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Considering early childhood education teachers' perceptions of risk

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ABSTRACT

Because of violence, poverty, and inequality worldwide, teachers are increasingly working in high-risk situations. To support teacher development, education researchers can usefully study professionals in the field to understand their working environments. This paper presents theory, method, and findings to consider how teachers in the high-risk *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro understand risk. Based on narrative inquiry design and analysis, findings indicate that what appears to be avoiding reality, coping, or being resilient, comes into view as teachers' ways of narrating to mediate professional and community circumstances. We conclude with a discussion for ongoing research and practice.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Early childcare teachers as agents of change

Drawing on cultural-historical activity theory (Vygotsky, 1978), this study considers teachers at the center of activity-meaning systems for educational change as they work and reflect together. We consider teachers involved in an innovative training program as agents of change through their meaning-making activities, and discourse as a critical process where meaning develops, conflicts, and changes. Consistent with that definition, conversations about risk (and other aspects of the work environment) are collective social, political, and personal engagements with environments where teachers live and work.

1.2. Teachers narrate risk as an interpretive process

Risk is typically defined as a factor in the world, imposed on individuals, and internalized by them. Risk is associated with objective factors, like living in the midst of events that threaten daily survival, like shootings, robberies, acts of vengeance, environmental collapse, and surveillance. Individuals in such situations are then deemed at risk for being damaged or for internalizing causes from environment. Much research deals with the personal effects of violence in terms of individual traits, like vulnerability, resilience, or responses like coping. From a cultural-historical approach, we posit, instead, that

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people interact with dangerous environments like more apparently normal ones by using capacities and tools like language (Daiute, 2010).

When assuming the engagement of human goals and capacities rather than their reduction to individual traits or psycho-social reactions, researchers can shift their focus to participants' authorship, in this case, teachers in the fields of infant education and development (Vasconcellos, 2011; Wallon, 2008).

Integrating principles from cultural-historical activity theory (Engeström, 2005; Vygotsky, 1978) and language use theory (Nelson, 1996), we define "agents of change" as those persons in pivotal positions of interaction within broader activity-meaning systems (Daiute, 2010). The theoretical principle that individuals and society develop inter-dependently via their meaning-making activities requires a participant who mediates powerful policy directives local practices and daily work activities.

Children, families, educators, and others in situations like *favelas* are similarly situated in public discourse that imposes images on them. Therefore, understanding how teachers working in dangerous environments understand them can offer insights into the dynamics of a social system. While outsiders perceive the risks and dangers of *favelas* as internalized by people living and working there, how do those whose public roles, like teachers, make sense of the social-ecology of the place? Related to this critical stance has been an increasing call for research eliciting the voices of insiders, especially those with the least status, such as children, teachers, and researchers: "The question of how teachers, administrators, and students produce meaning, and whose interest is served, is subsumed under the imperative to master the 'facts'. The script is grim" (Giroux, 1988, p. 2).

Research methods with narrative and other qualitative expressions often further reduce insiders' perspectives by sampling them as though they are individual, authentic, and stable, rather than relational, flexible, and complex (Daiute, 2010, 2011, 2012). A narrative approach requires ongoing development, in particular to shift from the common value of narrating as a personal or interpersonal process to one that is the enactment of dynamic contentious socio-political relations. In an attempt to avoid reducing teachers' narratives, we present theory and method considering how teachers in objectively dangerous contexts, narrate their experience in relation to social structures and new goals.

1.3. Child and society development in Rio de Janeiro

The municipality of Rio de Janeiro decided in 2007 to open a selection process for under-qualified professionals (degree required was middle school) to work with very young children in high-risk areas (*favelas*), in order to account for many children in need of support in these areas. We refer to these professionals as "teachers' aides," although they actually worked as the main teachers in infant care activity rooms. These young adults are undergoing constant changes in different areas of development: social, emotional, and cognitive, so a training and research program was created to understand and support that process.[1] Since 2009, Vasconcellos' research has been engaged with children and teachers in five nursery schools (locally known as crèches) serving children age 6 months – 3 years of residents in *favela*s or working class communities in the city of Rio de Janeiro.

The city has a population and a culture reflecting a unique history and ecology of incredibly diverse groups. While upper and middle class residents, overwhelmingly from European backgrounds, live in districts with modern conveniences, *favelas* are likely to be overwhelmingly inhabited by Afro-descendants (as blacks are identified in Brazil) and poor whites. In the past sixty years, the city also has received in great numbers internal mestizo migrants from the Northeastern states of Brazil. Rio de Janeiro celebrates such diversity, yet the conditions of inequality continue to spawn biases related to race, gender and poverty status, among others, affecting teachers and the teaching profession, which is so important for social change and development. For these reasons, teaching in the *favelas* is a pivotal process of social change, societal, and individual development.

1.4. The favela context

Favelas are contexts of major political, economic, and social change, in some ways characteristic of urban areas globally and yet unique in its history, structure, and everyday detail.

