

“YOU GET TO A POINT WHERE YOU GET TIRED”: TRANSFORMING BRAZILIAN EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS’ AGENCY

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ABSTRACT: Early childhood institutions in Brazil used to be related to social care services, their main task being to care for and feed young children. In 1996 early childhood became part of the educational system and this required teachers to work more interactively with children. Thus early childhood education is recent in Brazilian legislation, and teachers still lack pedagogical competency to transform children’s learning experiences in early learning institutions. In this study, we use Critical Narrative Analysis (Souto-Manning, 2014) to examine how teachers’ collective dialogues increased their consciousness and agency to envision ways to refute historical discourses about the role of early childhood teachers. Findings indicate that while teachers remain rooted in traditional discourses, they are also seeking to make change.

KEY WORDS: Agency, Teacher formation, Early childhood, BNCC, Narrative.

Introduction

Historically, Brazilian early childhood (EC) educators’ task has been to care for children, and their work was not considered to be a profession until in 1996, Law n° 9.394 (Brazil, 1996) established EC as the first stage of Basic Education (0 to 5 years and 11 months), requiring proper training for ECE teachers, thus beginning their professionalization nationally. Despite gains made for the profession that align with this law, the training required by it includes general pedagogy coursework, which typically does not apply to EC

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concepts and priorities such as early childhood development (Kishimoto, 2005). As a result, many EC teachers in Brazil lack pedagogical competency to transform children's learning experiences in the EC setting. In this study, taken from a larger study examining the impact of the Base Nacional Comum Curricular (BNCC) on EC teaching, we examine how EC teachers' collective dialogue increased their consciousness and agency to refute historical discourses in order to re-envision change.

While this paper is focused on EC, the problem of teacher engagement has been addressed nationally across grade levels. The lasting impact of the banking education that Freire so often criticized is still pervasive in contemporary teacher training and development discourses. As all teachers are seen as reproducers of content rather than agents in the transaction of learning, their experience is more likely to be that of following directives than of facilitating critical encounters with children, despite reforms such as the BNCC, which promote interactive teaching. Given the recency of ECE's entry into the professionalized workforce, this problem is even more acute in the EC field in Brazil where EC teachers fail to sufficiently engage in their own teaching in this position. Drawing on the interactive focus group methodologies of Souto-Manning (2005, 2014) and de los Rios & Souto-Manning (2015) conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, we demonstrate how Critical Narrative Analysis can be used as an intervention in troubling established discourses in supporting teacher agency to make change.

Critical Pedagogy, Critical Meta-awareness, and Teachers' Agency

Paulo Freire combated the culture of silence and injustice in Brazilian education through critical pedagogy--a process by which teachers and learners work together in collective transformation of their oppressive situations. Freire (1970, 1979) defends that the school's objective is to teach students to "read the world" to transform it, and the main goal of education is to make students aware of their situation to raise their *conscientização*³ (concientizacion) so they can act in favor of their own liberation; in this sense, educating is not only a pedagogical action but also a political one, tied intricately to individual agency.

³ We use Freire's word *conscientização* in the original Portuguese, because translating it undermines its comprehensive power in the original Portuguese.

Within Freire's thought, education cannot function as a bank, and the teacher is an essential agent in the process.

Furthermore, dialogue is essential to the human condition. For Freire (1994, 1998), the central point of the activity of culture circles, in which the facilitator and participants are active beings, is dialogue. According to Freire, teaching methods should not be simply auditory and discursive, in which the teacher speaks and the student listens, but should take place based on discussion, dialogue, and full participation where “no one knows it all” and “no one is ignorant of everything” (Freire 1996/2005). It is through dialogue that the awareness of students and teachers, or participants and facilitators, occurs, and it is also the way in which the facilitator demonstrates respect for the participants’ knowledge, and without which one cannot teach, therefore, “teaching requires the existence of those who teach and of those who learn” (Freire, 2001, p. 259). Teaching should be an act of love, courage, and building knowledge, where debate and respect among participants are essential.

