

Dialogue and youth participation in education quality

A case study from Brazil

Kristine Uldal



Master thesis for the Master of Philosophy degree in Comparative
and International Education, Institute for Educational Research

UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

May 5, 2009

Acknowledgments

I want to thank my excellent supervisor Sheri Bastien for all the constructive comments, and for inspiring and motivating me throughout this process. I also want to express my sincere gratitude to Tove Nagel for the valuable contributions to this thesis. It is of utmost importance to thank Ingrid Iversen from Operation Dayswork and Christian Schøien from the Norwegian Church Aid for the opportunity to research one of their projects, and for the assistance prior to, during and after the fieldwork in São Paulo. I am forever grateful to the staff at Ação Educativa, in particular Ana Paula Corti, Louis Barata and Maria Virgínia de Freitas, for welcoming me to São Paulo and letting me stay with them to research the JADE project. I also want to thank Regina Costa, my dear friend and roommate, for all the love and support during my stay in Brazil. To all my informants – youth agents, students, teachers, parents, staff at Ação Educativa – without your contributions this thesis would not have been possible. Muito obrigada! I also want to thank Save the Children's Research Fund for the economic support.

I am in dept of gratitude to all my amazing friends who have supported me in countless ways throughout this process.

Finally, I wish to thank my parents, Heidi and Sverre Uldal, and my brothers, Anders and Øyvind. I couldn't have done this without your love and support. Thank you for always having faith in me.

Oslo, May 2009

Kristine Uldal

Abstract

Policies emphasising access to education have long been prioritized at the expense of quality in education. However, recently quality in education has come to receive substantially more attention in the educational discourse. While a general agreement on the importance of ensuring quality in education appears to prevail, there seems to be less conformity towards how the concept 'education quality' should be defined. The thesis explores the concept of 'education quality' and youth participation and dialogue as possible methods for improving the quality of education. Students are key stakeholders in education, but are seldom given the opportunity to express what they perceive as being quality in education. Particularly attention is therefore given to the students' perception of 'education quality'.

The research is case study of an educational project carried out by the Brazilian non-governmental organization Ação Educativa, with qualitative interviews as the main method for data collection. The secondary education system in Brazil has experienced a massive expansion in enrolment rates in the last decades, which has had a negative impact on the quality of education. Simultaneously, secondary education has long been a neglected topic in the Brazilian society. In an attempt to bring focus to the topic, Ação Educativa invited all stakeholders to dialogue about the state and role of secondary education. Youth hold key roles in this project. The research demonstrates that when given the opportunity to interact in the educational discourse, youth are both willing and capable of participating. Moreover, main findings from the study indicate that aside from being concerned with learning and the teaching-learning process, the students consider the psychosocial environment as decisive for their well-being in school. In particular the relation between students and teachers appear to be important to the students. Dialogue among students and teachers allow the students to express themselves, an opportunity seldom given them in school, and dialogue can in turn promote tolerance and understanding between students and teachers.

The thesis also points to the fact that youth participation in education has received little attention among researchers. This study demonstrates that this topic constitutes a highly interesting and important area of research, and more research on youth participation in education quality should be welcomed.

Table of content

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	2
ABSTRACT.....	3
TABLE OF CONTENT.....	4
ABBREVIATIONS	9
1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXTUALIZATION	10
1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM.....	10
1.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY	12
1.3 OUTLINE OF THESIS	13
1.4 EDUCATION IN BRAZIL	13
1.4.1 <i>The Brazilian society</i>	14
1.4.2 <i>The Brazilian education system</i>	15
1.4.3 <i>An overview of the history of education in Brazil</i>	18
1.4.4 <i>The challenges of education in Brazil today</i>	22
1.5 ORGANIZATIONS	24
1.5.1 <i>Operation Dayswork</i>	25
1.5.2 <i>The Norwegian Church Aid</i>	25
1.5.3 <i>Acção Educativa</i>	26
1.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY	30
2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	32
2.1 INTRODUCTION.....	32
2.2 QUALITY IN EDUCATION.....	32
2.2.1 <i>The purpose of education</i>	32