The *favelas* are slums outside of the official political-economic structure of society.[2] As such, they have lately been undergoing the process of "pacification", that is, the police force is entering these high-risk areas in an attempt to minimize trafficking and criminal action.[3] As a result, schools in these areas are changing as well. Population statistics in 2010 recorded that of the 6,305,279 inhabitants of Rio de Janeiro, 1,092,476, about one sixth, were living in *favela*s (IBGE, 2000). As a result of decades of activism on behalf of children, Rio has a large early childhood public education system, encompassing 275

[1] The research program at NEI titled "Enfim Professores na Creche! Como se constrói uma Pedagogia para a Infância Carioca?" (At last teachers in nursery schools! How to construct pedagogy for Carioca Children? Note: the word carioca refers to residents born in Rio de Janeiro.)

[2] The term "favela" was first used during the Canudos War (1896–1897), when a small town called Canudos was constructed on a hill top close by to the Favela Hill, which was thus named after the indigenous plant that covered the hill. By the 1920s, all temporary housings built on hill tops were designated favelas.

[3] Pacification Units, or in Portuguese, UPP – Unidade de Polícia Pacificadora, an initiative by the current state government of Rio de Janeiro to invade the favelas that are dominated by drug lords, inprison them, and "bring peace" to them by keeping the Police guarding the entrances and exits.

nurseries/schools with a total of 45,620 children between the ages of 0 and 3 years. We focus in this paper on how young professionals use narrating with others (present and imagined) to interact with the values and practices in the dangerous environments where they live and work. This means using narrating, among other discursive media, to navigate norms, challenges, needs, requirements, contradictions, and discoveries.

Favela, and the communities the term describes, has become a highly charged term. Prior research on meaning of "favela" has offered a wide range of meanings from diverse perspectives of municipal officials, residents, adults, and children (Dias, 2010; Freire, 2008; Naiff & Naiff, 2005). Descriptions of *favela* by municipal and institutional documents and workers include that they are occupied or invaded areas, with "no urban planning, with illegal, irregular, or precarious constructions, no infrastructure, bunches of shacks, where inhabitants are low income populations, lack understanding of space, lacking respect for one another's space (Freire, 2008). The same study reported similar views by *favela* residents, noting more from experience of daily life perhaps, houses glued together, "houses with illegal electricity and water, an ungoverned space where inhabitants have no education and drug dealers do as they please" (Freire, 2008, p. 104). Table 1 summarizes this prior research on a descriptive table.

In contrast with negative descriptions invoked for the term "*favela*," *comunidade* has been described as a term used to move away from the stigma associated with *favela* "toward a more agentic if not more positive view of the population, who has been abandoned and has needs" (Freire, 2008, p. 110–111). Residents do not usually call themselves as *favelados*, especially while inside although they might outside; but they do refer to others as *favelados*. As in other challenging contexts, when children are asked about the positive aspects of living in their communities, including war-affected areas (Daiute, 2010) and *favelas* (Dias, 2010), the positive aspects balance the negative.

In contrast to the studies mentioned above, our study focuses on the issue of risk as framed within the context of teachers' lives, in particular their reasons for going into teaching, for selecting their placements when they had the opportunity, and for interpreting their experiences. When the meaning of such a term is open to consideration of how it is used in narratives and other discourses of key stakeholders in an activity system, it is a cultural tool. The terms *favela* and *comunidade* are also focal points for inquiry into how teachers use narratives to mediate professional and personal contexts. Examining whether and how teachers' varied uses of "*favela*" and "*community*" interact with professional environments – the context, joys, and dangers – indicates the socio-political-economic dilemmas imposed on them and where they act as purposefully as possible.

Young teachers in dangerous situations are potential agents of change, when a long-term supportive context engages them in a process of a complex narrating of that experience. Just as we, along with other researchers, seek complex, non-discriminatory understandings from within communities of practice with which we collaborate, we need theoretically based methods allowing for complexity. Toward that end, we ask: how do early childhood teachers working in or near *favelas* make sense of their experience, in particular – risk? How does a narrative perspective allow for complex understandings, addressing the dilemma of danger and agency?

2. Method

The study was conducted in the city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, during a one-session open interview that lasted 3 h. Three early childhood education teachers were interviewed by the three authors. For privacy purposes, we have named them Iza, Luar, and Nadia. At the time of the interview, Nadia had been a teacher for 12 years, while Luar had 4 years of experience and Iza only 2 years. The teachers live and work in different areas of the city. All of them chose their workplace based on the distance from their house. One of the teachers lives and works inside a *favela*, while the other two live close to but not inside a *favela.* Initially, the 3 focal teachers worked as teaching aides, and later were re-hired as head teachers.

The setting of the interview is also relevant to the narrative theory of use. The meeting took place at the university where the teachers studied. The room is a simulated childcare space embodying a particular vision of infant care emphasizing free movement with the potential for interaction and play for children and those working with them (Vasconcellos, 2011).