According to Souto-Manning (2004, 2010), it is necessary to change from traditional pedagogy, which suggests that teachers can transfer knowledge to the students' minds, to a critical pedagogy that starts from Freire’s principle that knowledge is facilitated through social interaction. She also argues that learning is a dynamic process that must account for students’ economic, cultural and historical context. De los Ríos & Souto-Manning (2015) echo Freire’s call to action by claiming that teachers must be politically and critically aware so they can “re-envision their locations and challenge boundaries in society. To become educated in such a fashion, to learn how to read the world, to problematize it and to transform it, critical pedagogy is necessary.” (p. 275). In the context of the implementation of the BNCC, it is also important to examine if the curriculum will serve to move teachers in such a direction or if it leads them to reproduce the historical legacy of the banking model of education. Thus, in this paper, we ask, “In what ways does the BNCC aid EC teachers’ in transforming passive approaches to more interactive approaches in their work with children?” and related to our conceptual framing, “In what ways, if any, do culture circles about BNCC implementation aid teachers in transforming their teaching in ways that are aligned with Freire’s critical pedagogy?”

In order to examine educators' processes for adopting critical pedagogy into their practices, we draw on Souto-Manning's (2014) close examination of critical meta-awareness through critical narrative analysis, a methodology she developed to aid in this examination. People demonstrate critical meta-awareness as they begin to critique their own everyday and formal language use. Instead of taking problems as given and unsolvable, a person who is engaging in critical meta-awareness is able to identify the source of their problems and begin to imagine possible ways to address them, often expressed through the very grammatical constructions people use to describe their situation. According to Souto-Manning (2014),

the critical meta-awareness of how institutional discourses are recycled in conversational narratives allows narrators to understand the social construction of the realities in which they live. Through questioning the construction of their own stories, narrators can start envisioning ways in which these larger institutional discourses can be problematized and even refuted as they appropriate language in use. (p. 163-164)

Consistent with the understanding that people develop critical meta-awareness in dialogue with others, we thus use data from Brazilian early childhood educators' culture circles to describe in what ways they do and do not see themselves as agents of change in a shifting educational and curricular context in Brazil. Moreover, we show how teachers' sense of their own agency was further complicated in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic—showing how purposeful critical narrative analysis is even more important in this post-pandemic moment of global change.

Research Context

For nearly 35 years, Brazilian legislators have endeavored to strengthen basic education (from 0 to 17 years old) and incorporate early care and education into its definitions. According to the Brazilian Federal Constitution (Brasil, 1988), EC is a child's right and the State has the duty to offer it in daycare centers and preschools guaranteed and free of charge. Further, as stated in the historical context, a 1996 law established EC as the first stage of Basic Education, with the purpose of promoting the essential development of children from birth until just under six years of age, with mandatory enrollment in early

education beginning at age four. Federal efforts to strengthen basic education in Brazil were further solidified with the introduction of the BNCC in 2017.

Prior to the BNCC implementation, Resolution n. 5, of December 17, 2009 established the National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education – Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais para a Educação Infantil (DCNEI) – in Brazil. That document defines principles and methodologies to guide public policies in the area, in addition to addressing issues related to planning, evaluation and curricular pedagogical proposals. The DCNEI defines that Early Childhood Education is based on the principles of care and education, having interaction and interactive games as the structuring axes of pedagogical practices.

The BNCC complements the DCNEI as a normative document that defines a set of necessary learning outcomes that all students must develop throughout their Basic Education in and beyond BC, so that all Brazilian children’s learning rights are assured. The BNCC establishes six learning and development rights in the EC stage: living together, playing, participating, exploring, expressing, and socialization. These rights are structured in five fields of experiences: the self, the other, and the we; body, gestures and movements, traces, sounds, colors, and shapes; listening, speaking, thinking, and imagining; spaces, times, quantities, relationships, and transformations. There are some indications of development and learning objectives for each of them.

The BNCC thus serves as a “guiding document” that helps the teacher to plan activities to promote the integral development of children, promoting results through teachers’ organization of spaces and times in which children and teachers can co-create and produce knowledge through an experiential curriculum. Therefore, it does not provide teaching content or curriculum, and it does not suggest the transfer of knowledge or preparation of children for Elementary School. Rather, implementation and learning goals are managed by individual municipalities in Brazil, which have the legal responsibility to operate and manage EC in their districts. Thus, each Brazilian municipality must organize its EC offerings in collaboration with its state and national government, and each municipality has a Municipal Department of Education that oversees educational policy implementation in the public school system. This landscape of change defined EC in Brazil in the years leading up to the pandemic, and teachers in this study entered the lockdown and their virtual focus group participation for this

study resistant to changes that they deemed impossible to implement prior to the pandemic. In many cases, the pandemic served to exacerbate and further solidify teachers stances that change would be impossible.