2.2.2	<i>Defining education</i>	33
2.2.3	<i>The concept of quality</i>	35
2.2.4	<i>A historical introduction to 'education quality'</i>	35
2.2.5	<i>Defining quality in education</i>	36
2.2.6	<i>The essence of education</i>	37
2.2.7	<i>The aims of education</i>	38
2.2.8	<i>Arriving at a definition of quality in education?</i>	42
2.2.9	<i>Decentralization, democracy and dialouge in education</i>	43
2.2.10	<i>Education quality summarized</i>	45
2.3	YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATIONAL PROJECTS	45
2.3.1	<i>Definition of youth</i>	46
2.3.1	<i>Youth participation for educational reform in low-income communities of color</i>	46
2.3.2	<i>Hart's ladder of participation</i>	47
2.4	PAULO FREIRE AND EDUCATION FOR CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS	48
2.4.1	<i>Conscientization and the role of dialogue</i>	49
2.4.2	<i>A society's themes and tasks</i>	51
2.4.3	<i>How can dialogue be promoted?</i>	54
2.4.4	<i>Concluding remarks</i>	55
3.	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	56
3.1	INTRODUCTION	56
3.2	RESEARCH DESIGN	56
3.3	FIELDWORK.....	57
3.3.1	<i>Challenges in the field</i>	58
3.4	SAMPLE.....	59

3.5	QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS	61
3.5.1	<i>Interviewing youth</i>	62
3.6	ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	63
3.7	ANALYSIS.....	65
3.8	VALIDITY IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH.....	67
3.9	LIMITATIONS TO THESIS.....	68
3.10	CONCLUSION.....	69
4.	EDUCATION QUALITY AS PERCEIVED BY YOUTH.....	70
4.1	INTRODUCTION.....	70
4.2	OBSERVATIONS IN SCHOOL.....	70
4.3	LEARNING	72
4.3.1	<i>Youth's preferences in a learning/teaching situation</i>	74
4.4	THE PSYCHOSOCIAL ENVIRONMENT IN SCHOOL	75
4.4.1	<i>The tenuous relation between students and teachers</i>	75
4.4.2	<i>The lack of opportunity to express opinions</i>	77
4.4.3	<i>The weak attachment to school</i>	78
4.5	LIMITATIONS TO EXERCISING AN EDUCATION OF QUALITY	79
4.6	CONSEQUENCES OF POOR PUBLIC SECONDARY EDUCATION	83
4.7	CHAPTER SUMMARY	85
5.	BENEFITS OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION QUALITY.....	87
5.1	INTRODUCTION.....	87
5.2	PERSONAL ENRICHMENT.....	88
5.3	AWARENESS AND ENGAGEMENT.....	90
5.4	MOBILIZATION OF YOUTH	93

5.5	LIMITATIONS TO YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION QUALITY	96
5.6	CHAPTER SUMMARY.....	96
6.	THE ROLE OF DIALOGUE IN EDUCATION QUALITY.....	99
6.1	INTRODUCTION	99
6.2	THE ROLE OF DIALOGUE AS PERCEIVED BY YOUTH.....	99
6.2.1	<i>Opportunity to express themselves.....</i>	<i>99</i>
6.2.2	<i>Opportunity for increased understanding of one another</i>	<i>100</i>
6.3	THE ROLE OF DIALOGUE AS PERCEIVED BY PARENTS/GUARDIANS	101
6.4	THE ROLE OF DIALOGUE AS PERCEIVED BY TEACHERS.....	102
6.4.1	<i>Opportunity to practice the skill of listening.....</i>	<i>102</i>
6.4.2	<i>Opportunity to exchange ideas and learn from one another</i>	<i>103</i>
6.4.3	<i>Opportunity for increased understanding of one another</i>	<i>104</i>
6.5	HOW DOES DIALOUGE CONTRIBUTE TO EDUCATION QUALITY?.....	104
6.6	LIMITATIONS TO DIALOGUE IN EDUCATION QUALITY	105
6.6.1	<i>Ambiguous long-term planning</i>	<i>105</i>
6.6.2	<i>Limited resources.....</i>	<i>107</i>
6.6.3	<i>Weak foundation in schools</i>	<i>108</i>
6.7	CHAPTER SUMMARY.....	109
7.	CONCLUSION.....	111
7.1	INTRODUCTION	111
7.2	SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS	111
7.3	GAPS AND LIMITATIONS TO THE RESEARCH.....	114
7.4	FUTURE RESEARCH AREAS	115
7.5	IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE	115

