armed. Young children are sometimes prevented from going to school when the shooting starts.

A major challenge for young children is the almost complete absence of safe places for them to play. Open spaces are rare and those that exist are often dominated by drug traffickers.

Rocinha has about thirty formal early childhood learning centers, public, private and non-profit. They are a critical resource for parents but struggle with poor infrastructure, the difficulty of recruiting and retaining trained teachers, slow payments from the municipality, and overcrowding. But a number of the non-profit centers have a long history and well-developed programs. The community also has a modern, well-used public library.

There are several very active resident advocacy groups in the community that tackle a number of community issues.

2.1 Inclusion

The right to inclusion in education is enshrined in a number of Brazilian laws and policy statements including the Federal Constitution of 1988 and the Law of the Bases of National Education of 1996 (Brazil, 1988 and 1996). Early Childhood Education was recognized as a right to all children. However, data indicate that existing social inequalities in Brazil impact the education system in the country. Children and adolescents that are black, indigenous, poor, with disabilities and/or from rural areas are under greater risk of violence and exploitation. They also suffer the consequences of exclusion, understood as a combination of low performance, high difference between age-grade and school dropout (UNICEF; CNDE, 2013).

“The idea of inclusive education is strengthened in the sense that a school must be open to diversity, promote it, respect it, and above all value it as a fundamental element of the constitution in a democratic and just society” (Brazil, 2020). Inclusion in this project refers to all children who might be excluded from an education opportunity for any reason. Our definition includes children impacted by poverty, an inadequate diet, poor housing, without opportunities for leisure and culture, and any form of discrimination regardless of

the socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, gender, or ethnicity. The project has also defined inclusion to be about the existence of key educational opportunities since inclusion would be impossible without those resources. Hence the lack of opportunity to attend an early learning center is also exclusion.

Parents had several ideas about inclusion relating to such topics as access to education, health, leisure, accessibility, transit and income. But in general, it was not talked about much using that term. As one parent said, *“I guess I have not heard this word inclusion”*. But when they considered the term in relation to their young children’s education, they saw it as being about accompanying their children in the educational process and so helping their development and learning. As one parent put it: *“Inclusion for me is having the father, the mother, the grandmother, all the world involved in the education of the child”*.

Inclusion was also seen as young children being welcomed in educational spaces by adults, by listening to them carefully, and the adaption of practices that contribute to the common good. Some of the parents talked about the need for a greater number of professionals trained to give various kinds of support to the children and their families including specialized services for children with disabilities, chronic illnesses and for any problems that could impact on their development and learning. *“(…) For me, inclusion is when there are projects that attend the child’s specific needs. Education should be specialized*

in responding to individual needs. I think that nowadays the subject is not much talked about, right?”

When asked whether some young children in Rocinha were treated differently, most parents replied yes pointing to aspects of family and community life, social and economic factors and the basic difficulty of getting access to early childhood slots. As one parent put it, *“I guess that despite being one community (...) and caring (...) in various ways people here have many disagreements. (...) And there are children who do not have the opportunity to go to school as others do who must go to a public school, who encounter (...) problems”*.

The children most likely to get treated differently were those who did not receive the proper support from their families whether because of parents working long hours and not being able to accompany the day to day lives of their children or because of the precariousness of their income or unemployment in the family. The difficulty of getting a place in early childhood education because of the lack (or absence) of places to play in the community also contributed to the context of inequality. *“There are children that parents can afford to pay for private day care (...), where there is a slightly different type of service. And there are those kids who don't have that possibility. And there are children that don't even have the opportunity to go to school at all, also due to difficulties faced by the families”*.

Parents, in general, thought that their children

had no difficulty taking part in the activities of the ECCEs. But some parents thought that a lack of dialog between the institutions and families, the reduced number of professionals and limited access to internet during the pandemic were factors which impacted on their children's inclusion. *“At school there can be one teacher for thirty something students. It is very difficult (...) can you imagine a child having to compete for attention with thirty something children and only one teacher?”*⁴. One mother whose child had disabilities and a chronic illness thought that her child did suffer exclusion in the ECCE on account of the child's limitations and the fear of the organization that he might hurt himself.