This study addresses how teachers' concerns were shaped in response not only to the BNCC implementation in their municipality but also in the context of school closings where additional innovations were needed. Prior to the pandemic, municipalities were grappling with how to incorporate the BNCC into the EC curriculum. After the pandemic, consistent with data from across the globe, teachers struggled with how to survive. In our municipality of focus, a modest common curriculum was introduced via a managerial mandate, wherein each school within the municipality would be responsible for planning one week of instruction that all the other schools would then implement in the same week of the calendar. This effort, though well intended, often served to reproduce the old notions of banking education since educators were relying on survival skills to produce curricula and therefore relying more on what was most familiar rather than incorporating new material relevant to BNCC into it. Further troubling the state of BNCC implementation, many local administrators did not agree with the federally mandated BNCC and actively worked to interrupt its implementation.

Data collected for this paper, drawn from a larger study, is based on research carried out with educators in one such municipality in the state of Goiás close to Brazil's capital, Brasilia. With an estimated population of 71,000 people, this municipality would be classified as a small city according to U.S. census categorizations. According to the School Census (INEP, 2020), there were 600 children from 3 years old enrolled in the public daycare centers, and 1.997 children between 4 and 5 years old, enrolled in the public preschools. In March 2020, according to the Municipal Department of Education, their system had 141 teachers working in 11 educational institutions located in urban and rural areas. At the time this data was collected, in 2020, approximately 86 educators including municipal leaders, principals, pedagogical coordinators, and a majority of teachers were participating in this study.

Research Methods and Data Collection

The data we analyze in this paper is taken from a larger study, "Understanding educational complexities: On equitable and transformative teaching and learning processes in

a municipal system of early childhood education,” (Coehlo, et al.) conducted from 2019-2021 about educators’ implementation of the BNCC in one municipality in the state of Goiás. The aim of the larger study was to examine the impact of the BNCC and teachers’ approaches to using the BNCC.

The research team, which directly included Rhaisa but not Gail, used a variety of fieldwork, participant observation, document-based research, and interviews—all adapted to the online context of work during the pandemic—in order to examine the BNCC’s implementation. We organized our interactions with teachers around a series of credit-bearing online synchronous professional development workshops entitled, Teaching processes: formative path of early childhood education teachers. Educators who attended the workshops were invited to attend follow up focus groups and culture circle meetings where we deepened our exploration of their teaching practices using the Critical Narrative Analysis method in consultation with Gail. The current paper focuses on data collected from virtual workshops, focus group interviews, and culture circles. These data include transcripts from video-recorded virtual focus groups that were translated from Portuguese to English verbatim. It is important to highlight that we transcribed the teachers’ words only; pauses and other non-verbal signs on transcriptions are not shown as they are not relevant to the analysis undertaken in this work. Below, we analyze in what ways, if any, the teachers in this study draw on the BNCC in order to transform their teaching in early childhood as well as the challenges teachers faced in making such changes with particular attention to how the pandemic played a role in teachers changing discourses.

Critical Narrative Analysis

To analyze what teachers said, we used critical narrative analysis (CNA) (Souto-Manning, 2014). Souto-Manning argues that discourses need to be understood within their social, or narrative contexts; thus, her analytic approach points to the power of the subject's discursive social field and the moral impulse to position oneself as logical, good, rationale, etc. in front of what they face. Like critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2010), CNA “is concerned with power and language in society” (p. 161) but it adds the dimension of how power and language manifest in people’s everyday lives and experience through the

discourses they use and reproduce. Souto-Manning thus uses CNA to examine how narrative and critical discourse analysis “can inform one another as a means to seek a more complete analysis” (Souto-Manning, 2014, p. 161).