APPENDIX A	117
APPENDIX B	118
REFERENCES.....	119

Abbreviations

AED – Academy for Educational Development

CRC – Convention on the Rights of the Child

EFA – Education for All

ENEM – The National Secondary Education Examination

FUNDEF - National Fund for Basic Education

GNP – Gross National Products

IIEP – The International Institute for Educational Planning

INEP - National Institute for Educational Research

IMF – International Monetary Fund

JADE - Youth Agents for the Right to Education

KNH – Kinder Not Hilfe

NCA – Norwegian Church Aid

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization

OD – Operation Dayswork

SAEB - Sistema de Avaliação Básica (assessment of students in fundamental education)

SEE – The Secretary of Education of the State of São Paulo

UN – The United Nations

UNICEF – The United Nations Children’s Fund

UNESCO – The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

WB – The World Bank

1. Introduction and contextualization

1.1 Background of the problem

Policies emphasising access to education have long been prioritized at the expense of quality in education, and traditionally quality has fought alongside quantity for attention in the educational debate (Leu 2005). This is recently seen in relation to the launching of the Education for All (EFA) policies, in which the contrasting emphasis on the two aspects has been obvious. At the first World Declaration on Education For All, which was held in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, the delegates agreed that primary education was to be universalized, and illiteracy rates heavily reduced before the end of the decade. Although the Jomtien Declaration did not ignore quality, increasing the quantity of education was the priority at the time. ‘The implementation of EFA brought about declines in quality as resources were stretched beyond effectiveness’ (Leu 2005:iii).

However, at the second EFA conference which was held in Dakar in 2000, the importance of giving the quality aspect of education attention was recognized. During the conference six goals were adopted, and one of the goals concerned quality specifically. Goal 6 of the Dakar Framework for Action and Millennium Development Goals declares that “improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills” (UNESCO 2000:17).

Brazil aims to achieve the goals of the EFA policy, but as the system of education is expanded in order to be able to offer young people in Brazil an education, the quality of the education remains poor (Schwartzman 2004; Batista Araújo e Oliveira 2004).

Simultaneously, primary education was for a long time the only part of the education system to be debated in the media and receive attention from Brazilian politicians, to a large extent disregarding secondary education. Until recently, secondary education was considered the most neglected education level in Brazilian public education policy (Guimarães de Castro and Tiezzi 2004). High drop-out rates and poor test results in secondary school made it clear

that a debate about secondary school, its purpose, content and quality was necessary (Acção Educativa 2007).

However, it is challenging to expand access to education and at the same time ensure the quality of education. Countries that have recently witnessed a substantial improvement in their students' performance in school have experienced that the process of ensuring both access and quality has taken decades. South Korea is an example of this. The country promoted extensive expansion of secondary education in the 1970s. Later the country invested in improved quality, and newly the performance of the students has improved (Guimarães de Castro and Tiezzi 2004). This could indicate that there is a 'natural' process taking place when expanding the education system, in which the countries increase enrolment rates first and improve the quality of education afterwards.