Respondents were asked about ways to increase inclusion and participation of their children in early learning centers and suggested such strategies as guaranteeing internet access through government projects and increasing the number of teachers and specialists. They particularly emphasized the importance of such professionals as educational psychologists, speech therapists and social workers.

A majority of parents interviewed thought that there were parents in the community who wanted to place their children in ECCEs and preschools but could not find places. *“Not everyone succeeds. Because there are few spots”*. Parents of babies and young children with disabilities thought they were most challenged because of the special attention their children needed. In addition to problems due to delay

in getting a place in a public institution, many families could not afford the monthly rates for private organizations. Several families had more trouble keeping their children in private centers during the pandemic as unemployment and economic difficulties increased during that time. We were told about the lack of information about enrolment processes as many parents said that they did not know how the decisions to admit children were made.

There were varying opinions about which children were likely to get accepted for a place in an Early Education Childhood Center (ECCEC) for children 0-3. About a third of parents thought selection was based on a first come first served basis. Some thought that ECCECs prioritized children whose parents worked. Others thought that ECCECs prioritized mothers who either studied or worked. Many thought that getting information about the process of enrollment was a vital first step in inclusion.

Parents also made suggestions about what would improve the programs such as full day rather than half day classes, offering teachers on-going training course, the provision of language courses, sporting activities, emergency healthcare and better accessibility. Some of the parents pointed out that for these things to happen there would have to be more investment including public sector investment to improve infrastructure, increases in the number of early childhood places, and the number of qualified professionals such as psychologists, speech

therapists and audiologists.

Children with special problems had difficulties being included. One parent said: *"There are schools which don't adapt. Close to my house is a young girl (...) who is autistic (...) She needs a teacher who is trained for such children. Why? Like it or not, she is equal to all the other kids. She just needs more, a little more attention"*.

Sometimes children without special problems have difficulties getting into a school. *"For preschool these days, they tell you to go to the site. You have to register online. A place empties, a child who lives here in Rocinha is told to go to Catete".* Catete is over ten miles from Rocinha and connected by roads with heavy traffic.

Inclusion in the general community is also important for a young child's development. And racial discrimination can block this inclusion. *"There are children, generally black children, and a majority of the population here in Rocinha is black (...) who are discriminated by society at large for all their lives"*.

Regarding children having already suffered some type of discrimination or prejudice at day care center/preschool, most of the interviewees answered that children did not suffer any type of discrimination or prejudice in the institution. However, one of the interviewees reported that his son was prevented from doing ballet at school, due to the prejudice of parents who were against the activity being offered to boys. It is important to highlight that the institution sought conciliation but ended up being pressured to offer

an alternative dance class “for boys”, indicating the segregation of activities that can be offered to different genders, contributing to the debate on inclusion.

Among interviewees three families did not have their children enrolled in ECCEs at the time of the interview for different reasons, but when asked whether enrolling their children in an educational institution could help them learn, the three respondents said yes, highlighting the importance of access to early childhood education for the development of children: *“And I have experience with my nephews, right? I have two nephews of the same age, one went to an education center at 9 months and the other went to daycare at 5 years old. (...) The one who went to day care before, nowadays, knows a lot that the other doesn’t know (...)”*.

2.2 Participation

While this concept is being developed (Freire, 2011), participation as a general right is specifically supported for children by the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child (U.N., 1989), the Brazilian Statute on the Rights of the Child (Brazil, 1990) and the Early Childhood Framework Law (Brazil, 2016). According to the Paraguayan author Bordenave (1983), one of the major Latin American thinkers about communication, people participate in different spaces, in the family, in the community, and in political struggles. This micro-participation is important in the construction of social life and an

organic part of macro-participation, both being inherent in the nature of what it is to be human and a right of all people. ECCEs and preschools are also spaces that should permit participative *praxis* and, in this sense, our project analyses the involvement of children, their families, and other key actors in the children’s education.