Souto-Manning (2005) and Buffalo (2021) explain that participants’ degree of grammatical agency is unveiled in the syntax of active and passive voice, so this type of agency identifies the extent to which the speaker sees herself as an active participant (here, in changemaking related to BNCC implementation) or not. Framing agency is when individuals relate their actions to the normative and institutional morals and their associated discourses, often in terms of what is impossible to change as in “this is the way things are”--indicating resignation rather than a sense of self-empowerment needed to make desired changes. Grammatical agency and framing agency differ in that the former reveals how individuals put themselves in the active position in their experiences and the second one the extent to which the speakers align with normative discourses. Below, we analyze in what ways the presence and/or absence of grammatical agency in teachers’ dialogue suggests their agency in the context of implementing the BNCC under the circumstances of teaching EC during the pandemic.

Findings

Findings indicate how teachers’ desire to be more active in their approaches is in tension with the historical discourses that have defined their work with children for years. Below, we show how teachers engaged in dialogue around this tension, sometimes reproducing established discourses and other times seeing a window for possible transformation. Other teachers, frustrated by calls for new teaching methods in the pandemic context, gave up. Ultimately, we demonstrate the potential for the discursive tools of the culture circle to serve as an intervention in helping teachers identify ways around the obstacles of their own beliefs and practices in order to achieve positive transformations in their teaching that they want to make. Below, we organize these findings by various themes on a spectrum of example where teachers are recycling old discourses as justification for what

cannot be changed to teachers who show an emergent understanding that change is possible through shifts in their language structures and use.

Teachers Stuck in the Old Ways

Following the municipality's transition to a common curriculum, Vanderleia demonstrated how the old methods of teaching continued to impact her role as an educator. Here, she talks about the printed activity worksheets she was sending to children's homes in her interpretation of the common municipality curriculum meant to acknowledge the upcoming Indio, or Native Day

On the first day [the assignment] was to make a headdress. I decided to do an activity where I explored the Indian culture itself. I thought it was interesting to do this activity here where I talk a little bit about the culture, the Oca [hollow structure used for indigenous housing] and that children will color, and then explore everything the Indians used. Before doing this activity, children will watch a video... As we are not exploring [consonant] letters, we are still talking about vowels, I asked children to paint all the letters "I" and I have been explaining here below that the letter "I" comes from the word Indian. This was well presented, well-explored... Because I said, I'm going to put an Indian and put a reminder right here for them: "Did you know that the word Indian starts with the letter "i"? Then paint in your favorite color all the letters "i" that you find in the word Indio." (Focus Group - April 13, 2021)

While Vanderleia is talking about the Indio activity she shows it on the camera. The activity contains a paragraph written with capital letters and below it a few images such as an ocaa telephone, a pot, a slingshot, an Indio, a radio, an axe and children are asked to paint only the objects indios use in their daily lives. The cultural inappropriateness of both the original and Vanderleia's interpretation of this activity and her lack of critique of Native Day notwithstanding, in our analysis, we focus on how Vanderleia's description helps us to interpret her sense of agency in the classroom.

Vanderleia presents herself as a teacher who is independent from the outside mandates of the new municipal curriculum. This is demonstrated in her use of high grammatical agency when she is talking about the activity she prepared for children, she says "I decided to do", "I explored the Indian culture itself", "I thought it was interesting", "I talk a little bit about the culture". She shows her ideas and her decisions on what to include in the activity with pride, saying "This was well presented, well explored." However, when it comes to the traditional curriculum for banking step by step learning about letters, Vanderleia shows that she does not

question it, “As we are not exploring letters, we are still talking about vowels...” Here, Vanderleia uses the established curriculum progression for learning vowels before letters as a justification and way to highlight what she added to the lesson by allowing the children to choose what they would color.

Even as someone who has a powerful sense of agency in her own classroom, as someone who sees herself as brave to stand up against municipal regulations, Vanderleia is still stuck in the old methods of teaching. While she is able to change the activity, she does not make improvements. Instead, she reproduces the same passive experience for children in what she considers to be innovations in her teaching based on the municipal curriculum.

Many of Vanderleia’s traditional notions of teaching also express the restrictions she puts on children and what they can and cannot do. In another example from this same transcript, she explained, “So on Tuesday, the school proposed to talk about the...assembly. And I found the story’s moral for children who are far away to be complicated. I can even talk about it, but I think that five-year-olds still don't have these concepts very clear if we are not face-to-face to speak to them and tell them.” Due to limitations of space, we do not explore this in depth, but it is important to note that even those considered to be the strongest teachers in this context hold restrictive notions of both the curriculum and the capacity of children to interact with it, further demonstrating a need for intervention not simply into their teaching methods but how those teaching methods are socially constructed within the larger context of Brazilian education.