Research contexts are fraught with power relations and that interviews raise several specific issues relevant to researchers posing questions from their points of view to interviewees who are expected to deliver specific answers. Although participation in research studies is voluntary, participants tend to try to give researchers perceived relevant

Table 1
Multiple views on concepts associated with *favela*.

Municipal housing policy proect	Engineer, municipal department of housing	Community agent	*Favela* resident
Occupation of land	No urban planning	No one respects each other's space	A bunch of people with no education
Low income population, illegal constructions	Invaded area	Bunch of shacks together	Houses with illegal electricity and water
Precarious urban infrastructure, narrow alleys	No infrastructure	Residents do not understand anything about space	Houses glued together one to another
Plots in irregular shapes that do not follow legal standards	No legal status		Ungoverned space, the boys (dealers) do as they please

Based on Freire (2008).

information. In contrast, research designs that occur in contexts and activities familiar to the participants may shift power relations toward interviewees, in particular by allowing meaning making to emerge from the interviewees' perspectives.

Given concerns about possible limits of power and relationships, the design and analysis of our study included several strategies. The interview occurred in the childcare simulated classroom where participants had previously studied and apprenticed. The interview also occurred at the conclusion of a training phase and thus was relatively embedded in ongoing practice (yet not graded in any way), rather than occurring out of the practice context. To shift the meaning making process to the interviewee perspective, this study invited participants to share personal narratives of experience and knowledge from a range of stances, rather than asking a series of direct questions about risk.

2.1. Analyzing the context of the interview

In addition to the three researchers/practitioners, 2 teacher education students were present to video record the interview. This setting, thus, afforded a range of formal and informal relations, which is important for meaningful social inquiry. The range of power relations included, for example, the teachers' professor, a professor from another Brazilian university, and an international professor, eliciting a certain type of reflection on the process, off-set by the focus on the 3 teachers as the experts about their interpretations of experience, potential solidarity, and other factors. The presence of the two younger students doing the recording added to the teacher collective, as another type of audience. The power dynamic of professors asking questions was thus countered by the teachers' position as experts about their practice, which, as illustrated below, played into the dynamic positioning around the issue of risk, which they performed. The idea is that narrating involves creative and critical interaction with the immediate society (the other teachers and researchers at the interview), the influencing society (childcare settings, education, and family) and broader society (greater Rio, Brazil, and the global situation that has created *favelas*).

3. Data analyses and results

The interview was video-recorded and transcribed, and amounted to 36 pages of transcript, 12,829 words. We analyzed the data from two different perspectives: first looking at the narratives teachers built along the interview and how the idea of "risk" is characterized in it, and, second, looking at the different meanings of "favela" and "comunidade" in relation to risk.

3.1. Narrating everyday life in favelas

Iza: *People say: "not favela; community"* ...

Nadia: ... *Those who do not experience it, that only see [it] on television are much more frightened than those who live there, right? So that for some people they would not even go to work when they saw something happening on the television.*

Luar: ... *Oh, I know it little. I have lived there for about four years. Nowadays I go from my home to work, and then back home. I do not usually stay out on the street, and before I started working, then I knew it [the neighborhood] even less. Work has made me have a little more contact with the people who live there. Yeah, but even so, it is generally calm.*

Based in the theoretical foundation of socio-cultural developmental theory (Vygotsky, 1978), we posit that human sense making involves intense interaction with social and material circumstances of daily life in risky contexts as in mundane ones. Narrating, in particular, is a powerful human tool for understanding what is going on in the environment and how the narrator fits (Daiute & Nelson, 1997). As with other cultural tools, narrating is, moreover, a dynamic process for interacting in the world, for *doing* rather than only *reporting* (Daiute, 2014). As children acquire the basics of narrative structure, they begin to use narrating to make sense of novel contexts (Nelson, 1996) and to adjust their narratives to the expectations and opportunities of audiences in diverse contexts (Daiute & Nelson, 1997). Developmental analyses of the effects of challenging environments have shown, for example, that young people growing up in crowded and ethnically contentious cities in the United States (Daiute, Stern, & Lelutiu-Weinberger, 2003) and in situations of armed conflict (Daiute, 2010) interact with these environments as normative, using narrative among other cultural resources like social organizations and community re-building activities to deal adaptively and creatively with the dangers. According to this theory, narrating is a dynamic process of mediation. Mediation is a process of interaction between young people and the circumstances where they live to create and share meaning via symbolic tools: "*a means by which human external activity is aimed at mastering, and triumphing over, nature" and the resulting "signs" or knowledge that is "a means of internal activity aimed at mastering oneself*" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 55). This developmental process posits that young people are especially attuned to their environments, the challenges and opportunities, and it means research designs should allow for narrating as a social process rather than only a personal one.

We have found, moreover, that when analyzing narrative as a tool, we observe how people in the midst of contentious environments can cleverly use such interpretive genres to conform to cultural norms and to preserve the self for presentation (Daiute, Buteau, & Rawlins, 2002; Oliveira, 1999).