In our study, family respondents defined participation as their constant presence in daily lives of their children, interacting with them as they accompanied the children’s development and learning. Note the similarity of this definition to respondents’ definition of inclusion:

“Everyone must participate with the child; to see him grow, to be by his side. Because he depends on people. Not to mistreat and to give education”.

“For me it is giving attention to everything that is happening to your child’s ECCE. If there is a coffee for mothers, you make sure you are there (...) talk to your workplace and be there for the child”.

Parents thought it is important to accompany and give support to children in their school activities, and to participate in meetings and other activities suggested by the ECCEs or pre-schools. These are not simple things to do especially for single mothers who run their households alone and for those who work outside the family and depend on their bosses’ permission to attend these events.

On the other hand, some thought that although it caused a physical absence, working to maintain

the household and, therefore the children, could be thought of as a type of participation.

On a lesser scale, there were parents who criticized some schools for not informing families about the children's school routines and for not involving adults in some activities. One parent said, *"we are never invited to participate in anything"*. Parents of children with disabilities or chronic illnesses were particularly concerned about participation. *"Participation is for me related to inclusion and about including children in activities, in general, from day to day"*. As another parent put it: *"I am always asking: what happened during the day? What activities did he do? What did he eat? How did he behave in the classroom? If he thanked his teacher? If he fought with his classmates? I am always asking these things"*.

Parents liked many things about the ECCEs and preschools their children attended. They liked those activities which taught their children resourcefulness and how to develop independence. Some parents liked the relationships among the ECCE staff, children and families especially when there were channels of communication and opportunities for parents to participate with the schools. Throughout the interviews, however, parents complained about the lack of communication between the institutions and the families, the reduction in the number of professional staff, the lack of individual attention to the children, the institutions failure to adapt to children with disabilities, disorders,

and chronic illness and even the poor quality of the food.

As for the children's participation in early learning, most of the respondents said that their children had no difficulties participating. However, some parents thought that limited internet access during the COVID pandemic when most ECCEs were closed, the lack of dialogue between the schools and families, and the reduced number of teachers were factors which affected the participation of children.

As for participation in the community, some respondents mentioned that children did nothing locally because they, the parents, did not know of any accessible or interesting places for them. They added that the local squares were not maintained and lacked free playground equipment suitable for young children. Other parents talked about the risk of children being exposed to violence and gun shots as dangers which restricted the children's circulation in the streets. But some parents, however, said the children did spend time in places in the community but that there were too few places for the local demand. They mentioned that their children did use spaces in the community although those places were insufficient for local demand. A park, a sports arena, part of the forest, places in different parts of the community were also mentioned.

The vast majority of parents, however, said there were no safe places for their young children to play in the community: *"We don't have a good infrastructure. We don't have good public*

squares. There is not good playground equipment in the squares that work. We don't have sports fields that we can access. There are so few for all the people here (...) They are either badly cared for or they are full".

"I never take him out to play. In the past we had a little square and I guess that the municipality placed a slide there, things for little children (...) But I never liked to take him there because the kids who are on the street are a little aggressive. They are a little badly educated. That's the right word".

There were private child care-givers who were very useful when the parents' work schedules clashed with pick-up times at school. Some parents regretted that they did not have enough time to spend with their children but relied on the support of family members and, during COVID, resorted on virtual connections to be present.

One parent summarized it: *"I would love there to be a square. I would love to have a swimming pool. I wish there were a music school. I work right? I know that these things exist. And I wish that my son had access to them. Here I know of no place with these resources".*

At home, parents undertook a variety of activities with their children including play and joint household tasks to promote their children's learning. They talked about games, drawing, painting, reading and music. One parent who could not read told her grandchildren stories using images from a book. Helping with

homework set by the school was an important job for most families.