Furthermore, when discussing the poor quality in secondary school in Brazil it is important to define what is meant by quality in education. Who has the power to decide what 'education quality' is? When speaking about 'education quality'; to whom should it be considered quality? Far too often the task of defining 'education quality' is left to politicians, international organizations and donors (Johannessen 2006). Why aren't the people on the grass root level of the education system, those who are involved in and a part of the education system every day, asked what they perceive as being 'education quality'? Isn't it time to ask what students, teachers and parents consider education quality to be?

Acção Educativa and the JADE project

The São Paulo based non-governmental organization (NGO) Acção Educativa works in order to improve the quality of education in Brazilian secondary schools. Their concern about the continuous decrease in the education quality resulted in the creation of a project called 'Jovens Agentes pelo Direito à Educação' (JADE), in English: 'Youth Agents for the Right to Education'. The project was initiated in 2007 and aimed at generating knowledge about how the quality of education in Brazilian secondary education can be improved and ensured. This knowledge was generated by asking students, teachers, parents and other members of the school community about their opinions about the school and the education system they are an important part of. In every respect, Acção Educativa wanted to find out what 'quality education' means to the ones the education system is in fact created for; the youth themselves.

The project heavily emphasized youth participation, and youth were involved in all stages of the project. In addition, the use of dialogue was an important element in the project. All members of the school community were invited to participate in the dialogue; students, teachers, the principal, administration staff and other school staff (for instance cleaning and canteen personnel), parents and local government officials. Education policies in Brazil are created by politicians and educational experts that may not have day-to-day contact with the school reality. Ação Educativa strongly argues that this top-down approach in education neglects the students themselves, creating an education system and a school reality that do not 'fit' the youth and the reality they live. By looking more closely at this project, it is hoped that this thesis can shed light on important aspects in the discourse on 'education quality'. Moreover, I want to give a voice to the students by focusing on their perception of what constitutes quality in education.

1.2 Objectives of the study

The main objective of this study is to investigate the issue of 'education quality' and youth participation in an educational project in Brazil. It seems both unjust and peculiar that the people the education system is created for, and the people that ensure the system's daily endurance, are left out of the educational debate. Therefore, this study first and foremost aims at finding out what students perceive as 'education quality'. Secondly, as the project that constitutes the basis for my research involves youth participation, an important part of this study is to make an attempt at identifying the benefits of, and possibly limitations to, this participation. Can this project lead to increased quality in education? The project heavily emphasizes the use of dialogue as a method to generate knowledge about what quality in education means to the various stakeholders. In this way, the project aims at giving voice to those who are seldom listened to in the educational debate. Consequently, this thesis also aims at finding out how the participants of the group dialogues perceive the role of dialogue in education quality. Further, how the information and knowledge that has come out of the project is used so that the quality in education in secondary schools in São Paulo can be improved will also be looked into. Dialogue can have a value in itself, but in order to truly give voice to students, teachers and parents, their opinions need to be taken further into consideration and change within the education system advocated for.

The principal research questions that have guided this study are as follows:

- How do students in secondary school in São Paulo perceive ‘education quality’?
- What are the benefits of youth participation in education quality?
- How do youth, teachers and parents perceive the role of dialogue in education quality?

1.3 Outline of thesis

The thesis is divided into seven chapters. This first chapter will continue with an introduction to the Brazilian society and the country’s education system, as well as the challenges to education in Brazil today. Furthermore, a presentation of the various organizations I have cooperated with for this research project will be given. Lastly follows a thorough introduction of the project that has been the focus for this thesis.

The second chapter is devoted to methodology, while the third chapter discusses relevant theory and a literature review. In this chapter I will make an attempt at defining ‘education quality’, before I take a closer look at Paulo Freire and his theories on education for liberation. The third chapter also gives a review of literature on youth participation. Analysis of data is performed in chapter four, five and six. Chapter four looks at the concept of education quality as perceived by youth, while chapter five is occupied with the benefits of youth participation in education quality. Chapter five discusses the role of dialogue as perceived by youth, teachers and parents, and the possibilities for dialogue to contribute to improved quality in education. The final chapter contains a final discussion of the study’s main findings, tying theoretical aspects and data obtained together in order to answer the principal research questions posed in this study.