3.2. Theory-based method of narrative use

Narrative inquiry has increased in recent years with distinct theoretical bases. A comprehensive review of these diverse approaches to narrative inquiry is beyond the scope of this article, except to highlight the fact that many contemporary

approaches acknowledge the social nature of narrative. The meaning of "social" has, however, differed in important ways in narrative theory and practice. As reviewed more fully elsewhere, the rationales for narrative inquiry include eliciting individuals' experiences and understandings thereby foregrounding personal meanings of phenomena of research interest. Another recent trend is to acknowledge the social construction of meaning via narrative in practice settings (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Wolfram, 2006). While acknowledging the other approaches, this design enacts a narrative theory of use.

Based on the theory of narrative use, the interview design invited participants to position themselves in different ways in relation to their work as teachers in dangerous contexts, and analyses examined the teachers' meaning making about risk in terms of the various functional positions (Daiute, 2012). Analyses focus on referential (explicit) and evaluative (implicit) expressions of danger/risk to reveal that these teachers interpret risk in the light of their roles as teachers, that is in terms of moments of bonding (between head mister (or principal) and teacher; parents/teacher; parent/child). Such oscillating between positive views about their environs and stories of events fraught with negative meanings indicates the creatively adaptive social purpose of being a teacher focused on the perspectives and plights of the very young children and families.

Because we had hypothesized that acknowledging issues of danger and risk would be difficult, we designed the interview in three movements inviting the participants to position themselves in different ways around issues in their work and lives. Consistent with cultural historical theory about the organization of higher order thinking and behavior in terms of purposeful activity (Vygotsky, 1978), we began the interview with a question about goals ("Why did you decide to become a teacher?"), specific activities ("What was your best experience in your work as a teacher?"; "What was your most difficult experience in your work as a teacher?"), and explicitly reflective interpretations (direct questions about danger and risk). Such questions in a conversation with peers and other educators (the three authors of this paper) in a familiar educational space (the childcare lab at a University) invoked understandings of teacher development in the broader educational context.

On this view, the purpose of the interview was to provide a space for collective reflection that we assume develops in the midst and, thus, provokes meaning rather than only reporting it. The interview is not only about the issue of risk but an activity enacting the meaning of risk in symbolic and material social relations. The interview was video and audio recorded, transcribed, translated, and coded. We employed two phases of narrative analysis: (1) explicit mentions of dangers and risks overall and in the context where they appear; (2) mentions of dangers and risks as enacted with reference to characters, including the narrator and others mentioned by the participants; (3) narrator significance across the best and most difficult teaching experience narratives, as indicated by evaluative device use; (4) use of *favela* and *comunidade* to enact their descriptions of the place.

Analyzing referential and evaluative phases in narrating allows us to listen closely to how the narrators are using their stories to connect beyond the literal stories to others in the interaction and in the broader context. Narrators spontaneously interweave strands of meaning – both interacting in the world as well as within any expressive event (Labov & Waletzky, 1967/1997). One strand of meaning comes more *from* the world, as we appropriate language acquired over our lifetimes in various relevant cultural contexts. The other phase of meaning directs interactively *toward* the world, between the narrator and audiences (including the self). These reciprocal relations in narrating occur with precision we can draw on for research seeking to acknowledge the dynamics of collective and individual meaning. The *referential phase* of meaning is what we notice – the explicit statements, the nouns, the verbs, the words we can look up in a dictionary – while the *evaluative phase* of meaning is what we notice less – the small words, the words between the nouns and verbs, some in the dictionary, others seemingly mistakes, or beside the point. Referential and evaluative phases of meaning serve different interlocking purposes – one tells the story and the other hints at why the narrator is telling the story. Meaning inextricably involves both.

It is important to point out that analysis of evaluative devices captures implicit meanings in how people narrate, thereby expressing experience and knowledge that may be pre-conscious, hidden, or perhaps even "unsayable" in some way. Narrative analysis, thus, taps in to personally affective expressions, less explicitly processed, and less labeled experience than referential language. When researchers and participants bring different language systems to bear upon an issue of interest, such as the African American children in Labov and Waletzky's original studies examining evaluative devices for possible diverse participant centric meaning, they are not only tapping into subtle meanings emerging in how narratives are expressed. After those seminal studies, sociolinguists, psycholinguists and, now, social science researchers have employed such narrative approaches (Daiute, 2014).