Challenges to Using the BNCC

In the below excerpt, we see the ways in which Andreia, a teacher, critiques the institutional challenges of making changes according to the BNCC:

Teachers bring that traditionalism...that the child has to line up because the child has to walk like that, the child has to do that way, right? And BNCC brings something totally different, right?...And not this paper activities... How do we work there? Do you know the school? There's no space! The patio has a small size. How are you going to work with the kids there if the classrooms are small? What structure does the school have for me to work with a child?! (Teaching training course - September 1, 2020). (144-35=109)

Here, she names “traditionalism”—“the child has to line up ... the child has to walk like that”— as an institutionalized obstacle to other teachers successfully implementing the

BNCC, drawing on framing agency to position herself as unable to change what is known and expected of teaching early childhood. She continues framing herself as powerless and the institution as powerful, emphasizing that the limitations of physical space are outside her control: “There's no space!” Her critique of spatial limitations exemplifies framing agency. In her view, Andreia cannot control the historically influenced environment, where the banking model of teaching is the norm, and there is little need for children to move, and she, therefore, frames the institution as having power over her teaching without any recognition of her power to change what might be.

Helen is a pedagogical coordinator at the ECE centre, and she is responsible for overseeing and helping teachers in developing the curriculum and their practices. When starting to talk, she calls attention to how teachers from her city have been working with BNCC compared to how they used to work before. From her perspective, teachers are beginning to make changes using the BNCC, though it is complicated.

I would like to make a statement. Today, in [my] city, Early Childhood Education has worked in a very advanced way, I see it that way in relation to previous years.

One of our difficulties when we actually started working with BNCC was to remove the content part that you were talking about a little while ago. It is very difficult, like that, we were used to working in a format in which we had a pre-made curriculum. We had it there in a nice separate set, with letters and numbers that the children would have to work in each bimester. So, this part was one of the most difficult for us, to look towards what you said, that the important thing is the child's experience, this is the content that should be worked on, right? (Teaching training course - September 8th, 2020).

Helen begins her statement using a high grammatical agency, somewhat reflective of her position of power, “I would like to make a statement,” and she follows with her evaluation that ECE in her city “has worked in a very advanced way,” compared to previous years. She emphasizes her position again, using a high grammatical agency in the statement, “I see it that way”. In analyzing the changes that teachers have already made, Helen shows a critical awareness of the challenges that the BNCC poses to her work with teachers. Positioning how they approached difficulties with a high collective grammatical agency, “we actually started working,” Helen explains that removing the “content part” was difficult (but not impossible).

She explains the reason that change is difficult showing that she understands the barriers from a pedagogical point of view with critical awareness, “This part was one of the most difficult for us, to look towards what you said, that the important thing is the child’s experience, this is the content that should be worked on.” Through the BNCC, teachers were invited to design experiential learning activities for their children, but this change presented a challenge for them because they were used to having a pre-made teacher-centered curriculum in a “nice separate set.” The BNCC thus marks an important transformation in the practices of Brazilian ECE.

Resigning to Old Methods During the Pandemic

In the next excerpt, we analyze how Andreia approached the challenges of teaching during the pandemic—a situation that served to amplify the larger problems teachers face in utilizing the BNCC. Here we emphasize how a reduction in grammatical agency aligns with Andreia’s giving up on the BNCC, resorting to sending home paper-based assignments in lieu of promoting interactive games at home.

I've been proposing [games] to the parents, you know? But it is difficult because... the parents never have time... So I always promote the games, very much... I put a lot of games [in the assignments] but I see that they are not very interested... there are very few who did it. They never sent it back. [Parents say] “I never have time.” They are very busy. The father works, the mother works, and the child stays with her grandmother, right?... There's no way to do it, right? ... but the worksheet has, the worksheet has time, the worksheet can be done, right? But the game has no time, so it is difficult, you know, you talk, you talk, *you get to a point where you get tired*, ... That's what I said yesterday with the coordinator, you get to a point where you know you get tired of talking... Talking, talking, and yesterday I got to the point when they are tired, I am tired. (Teaching training course - November 24, 2020, emphasis added).

