sipp Safe, Inclusive Participative Pedagogy: Improving Early Childhood Education

The Community Case Study in Brazil

Rocinha, Rio de Janeiro

The site for the community case study is Rocinha. Rocinha has a population of approximately 150,000 and is a hillside community covering about 350 acres in the southern zone of the city of Rio de Janeiro. These people live in a community measuring less than one square mile. Most homes are made of brick or concrete blocks with steel structure support. While 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 residents on its research staff and two more who have worked or work there. CIESPI has also helped 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 neighbourhoods, a source of jobs for women as domestic workers. It is closer to downtown than most low-income communities in Rio and hence has access to public sector and service jobs.

There are two main asphalt roads running through the community which are usually jammed with traffic. 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. Violence is endemic. Shootouts are frequent. Many of the traffickers are young men and they are 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.

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Research Methods

Since the beginning of the project, CIESPI staff at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro have been working on research and action on improving the educational context of small children in a form that benefits the children and families in the community of Rocinha in the southern zone of Rio de Janeiro. In total, we have finished 65 semi-structured interviews with parents and responsible adults, key actors in the community, teachers and other educational staff. We are starting a series of interviews with municipal and national stakeholders. We also used special child friendly methods to listen to the views of 30 children between the ages of 3-7. Our goal was to understand the struggles and opportunities for improving the educational environment in the community, the children's homes and the educational institutions for young children. At the same time, we trained a group of six young people in the community to hold sessions with the children in their schools for story-telling and games suitable for young children. Another aspect of the work was constructing a small course for training teachers in the schools about listening to, and eliciting the views of, young children. We also took part in a local campaign to promote the uptake of COVID-19 vaccinations for young children. Throughout, we provided material back to the community about what we were finding in the form of brief bulletins on different aspects. There are currently eight SIPP Project bulletins in circulation on different topics. Now the team is organizing conversation circles to discuss key issues and to discover what the community's priorities are for early childhood education. The heart of this effort is a community consultative group which has been consulted from the outset. This group was critical in connecting us with key families and schools' representatives of the entire community of about 120,000 people. These encounters were critical in such a diverse community. In parallel action, CIESPI at PUC-Rio has taken a very active role in the National Coalition on Early Childhood, allowing a dialogue with key municipal, state and federal actors with the goal of improving the educational environment and the rights of small children.

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