Asking about best and most difficult experiences builds on a tradition in narrative psychology to identify culturally salient meaning making in poignant (even painful) events (Labov & Waletzky, 1967/1997). Narrating "good" and "bad" experiences elicits cultural and personal values and norms, such as what would be ideal for a narrator to reveal when he/she is the protagonist of a story (Daiute, 2010). For these young teachers, we assume, for example, that given their three year involvement in the early education program and practice, their selection of best experiences would echo values they have learned about what it means to do a good job and related sensibilities, which interact with their personal histories, such as the people and events they encountered in their work and their own subjective orientations. Because education programs also provide spaces for practicing teachers to discuss problems and interpret them theoretically, narratives of the most difficult experiences will also broaden the range of possible criteria for selection. This process of selecting which experience to narrate is, of course, on-the-spot and, thus, implicit, which means we also rely on our socialization to narrative devices developed over time in life and in the course of the interview event. As their professor (Vasconcellos, 2011) was the primary interviewer in a room where she meets with the students and she had posed the research as part of their collective work in the teacher-education program, the participants were invited to assume active rather than passive positions as occurs in more traditional interviewing.

Analyses of the referential phase of meaning involved identifying each explicit reference to "risk", "danger", and concepts the research team assumed to be indicators of risks and dangers, based on their knowledge of the contemporary Brazilian situation, such as "police", "crime", etc. Explicit mentions of such words and concepts were identified in Atlas t.i., computed for frequency, and examined in the context of the statement where it was embedded to assess whether and how the speaker was commenting on risk, that is to further define it, expand it, or, as it turned out, often to qualify it. Analyses of the evaluative phase of meaning included identifying co-occurrences of mentions of risk with characters in the narrative and identifying evaluative devices, including psychological state expressions (cognitive expressions such as "think," "know" etc.; affective expressions such as "feel", "want," etc.; intensifiers (such as repetitions, exaggerations, etc.); causal connectors (such as "because," "but"), negations ("no," never, "n't in can't", etc.), and qualifying adjectives (such as "good," "bad," big," etc.). Co-occurrences of characters with the referential statements of risk/danger were computed for frequency by character type including first person subject positions ("I") and third person subject positions ("child(ren)/kid(s)," "mother," "father"). The frequencies of evaluative devices per narrative were divided by the total number of words (density of evaluation) in the narrative resulting in a ratio for comparative purposes. Below we describe and interpret the patterning of these analyses for how the teachers used referential and evaluative meaning across the interview to engage with the issues of interest.

Results of the analyses offer insights about their function to naturalize risk, to consider risk in collective professional contexts, and to perform risk with the use of the linguistic devices, especially when recounting the "most difficult experiences" in their work as teachers – in brief to manage risk symbolically and, on the view that culture creates meaning, the symbolic interaction mediates activity in context (Vygotsky, 1978). Across these results sections, we build the argument that these teachers appear to minimize an explicit focus on danger and risk, while they are actually dealing with risk when the symbolic formulation (of the interview question and range of responses) involves narrating as an actor with others and on behalf of others.

3.3. Naturalizing risk

Iza: *It seems like it's normal even, right? That the husband is arrested; not husband, sometimes he's just the father of the child, right? He's arrested or deceased.*

As indicated in this quote by one of the teachers in this study, living and working in extremely dangerous circumstances involves orienting toward those circumstances, much of the time, as "even normal." When looking at the interview as a whole we have found an apparent contradiction in teachers' narratives. The teachers mention danger and risk, sometimes explicitly and more often with related words, like "gunshot" and "police". We begin our analysis with a review of such explicit mentions in the context of use. Given that the interview included 12,824 words overall with a vast majority spoken by the teacher interviewees that danger/risk related words appear 113 times may seem surprising. The teachers' expressions focus on police, shootings, traffic, addicts, drugs, confrontations between the police and drug dealers. Qualifiers for those include: fear, scared, noise, and surrounded. Of those 113 mentions, it is interesting to note that 57% of those are about "police" (17%), "danger" (10%), gunshot (10%), "action"[4] (9%), criminal (6%), and shoot out (6%). When we look at each of the teacher's narratives, we see that the risk and danger words are present across the interview, but they are concentrated in two sections in particular: when they are asked about the distance between their home and their work, and in the end of the interview, when they are asked explicitly about their worst experience and about risk. While teachers bring to their narratives the concepts of danger and risk, at the same time, they minimize their importance or salience, presenting us with almost contradicting ideas about their workplace.

In this example, the teacher, Nadia, is talking about all the violence present in the *favela* where she lives but minimizes it by stating that it might all be just a rumor. *Oh, there are many rumors, right? The conversations, the conversations, then people say that there is a larger number of dealers because of the Pacification Units, right?*

Here, teacher Iza states that her workplace is safer, when compared to other communities, marking at once its danger and its relative safety. (. . .) *But it didn't come from there where the crèche is, there it is safer, if we think of the other communities in the surrounding areas. There is a high number of muggings right nearby those communities.*

In this example, the interviewer mentions the drug, and the teacher justifies its presence by almost blaming the daycare center, for having a short wall, which facilitates invasion. Vera: *But the crèche is targeted as a crack spot* Luar: *It's because it [the crèche] is very low, the walls are very low, so it is easy to jump over into the crèche.*