Here, Andreia’s grammatical agency shifts from positioning her as an active agent promoting games instead of worksheets for at home learning during the pandemic—“I’ve been proposing,” “I always promote,” and “I put a lot of games”— to an agency that is focused on observing “I see that they are not very interested.” As she observes challenges, “They are very busy,” her own grammatical agency is subordinated to families’ resistance and

lack of participation. In this critique, Andreia employs framing agency to account for families' time restrictions, but with irony, she points out that families have time to return worksheets even though they complain, "I never have time" to practice games with their children. Andreia returns briefly to the high grammatical agency "That's what I said yesterday," but she concludes by demonstrating her lack of power to change circumstances, "They are tired, I am tired." Here, her shift from the first-person pronoun, "I," to the pronoun "you" used to emphasize a universal experience, indicates a shift away from feeling agentic, highlighting that the framing circumstances of the pandemic make it difficult to utilize the BNCC. Moreover, this excerpt also points to the mutual reinforcement of discourses of what is expected by parents at home, who resisted the BNCC prior to the pandemic. Having been taught themselves in the banking model of education, interactive and game-based approaches to learning are rejected by parents, making it even harder for teachers to implement curricular change since children were learning at home with their parents.

Opportunities to Shape Possibilities Through Dialogue

Finally, we present a brief analysis that shows how teachers are beginning to use focus group dialogues modeled on the culture circle to imagine new possibilities for their teaching. Here again, the degree of emerging grammatical agency of another teacher, Vanderleia, signals how we might continue to support teachers' development of lived agency in meaningfully transforming their teaching.

I agree with our colleague, and I was even typing here that what I have understood is that the focus is not on student learning, but on bureaucracy. You have to report what you're doing during the day. During today, I've already questioned Elisângela. Today, I called her, and I needed to talk to her and she is irreducible on some issues. You have to plan over the planning from another school with a completely different reality than hers and the focus is not on learning. (Focus Group - April 6, 2021)

Across several options for how she might present bureaucratic challenges to creating positive change, Vanderleia selects verb forms that highlight her high grammatical agency: "I agree," "I was even typing ... that what I have understood," "I've already questioned," and "I called her." Only in being critical of bureaucratic protocols does she drift from this structure:

“You have to report.” If restated with a personal pronoun, “I have to report,” then this sentence demonstrates less grammatical agency. Otherwise, Vanderleia’s individual grammatical agency does not waver, even when she speaks of challenging Elisangela, an EC Education administrator. Vanderleia also powerfully draws upon a collectivist framing to theorize how “You have to plan over the planning from another school.” Like Andreia, Vanderleia shifts to a distinctively universal pronoun here, “*You* have to plan over the planning.” However, the meaning of Vanderleia’s shift is more agentive and collective in that she is discussing a strategy to overcome the challenge. It is collective in that she is engaging with the administrator to create change, and she began her excerpt by framing how she wanted to share in the chat and connected her own understanding to a colleague’s. Thus, her use of the universal “you” can be interpreted to be more grammatically agentive and collective.

In expressing her agency in a more collective form, Vanderleia also demonstrates a powerful critical meta-awareness. She identifies a way to intervene and promote change in an uncomfortable situation, taking the action to call a superior so that she could adjust it. Similar to participants in one of Souto-Manning’s earliest culture circles, she “construct[ed] new realities” through the “process of problematizing” (p. 171) and she intervened in order to challenge and change the municipal bureaucracy that she critiqued as “not about learning.”

Discussion

Andreia’s words “you get to a point where you get tired,” particularly in the pandemic context of this research offers a way for us to continue to problem pose with teachers as they seek to make change but do not feel they have the resources to do so. In particular, we see in Andreia the opportunity to shape teachers’ critical awareness of how they perpetuate traditionalist discourses in the ways that they seek to transform their teaching. Andreia sees herself as trying to make change but bumping into obstacles. She shows her agency and alignment with the BNCC in attempting to put the new curriculum into practice throughout the pandemic. She critiques traditional teaching structures before the pandemic such focusing on children walking in a so-called correct way. She names worksheet or paper-based activities such as children practice writing letters, circling the vowel in the words, or tracing the letters,

as barriers to implementing the BNCC. Her desire to make change persisted as she proposed play activities for families to develop with their children. In this and more, Andreia positions herself as an active agent promoting play activities instead of sending home worksheets during the pandemic.