1.4 Education in Brazil

The following section gives an introduction to the Brazilian society and the system of education. I give a short overview of the history of education in Brazil, and lastly challenges to the education system in Brazil today are presented.

1.4.1 The Brazilian society

With more than 8 million square kilometers and a population that has now has more than 187 million people, Brazil is one of the world's biggest and most populous countries. The nation is divided into 26 states, four territories and a Federal District. The population is a mix of various races and ethnicities. The people of Brazil are descendents of Native Americans, Africans and Europeans. Additionally, waves of immigrants from Asia and Europe have contributed to making Brazil a true melting pot (World Bank 2004). Brazil is also a country of great contrasts. Distribution of income in Brazil is among the most unequal in the world, and this has been the situation for a long period of time (World Bank 2004). The living conditions for the population vary both across the states and regions, and within them. Inequalities between gender and racial groups are immense. Furthermore, Brazil's inequality is not restricted to income. It extends to – or originates from- the distributions of educational attainment, agricultural land, health status and political influence (World Bank 2004:59).

Strong correlations between ethnic origins, income and educational opportunities exist in the Brazilian multiracial society. In general 'non-whites'¹ are poorer, live in areas of low socio-economic status and have less educated parents. Half the population is classified as 'non-white'. Black Brazilians earn salaries that are on average about half of those earned by people of other races. A substantial educational gap between blacks and whites is to blame for the vast differences. While the white population had on average of 5.75 years of schooling in 2001, the 'non-white' population had only 4.04 years (Schwartzman 2004). As for the other races, the indigenous populations have not been surveyed extensively so that reliable data can be presented. However, the indications are that they are no better of than blacks. Asian descendents are generally considerably more affluent than people from other races, including the average white (World Bank 2004). Public schools in poor areas tend to be of worse quality than those in middleclass areas. In contrast, middle -and upper class

¹ The Brazilian population is categorized according to one's own self-described skin color in order to obtain ethnic and race classification. The Brazilian national household surveys and censuses ask the population to place themselves into the categories of 'white', 'black', 'mixed', 'native' and 'oriental'. 'Native' and 'oriental' are subgroups within the 'yellow' category. Schwartzman has added the figures for 'black' and 'mixed' to create the 'non-white' category. The natives correspond to 0.1 percent of the population, while the Orientals, mostly of Japanese descent, make up 0.5 percent of the population, and do not fall into the category of 'non-white'. In the 2001 survey, 53.4 percent of the population defined themselves as white (Schwartzman 2004).

families can afford to send their children to private basic and secondary education schools. The private schools are generally of much higher quality than the public schools (Schwartzman 2004).

Approximately 9 percent of Brazilian students are enrolled in private schools (Soares 2004). In turn, private basic education will open the doors for these students into the public higher education institutions. These institutions are free, as the 1988 Constitution guaranteed free college tuition. The public universities are also the most prestigious. Thus, this policy is merely to be considered as a subsidy to the rich part of the population, as they are by and large the only ones who are accepted into public higher education institutions owing to private basic and secondary education of high quality (Schwartzman 2004). Figures from the University of Campinas, a public university in the state of São Paulo, show that in 2003 only about 30 percent of final year public secondary school students registered, although these represent more than 80 percent of enrolments from that level of education in the state of São Paulo (Guimarães de Castro and Tiezzi 2004).

Youth of low-income families, who are forced to struggle through public schools of bad quality, will at best end up at less prestigious courses in public universities or in private institutions of poor quality (Schwartzman 2004). At worse they leave school before graduation. These youth are often already marginalized owing to class and ethnic origin, and experience further isolation because the lack of access to a quality education limits their professional opportunities (Wong and Balestino 2001).