In sum, these examples express conflict about living or working in such danger prone areas, on the one hand trying to get used to it and, on the other, being intermittently reminded of it. It may be that people living with daily dangers have a high threshold for what they consider a danger or risk so what emerges in polite formal conversation like a group interview may not touch on these issues in a major way. Discursive activity may serve to minimize inflicting fear and tension, or, stated differently, to provide a protective buffer for the bad memories and attendant feelings. Novice teachers may have assumptions about the expectations and assumptions of the academic professors toward people who live on a daily basis with risk and danger. They might desire instead to identify with the interviewers (who are, after all similar to them, in that

[4] "Action" is a translation for "agitada", which is used by the teacher in an euphemistic manner to refer to the presence of criminal action or confrontations, or muggings.

they too have gone through academic studies), and elect the self that is detached from that reality. Nevertheless, over the course of the interview, and when faced increasingly with questions that address the reality of risk, there emerges a cognitive dissonance in the collective discourse. Speaking in terms of the concept of recognition (Honneth, 2002), we hypothesize here that the teachers' representations of what we expect of them and how we see them may be in conflict with how they want to present and understand themselves. For insights about whether and how those explanations are plausible, we extended the analysis of the referential phase of meaning in the interview with an examination of the evaluative phase of meaning.

3.4. The collective engagement of risk

Interestingly, mentions of the teachers' personal distress rarely co-occur with the mentions of danger/risk. Although the focus of the interview was to explore whether and how young teachers working in the dangerous *favelas* experienced risk, only 4 of 11 mentions of teachers' personal distress co-occurred with mentions of danger/risk and only 3 of 8 mentions of an individual child's distress co-occurred with mentions of danger/risk. Given our theoretical perspective that narrating is a sense-making process, we consider, further, that the apparent minimizing of personal risk to themselves and the children for whom they are responsible, may be an adaptive orientation to living in such circumstances.

Nadia: *Yeah, I get used to it, right? I no longer get too scared, I just get very scared if my child is not home, then I get kind of terrified, but as for me, in relation to the work and there being a confrontation and in the case that I am in the nursery, right? I don't get so scared, in fact I try to stay calm, because children get agitated, right?*

The most explicit expressions of *favela* dangers and risks come when the conversation shifts to children and families. While the first person accounts tend to be good or neutral, perhaps even controlled, the narratives where children, families, and especially fathers enter are the most explicitly horrible stories. Analysis of the co-occurrences of dangers/risks and characters indicate that participants frame danger and risk in collective contexts. Forty two percent of all mentions of dangers/risks co-occur with "community" (26%) and parents – "father" and/or "mother" (26%). When only the mother or father is mentioned in relation to risk, fathers are represented twice as frequently as mothers (8 versus 4 respectively and thus not predominant overall in the discourse). Mothers are also implicated in the web of violence and criminality that ultimately involves the mother's relation to her children. While father's death or imprisonment may be mentioned in relation to general dangers in the *favela*, a mother's crack addiction is expressed in terms of her lack of availability to the child. Making this more prevalent mention of "father" and dangers/risks even more striking is that overall fathers are mentioned less (33 times) than mothers (44 times) across the interview.

Participants' narratives of their best experiences in their early child care work were primarily first person accounts, with an emphasis on the teachers' thoughts and feelings about specific times when they felt they had taken an active positive role in the lives of children and families, and had been recognized for their role. Notice in this excerpt, for example, how Luar narrates a "best" experience.

Luar: *I think that the best [experience] was to have stayed with the group of students I was with last year and have accompanied this group. This way, I feel a very strong bond with the parents, a positive recognition in relation to the work that we are already developing, the children too, and . . . there is a strong big trust and especially during the period that I was away, the way girls talked, how the children asked for me, the parents asked, when I was about to come back they told the parents and they were, you know, celebrating that I was going to come back, I think that the best experience was this one, I think that pretty much for the children too*.

Luar orients the narrative in terms of her psychological states, "*I think . . . I feel. I stayed away, I was about to come back . . .*". Not only an individual story, this one mentions other characters' speech "*the children asked for me . . . the parents asked*." Also demonstrating her sensitivity to the others involved, Luar broadens the perspective as the end of the account, projecting others' experience on her own, "*I think that pretty much for the children too very good for the day care as a whole*".

In contrast, the narratives of difficult experiences in early childcare work revolve much around the children's perspectives, often as refracted through issues with their mothers and fathers. Compare that process in Luar's narrative of her most difficult experience.

Luar: *Yes . . . there was a class in which I stayed that the children were very, like, aggressive, but today, I think that if I had to choose, I would choose two children from my class, one is a boy who is very caring, but who hits all the time, he blinks and is hitting someone and, like, we have spoken to his mother, found out that the mother gets beaten by her boyfriend, who in this case isn't even the father of the child, he is very caring, but he hits all the time! . . . And there's also another girl who, in the beginning of the year, we, like, she always arrived to the day care very hungry, very hungry! And she went and always took the same clothes, then we started to think that she, like, was in need, then we discovered that she had her house buried in those landslides that happened and in the beginning the family really was going through a lot of difficulties. . . . I think these two cases were the worst*!