Despite the opportunities for growth, Andreia's obstacles to change making are even more important to the ongoing work needed with teachers like her. We see in Andreia a good example of someone whose grammatical and framing agency helps us to pinpoint interventions in the future. Before the pandemic Andreia framed the lack of institutional support available for teachers to develop an experiential curriculum as "there is not enough space" for children to play and move around at her EC centre. Afterwards, she frames the pandemic and the families' time restrictions as obstacles to using the new curriculum; in both cases, she showed little sense of her own agency in putting the BNCC in practice as she affirms her lack of power to change circumstances. Andreia grew exhausted from the challenges she faced and resorted to old practices such as sending paper-based homework.

Preliminary findings such as these suggest that teachers increase their agency over time through the culture circle activities, and as a result, they make some changes to their practices. For example, even after working with the project for one year during the pandemic Vandalaria demonstrates that she still operates primarily from traditional notions. Even in moments where teachers are not transforming their practices such as this, the very opportunity to discuss challenges in a supportive and critical context pushed teachers to consider alternatives to their thinking. In time, the desired changes can be made if teachers are given opportunities to problem pose in collective dialogue with one another. In data analyzed for this paper, parent resistance served as a major culprit defying transformation, and this seemed to be the breaking point for teachers in our study to give up in the pandemic context. This demonstrates how the pandemic made it harder for teachers to make changes, and it shows how enduring narratives operate in a social field to influence actors' choices—not just in what they do but in how they think about the problems they encounter. Most important for our purposes, it demonstrates ways forward to intervene for change in dialogic interaction with teachers.

Conclusion

The cycle of transformation of teachers' agency and the work their agency can do in conversation with an active critical pedagogy is messy. Our primary goal is to improve teachers' perceptions of their own agency to make it possible for them to make desired changes in their curriculum. This paper establishes the critical context where such dialogical work is most needed. Ultimately, we seek to create a context in focus groups modeled on culture circles wherein teachers can experience a shift towards collectivist action and change-making that results from the development of their individual agency. Much like one teacher in Souto-Manning's (2014) study who suggested, "We can work together to choose what is important and what we are not willing to change" (p. 173), we hope that teachers in this research can "choose together" what is important and what does not need to change in the face of persistent resistance to the changes they want to make.

Despite Freire's campaign to end banking education in the 1970s, the problem is still pervasive in Brazilian teachers' beliefs about their responsibilities, and this is consequently displayed in the relatively limited grammatical agency they demonstrated in the excerpts analyzed above. In the context of the BNCC, there is a need for active interventions to help teachers redefine their own positions as agents in working with children. Given openings we are beginning to see such as Vanderleia's use of the collective focus group as a space to imagine change, and teachers' own sense of themselves as trying to make change—despite their continued traditionalism—we intend to use these findings in the development of future culture circles with teachers as they learn to adopt the BNCC.

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“VOCÊ CHEGA A UM PONTO QUE CANSA”: TRANSFORMANDO A AGÊNCIA DE PROFESSORES BRASILEIROS DE EDUCAÇÃO INFANTIL

RESUMO: As instituições de educação infantil no Brasil costumavam estar relacionadas a serviços de assistência social, sendo sua principal tarefa cuidar e alimentar crianças pequenas. Em 1996, a educação infantil passou a fazer parte do sistema educacional, o que exigiu que os professores trabalhassem de forma mais interativa com as crianças. Assim, a educação infantil é recente na legislação brasileira, e os professores ainda carecem de competência pedagógica para transformar as experiências de aprendizagem das crianças nas instituições de ensino. Neste estudo, utilizamos a Análise Narrativa Crítica (Souto-Manning, 2014), para examinar como os diálogos coletivos dos professores aumentaram sua consciência e agência para vislumbrar maneiras de refutar os discursos históricos sobre o papel dos professores da educação infantil. Os resultados indicam que, embora os professores ainda estejam enraizados em discursos tradicionais, eles também estão buscando mudanças.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Agência, Formação de professores, Educação infantil, BNCC, Narrativa.