The unequal income distribution systems and the equally inequitable education system have caused tremendous discrepancies between the members of the Brazilian population. The two systems are closely connected, thus policies to improve the education system must also address the socioeconomic and cultural conditions that hinder groups or individuals from accessing the education system (Di Pierro 2000).

1.4.2 The Brazilian education system

Basic education

The education system in Brazil consists of two main blocks; basic education and higher education. Basic education is divided into preschool, fundamental education and secondary

education. Fundamental education lasts eight years, for children who are 7 to 14 years old. The first four years of fundamental education is sometimes referred to as 'elementary education'. Secondary education, also referred to as middle education, lasts for a period of three years, and starts when the students are 15 years and ends when they are 17 years old (Schwartzman 2004). Basic education is compulsory for children aged 7 to 14 and free of charge at all public institutions (Soares 2004). Although not compulsory, secondary schools are also free of charge within the public school network (Câmara et al. 2000). Secondary school is part-time in Brazil, and the school day is divided into three 'shifts'; morning, afternoon and evening school. More than fifty percent of secondary schools are evening schools (Batista Araújo e Oliveira 2004).

Most students go to public schools. However, nine percent of the students in fundamental education attend private schools. These students come from families of high socio-economic status (Soares 2004). The private school sector in Brazil is allowed to participate in all levels of schooling, depending on the approval and evaluation of the government. As long as they are authorized, private schools enjoy the same rights as the public schools, whether they are federal, state or municipal (Câmara et al. 2000).

Higher education and the exam vestibular

Higher education is divided into professional, graduate level and postgraduate level. The graduate level consists of courses lasting from three to six years and grants Bachelor's degrees. The postgraduate level is for students working for Master's or doctoral degrees. Admission to higher education is determined by the students' performance in the college entrance examinations, *exame vestibular* (Haussman and Haar 1978). The exam vestibular was created in 1911 and originally it served to test students for secondary school graduation diplomas. However, uncontrolled expansion in secondary education in the following decades, together with a lowering of academic performance in many schools, made the exam vestibular end up as the university entrance examinations.

The Law of Directives and Bases of 1961 made the exam vestibular compulsory for access to the university. However, this policy led to severe problems. Since the number of applicants exceeded the number of available places in university, the content of examination and the grading system were manipulated in order to match the number of admissions to that of available openings. In this respect the process did not select all those who were applicable

for a place in university in the first place, which originally was the objective of the exam vestibular (Haussman and Haar 1978). The consequence of this policy was that the students were left to depend upon the cursos prevestibulares, also known as cursinhos. The cursinhos are not part of the formal education system, but are privately owned and operated training courses. The only purpose of the courses is to prepare students for the exam vestibular. This business is very lucrative and the teaching staff is well paid. Many of the instructors are former teachers who have left teaching in school for the more lucrative cursinhos-business (Haussman and Haar 1978; World Bank 2002). The quality of the cursinhos varies, but the fees are high and can often be the equivalent of two to three months minimum wages (World Bank 2002). This implies that the students that can afford to pay for these cursinhos are usually the ones who have already had the opportunity to go to a high-quality, private secondary school. According to Haussman and Haar (1978), the cursinhos were both cause and effect of many of Brazil's educational problems in the 1970s; there were not enough university freshman places in university to admit all candidates, the exam vestibular served as the only base for admission, and secondary school education failed to prepare students to pass these exams.

Today exam vestibular is only referred to as vestibular, and the term refers both to the individual exams and to the process of selecting students for admission to tertiary institutions (World Bank 2002). Currently the vestibular system continues to receive critique for the fact that it contributes to making it difficult for poor students to enter higher education. The exam does not measure general academic knowledge, but focuses more on mastering/memorizing of a set of facts (World Bank 2002). Not only is it a problem in itself that the diversity of knowledge the students have obtained in secondary school does not count in the process of entering tertiary education, and that the vestibular could possibly 'guide' the content taught in school in order to prepare the students for the vestibular², but it also biases the students that have been enrolled in secondary schools of poorer quality. It is also worth noting that the tests tend to take place in metropolitan centers, thus making it hard for poor rural students to reach. To pay for travel, lodging and food can be too expensive for poor families (World Bank 2002).