The story begins with the first person perspective "*I would choose . . .*" but then shifts exclusively to the children's psychological states, "*boy who is very caring, he blinks . . . girl . . . very hungry . . . she felt . . .*" The first person "I" perspective also shifts to "we" as Luar explains the collective attempts in practice to interpret and to help these two cases who "were the worst!"

It is, in summary, as though shifting to others, others for whom the teachers are interlocutors, agents, protectors, allows teachers to accept emotionally or to buffer the dangerous circumstances where they work.

3.5. Cultural linguistic strategies for narrating risk

What do we learn about how people make sense of working in risky environments?

An analysis of evaluative devices across the six narratives of best and most difficult experiences by the three young teachers indicated that narratives of the most difficult experiences are more densely evaluated overall than those of best experiences. Each participant said relatively more or less across the interview, with Iza expressing considerably less in these best/worst experience narratives than Nadia (range of 224–417 for Iza and a range of 671–1160 for Nadia, with Luar relatively stable at 448 and 414). Ratios of evaluative devices to the participant's overall number of words expressed provide a comparable measure. Evaluative devices in the best experience narratives by Luar, Iza, and Nadia are .14, .23, and .12 respectively compared to evaluative devices in the most difficult experience narratives, .20, .27, and .24 respectively. Nadia narrated best and most difficult experiences very differently with over 20% evaluative wording in the most difficult experience narratives compared to just over 10% in the best experience. Iza's best experience narrative was the most highly evaluated of the three, as was her most difficult experience narrative, albeit with less difference in evaluative expression across her best and most difficult, than her peers'.

Iza best: *Good experiences are hard to be able to follow. I work with a group that I was also six months with, in one year, and then came to encounter the following year, the good thing is that you really develop a greater bond with the families, a greater trust, and until today there are last year's mothers and fathers that find me, or even on Orkut, to say that the children miss me, . . . I was invited to an ex-student's birthday party (. . .) I think this is really cool.*

Such an orientation does not, however, characterize Iza's orientation absolutely, as evidenced when examining risk in context and differences in how individuals narrate from different perspectives.

Iza worst: *we also invited the father for a conversation, to speak about this aggressiveness [the boy] had with the other children, that he bit, hit, with no apparent reason, pushed others sometimes out of the blue, without being in a dispute, understand? And rumors had it that the father encouraged that, there were people who had heard the father saying that – oh, because he hit his grandmother! –And talking, telling it while he laughed, as if it were funny, like it was good, you know? So it was a difficult experience dealing with the father with a, who mostly because he ends up . . . ends up encouraging this in the child, right?*

Both narratives are evaluated, but the latter is more highly saturated with 23 in the 96-word excerpt, compared to 13 in the former excerpt. These brief excerpts also indicate a tentative quality of talk, with repetitions, restating, appeal to the listener, indicating a more tentative or exploratory approach to the story. This intensity of evaluation interacts with the contents of an event that had obviously caused some anxiety at the daycare center. Fig. 1 illustrates the pattern of relatively intense evaluation in stories about difficult experiences.

Based on these observations, we posit that these young teachers use narrating to create psychosocial buffers from the dangerous circumstances in which they work and live. The surprisingly infrequent mention of danger and risks (even though prompted as the interview progressed) becomes evident as a strategy when we observe the mention of risk as the discourse zooms back from first person accounts to the teachers' reflections on the community, the children and families in their charge. This selective organization of experience in narrating could occur along with explanations we offered above about the teachers' self-presentations in the context, as experiences framed as "most difficult" would most likely be loosened from any assumed judgment about people who experience risk.

3.6. Child care, relationships, and favelas

The pattern of collective of engagement of risk implores us to broaden to the setting of the *favela* as participants manage it psycho-socially and even physically. As with the pattern of statement and silence of risk, *favela* occurs in a nuanced way with *comunidade*. Overall, the teachers referred to "*comunidade*" more (30 mentions) than *favela* (9). Given our analysis of this as a collective discussion with an ebb and flow of conversation, as well as questions directed to the teachers one at a time, and a general tendency to ask questions and to listen on the part of the researchers. There was, however, a notable difference across the teachers, that Iza never used the term "*favela*" compared to 20 uses of "*comunidade*", while Luar used it 7 versus 2 times

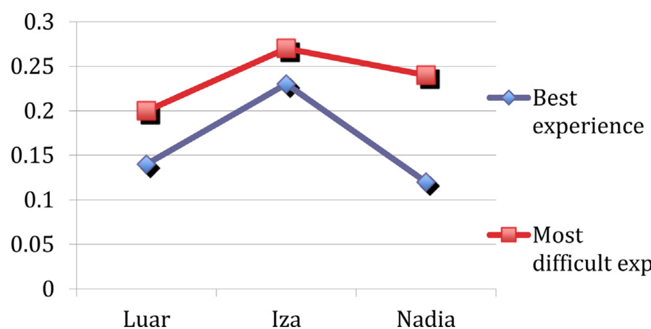

Fig. 1. Evaluative devices in participants' "best" and "most difficult".

using "*comunidade*", and Nadia's 2 mentions of "*favela*" (only when asked) to 8 uses of "*comunidade*." Putting these differences in further relief are the differences in overall speaking, with Nadia speaking the most, then Luar, followed by Iza. When asked directly about the differences between "*favela*" and "*comunidade*", Nadia who uses both terms the least relative to her overall output said "they are the same thing," Luar says "comunidade" is a euphemism and "*favela*" is "horizontal," and Iza said they are all "*comunidade*".