Parents saw the homework set by the schools as very important. *"I work with her on the homework they set. I sit with her, I explain. At times I take a pencil and paper and write her name for her to copy".*

Despite these efforts, some parents had difficulties paying attention to their children's learning at home partly because of a shortage of time. *"I could do more with more time. My time is not enough. But I could help more with more time. I am a single mother with two children and I work. We have to combine everything".*

There was also sometimes a shortage of experience and knowledge. *"She has been learning about vertebrates and invertebrates. And I thought, how can I explain this to her? At her age I couldn't even write my name". "I really want to offer him something better but I am not in the position do to that even toys. I really want to buy him things, everything which an autistic kid likes. But I cannot give him them. That is how it is, it is part of life".*

We should mention some special examples of parents helping children such as a home where the walls are covered with children's drawings or the mother who reorganized the books to be on a shelf within reach of her daughter, or the mother who encouraged her children of different ages to play with each other. Then there was the mother who used to sing all day long as way of being close to and calming her son. Parents also mentioned

getting their children involved in cooking as a way of stimulating their children's development.

To a lesser extent, television and cell phones were mentioned as strategies to entertain children during family routines. Cell phone was considered by one of the interviewees to be a challenge for her, as she spends a lot of time on social networks and feels that she could dedicate herself more to her daughter throughout the day. At the same time, another mother said that the device is essential for her to connect to networks that contribute financially to support her child, since she is part of an institution that helps families of children with chronic illnesses who report their experiences on the internet. Still on the use of technology, those with internet access mentioned using it to search for different activities to do with their children, especially during the pandemic when children were limited to the space of their homes and families had few entertainment options.

If on the one hand, the respondents talked about their absences, others pointed out the partnership they had with their children in domestic activities. *"It is good. We laugh so much. It is fun"*.

2.3 Safety

The United Nations Human Development Program's concept of security emphasizes dignity and liberty for people and includes economic, food, sanitation, environment, personal, community

and political safety (PNUD, 1994). In our study, safety is not only about protecting children from physical violence but also about other violations of their rights including violations which harm their well-being, their development, and their learning. It is also about improving the safety of young children in their homes, in the community and services, projects, and programs aimed at children.

Parents ideas about safety in Rocinha were very influenced by the micro-geography of the community and by physical violence. These fears were explained by the fact of being exposed to armed conflict between police and drug dealers and rival gang factions, and by limited access to public services because of the almost absence of the state in the community. Their two main concerns for their young children were to protect them from armed conflict and from domestic accidents. *"Safety for me is that you are able to come and go without fear that something could happen to your children, to you"*. And another parent said: *"Today, if you're going to play in the alley, you run, you take three steps, you're hitting your face against a gun"*.

What was necessary was the constant presence of parents and of people to watch over their children, giving them attention, care and education. *"I think that the principal factor that develops safety for a child would be this: the help which whatever person closest gives to them"*.

The majority of respondents thought that their children were not safe in the community.

"Ah no. Because of the presence of gangsters. You never know when something is going to happen. There is so much bad news. People are concerned with stray bullets which we see on TV". It was not just physical violence that was a threat to safety. "No, because of the many indicators of disease here in Rocinha (..) tuberculosis, meningitis. And here people live next to a ditch, full of rats (...) open to the sky, no one comes here to clean it".

But some respondents modified the view of daily violence by stressing community networks which helped with the care of children and the existence of local rules imposed by drug traffickers which reduced the incidence of such crimes as robberies, kidnapping and the abuse of children. *"It is not possible to be safe in terms of gunfire (...) but in terms of safety in school, here, I feel very safe, with the persons I have become friendly with". "They are (safe) because the very little ones you are watching them. And you can order the little ones around. Control them. When they grow, alas, only God".*

What would, however, improve the safety of their children in the community would be the end of the illegal drug trade. *"But for this to happen, for things to improve, things must begin at the top, with politics, with corruption. But sincerely, I have no hope for this".*

Other things mentioned were: more respect among people and less discrimination; full day schooling; more services and opportunities for the community; greater access to health care and to health specialists; and solutions for basic

sanitation problems such as the closing of open ditches which caused disease.