Future research with more participants may bear out some differences for those with more and less experience in *favelas* – as residents or teachers. With Iza focusing on "*comunidade*" much more than her peers and against never having mentioned "*favela*", we may be observing a "political correctness", given the overwhelmingly negative connotation of the term from the outside, and given her relatively compact expression compared to the more talkative Nadia and to a lesser extent Luar. That overall, the teachers preferred "*comunidade*" suggests an empathy with and understanding of the community where they work and live. This implicit interaction with the place and people of their professional life is consistent with the strategic mention of risks and dangers through characters in their narratives. Narrative analysis is, thus, one way to consider plurality, especially in the light of expected dilemmas, to bring contradictions into relation if not absolute resolution.

4. Discussion – narrating change

This analysis shows how three young teachers used the interview setting to reflect upon their activities, to increase their collective reflection, and to begin to realize their critical and creative participation as teachers. When we analyze narratives as cultural tools, for how people make sense of their daily lives in relation to activities (in this case, acting as teachers in infancy care) to social institutions and to related social actors (in this case peers and mentors), we read an interview and the narratives embedded therein for social relations around the narrative as well as within. What is notable in this analysis is that the teachers' depictions of the most extreme circumstances in their work/life contexts are embedded in social contexts of community and family. While first person narratives position away from risk, those framed around the young children within the context of family, community, and the interview setting seem to buffer discussion of risk, which also becomes a more central focus across the social framing of the interview itself in the context of social change in Brazil.

These analyses indicate that participants are authors, who use narratives to engage strategically (albeit probably implicitly) with their immediate and imagined contexts. The patterns of statement and silence about their professional lives indicate that these teachers, furthermore, used their roles working on behalf of others to address the dangers in their environments, rather than dangers to themselves. This use of narrative a tool for teachers' consideration of the dangers to children and families serves to mediate interactions of personal and professional experiences in relation to the society. The analysis of narrative characters and narrative valence (positive and negative experiences) is, moreover, strategies that researchers and teachers themselves can use to evaluate problems and potentials in the educational project.

That the teachers faced dangers and risks when focusing on the plights of children and families in their care, more than when they focused on their own personal safety underscores the relational nature of meaning making.

Analyzed as an interactive process, the interview-as-narrative, provides a transitional space, in the sense that it allows for a period of supported separation – from the daily activity of childcare, continuing to grow as teachers and researchers, from one's spontaneous reactions – toward an engaged practice. In addition to the function of narrating, we connect with and through the elements – characters and character relations, the rising and falling organization of plot, the trouble that makes any piece of this interesting to tell and hear, and, in the absence of resolution to completely understand how to deal with daily life of risk.

The ongoing narrative about choosing to be a teacher, working in *favelas*, the child and human development project was an evolving collective tool as well as a product. This narrative offers the insights we presented above, but also, and perhaps more importantly, the interview can become a focal point for ongoing reflection about childcare, teaching, teacher and societal development, as well as an exemplar for ongoing practice-based research methods.

Although points of departure and specific narratives differed, results indicate, moreover, that childcare centers can be transitional spaces made necessary by violence but also powerful because of the spaces they are in for unique relationships. Perceived in this way, young childcare workers may be realizing positions as agents of change – perhaps to minimize risks they face every day but also to create ongoing career goals and development. Then, we researchers learn to examine specific cases of development, such as with young teachers in this study, in terms of systems of human activity, such as life in changing neighborhood, rather than analyzing risky neighborhoods in terms of linear sequences of cause (dangers/risks) and effect (fear/avoidance).

People living in extreme danger or during periods of extreme danger cannot narrate away these dangers or their own personal risk in those situations. What we see, instead, in this study is how young adults use narrating as a means for interacting with those dangers via affordances of collective uses of cultural tools and contexts. In this case, being a teacher working in a team with children and families provides the psycho-socially protective context of social role with strength being able to act in solidarity rather than only as an individual agent.

Implications of this approach to narrating in context are, first, ongoing inquiry to address questions about how teacher collectives can use narratives for solidarity and eventually for social change. While narrating social change is a leap, practice-based research like this can progress by compiling these stories of these contemporary realities as arguments for policy and sensible processes that provide resources for those living in the midst of change. We began this paper with a comment – a

euphemism perhaps – that ‘‘people speak of *favela* as community’’, and we add to that the idea that community can help people living in its midst speak of *favela*.

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