Many parents thought that home was the only safe place for children because then the children were in their company, because there was restricted access to the house or because the house was surrounded by other buildings and, therefore, less exposed to the stray bullets that came from armed conflict. Parents with children who had disabilities said they had to be particularly careful and adapt their homes to the needs of their children. *"In my house there is nowhere to sit and there is only one table because I took away everything close to him because he climbs up and jumps".*

Most parents thought their children were safe in ECCEs and pre-schools especially since these schools had protocols for dealing with armed conflicts such as hiding the children in a safe place, locking the doors, and not permitting anyone to enter or leave. The educational centers restricted access to the buildings, keeping the doors shut and having staff monitor the circulation of people. Children could only leave the building if accompanied by a registered responsible adult. The childcare staff were very caring paying a great deal of attention to the children.

But parents pointed out that safety issues were not just specific to the schools and that there were risks on the journey to school because sometimes on those journeys the children were exposed to the sale of illegal drug and the presence of armed

people. When the school was close to the parents' homes, this contributed to the parents' sense of safety.

A majority of parents thought their children were safe in the home. *"I think that treating a child with respect, showing him that he is loved, that he is an individual, that he has a voice in this house, because we listen to what he says, understand? I think this is what gives him security".*

A number of parents said they would like to improve things in the physical structure of the home to increase safety but that they could not afford to.

The following question reflects the satisfaction of parents and guardians with ECÉCs and preschools that their children attend: *"These are places where the child needs to feel safe".* When asked how children's safety could be improved in these institutions, nearly 50% of respondents said they did not identify anything that needed to be changed. Some participants mentioned that using cameras and more efficient communication with parents could help. Some of them mentioned that the security problems they identified were not specific to the ECÉCs but derived from the presence of criminals and their confrontations with the police. When there are no armed conflicts, education spaces and children tend to be respected in Rocinha.

One important aspect of safety concerns the increase in the number of single mothers and the insecurity this generates for families in Brazil. According to the Brazilian Census Bureau (IBGE,

2020) 45% of Brazilian households are headed by a woman and among these, 63% are headed by black women in households that are below the poverty line. Without policies directed at helping these households, safety is illusory. *"I think that I would feel safer if there were a father present, a man. Understand? Because people know that a woman lives here alone. And that complicates things".*

Regarding which spaces they consider safe in the community, just over 1/4 of parents and other responsible adults for the care of the children said that their home was the only safe place, either because children are with them, or because the housing has restricted access or because it is fenced by other constructions, being less exposed in cases of armed conflict: *"Then I see security, inside the house on my side. Then I know it's safe, other than that I don't see safety anywhere else".* Another 25% of residents said there were no safe spaces for children in the area, generally due to armed violence. As safe public spaces, one particular place (Latoriaux) was mentioned, a region where the risk of armed conflict is considered lower; the square on Street 4, where there are no presence of police and criminals, although toys available for children are paid for; Churches; and spaces for early childhood education, since access is restricted. Contrary to the other interviewees, 2 parents said they consider most of the community safe, especially the wider spaces and fewer ditches, where there is no ostensive presence of the legal drug trade.

As for their young children's sense of safety, some parents said that their children became agitated and alarmed when they heard fireworks and shots in the community. *"At just three years of age, she understands what a shot is and that someone is going to come. She shouts mother, mother, shots, shots. She cannot see an armed person without saying 'I am going to die; I am going to be killed. I am not sure whether she saw something or whether she heard someone'."*

Other parents thought that the children were too young to understand the idea of safety but added that it was crucial that the children remained close to the family to maintain a sense of safety. *"The definition of safety for them is this: to be close to their father or mother"*.

3. Final thoughts

The inclusion of children and their participation was important to parents as, of course, was their safety. But we learned that the subjective and objective conditions of each family limited or created opportunities for the development and education of their children. We were also told that these critical conditions were directly related to the population's access to high quality public goods and services and that the support of the state was essential for the full protection of young children. The families recognized the importance of being with their children, interacting with them and listening

to them even though the objective conditions of everyday life sometimes made these activities difficult.

We also learned how important it was to learn from parents directly their thoughts on these topics.

We had difficulties identifying male parental figures who could and were interested in collaborating with the research, which meant that 85% of our respondents were women. Talking with parents, many of whom are overwhelmed by work and childcare during the pandemic was not an easy task. That task was made more difficult by the length of our questionnaire which had to cover the triple themes of safety, inclusion and participation. Poor internet connections added to these problems. It is important to say, however, that having researchers living in the community where the research has been carried out was very important to overcome most of the challenges that arose during this stage.

We highlight that the opportunity to listen to families who made themselves available to tell their stories, addressing issues beyond the proposed script. The diversity of profiles, with different points of view and experiences to share, enriched the research and allowed us to know many narratives of struggle and dedication to children of the Rocinha community. Even in the face of difficulties, we heard fathers, mothers and guardians willing to fight for the rights of their children, such as the mother of a child with

Autistic Spectrum Disorder who said: *"(...) That's what I'm fighting for, to see the best of him, you know? And I will succeed"*. We also heard reports of a father who, together with his partner, splits between work and family to be present in his son's school routine: *"I'm always trying. I take him to school, I pick him up from school, my wife too. On days when we can't for some reason, we alternate. So, I'm always accompanying him in some way"*. And we heard the proud testimony of a mother who said that her daughter puts her security in her: *"And she always says like that too (...): 'I'm not afraid because mom always protects me'"*.

Families revealed that they consider important being present and interact with and listen to their children, even though the objective and subjective conditions of each one may limit or create opportunities for this to happen: *"(...) They have a voice. They need to be heard. They also need to be respected. As adults it is our role"*. Interviewees also revealed efforts to strengthen ties with the institutions of early childhood education and with the community where they live, even though it was evident that the limited presence of the State in Rocinha, with regard to provision of care policies in education, health and social assistance, for example, impact negatively and harm the development of children.

Finally, another aspect that caught our attention was the close relationship between the concepts of inclusion and participation for the respondents. Some pointed out the need for

participation for inclusion to be viable. While others indicated that for participation to occur, it is necessary to include people in decision-making processes. It is important to note that security walked in parallel with these debates, since Rocinha residents were, understandably, more focused on their frequent exposure to territorial conflicts between illegal drugs groups and the police. A broader perspective on the topic could have allowed us to explore its relationship with the inclusion of residents in social policies, including debates on public safety, education and health, for example. Or even address the historical agenda for social participation.

We would like to add that we will continue to consult other key-actors in the community on these topics, adopting listening methodologies specifically aimed at children in Early Childhood, with the objective of contributing to discussions and actions to expand and improve education opportunities for children living in Rocinha.

We are, therefore, very grateful to the parents who participated and gave up their valuable time to talk about their hopes and fears for the education of their children in the community.

You are invited to comment on this research report and any other aspect of the project at our site www.ciespi.org.br by email at ciespi@ciespi.org.br

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Notes

1 All initiatives have been previously included in other publications such as the series of SIPP project bulletins Listen to your children Rocinha! and the report Early childhood and community action in Rocinha: young people (re)discovering childhood, available on the CIESPI/PUC-Rio website (www.ciespi.org.br).

2 In this text, parents mean parents and adults in the family who have responsibility for the care of the children.

3 From the perspective of Inclusive Education, we will use the term “disabled” to name those with different disabilities or any other health issue that lead them to face obstacles in their knowledge construction process (MANTOAN, 2003).

4 The challenge regarding class overcrowding is especially noticeable in preschools.

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