²The fact that tests might affect the content of the teaching and learning in school is a highly relevant topic. However, I will not pursue the subject further in this thesis.

Administration

The administration of education is carried out on three levels, federal, state and municipal, as defined by the Brazilian Constitution. The municipality and the state share the legal responsibility of fundamental education, while the state alone is responsible for secondary education. Tertiary education is a federal responsibility (Blom et al. 2001). The Constitution of 1988 made the municipalities participants in the management of the educational system for the first time in history (Câmara et al. 2000).

1.4.3 An overview of the history of education in Brazil

Brazil's inequitable education and income distribution system has developed through centuries. Going all the way back to the colonial era, when Brazil was under Portuguese rule, (1415-1822), education was never a main concern. The Portuguese looked upon their presence in Brazil as short term exploitation rather than long term investment, and providing the people with education was therefore not a priority. Education was a good for the members of the rural aristocracy only, and served to make a clear distinction between the upper and lower classes (Hausman and Haar 1978). After the Portuguese had left in 1822, the Constitution of 1824 guaranteed universal education as a civil right. However, due to lack of physical and human resources and also to lack of public interest, a system of free public education was not established. Education continued to be of and for the upper classes. At the end of the 19th Century, Brazil remained an elite-dominated nation, and only five percent of the population had the right to vote (Hausman and Haar 1978). No more than 25 percent of the population was literate (Schwartzman 2004).

After 1920 the society started to change. Industrialization, urbanization and the emergence of a small middle classes modernized the Brazilian society. Despite the changes, the legacies of the past prevailed; illiteracy rates were high, the nation was run by a small upper-class minority, and the distribution of wealth and power in general were unjust (Hausman and Haar 1978). The 1930 Revolution brought Getúlio Vargas to power, and under his leadership was education recognized as a federal responsibility for the first time in history (Schwartzman 2004). Among some of the improvements that took place was the provision of more resources to basic education in order to reduce the high illiteracy rates (Hausman and Haar 1978). The Vargas government made significant efforts to form and control basic and secondary education from above. This was done, however, without taking responsibility for

the management and administration of the schools, which was left to the state and municipal authorities or in private hands (Schwartzman 2004).

After the Second World War, the Brazilian economy began to accelerate immensely, industrialization grew, employment rates increased and public services expanded. These changes brought about a growing demand for education (Hausman and Haar 1978). State governments and municipalities expanded their school system of elementary and secondary education, and the private sector increased their schools system as well. The private school system provided education both to the elite, but also to the lower middle classes (Schwartzman 2004). In addition, higher education expanded dramatically during the post-war period (Hausman and Haar 1978). A federal network of universities was created with at least one university in each state (Schwartzman 2004).

The first general education law, the Law of Directives and Bases of 1961, was only partly a success. The controversies in Congress had left the law filled with compromises and amendments, but still it managed to modify the educational system to some extent. Among the most important features of the law was that of decentralization. The states were now given freedom to organize their own system of instruction (Hausman and Haar 1978). Nevertheless, despite attempts at expanding the education system in the years after the Second World War, education was less prioritized in the 1950s and 1960s than in the earlier decades (Schwartzman 2004). In the early 1950s Brazil had a population of about 50 million inhabitants. Less than 30 percent of the population was enrolled in school of any kind (Schwartzman 2004). Furthermore, in 1964, four million school-age children still lacked school, and sixteen million people of fourteen years and older were illiterate. This constituted obstacles to the development of the country and to the creation of a democratic mentality (Freire 1974).

In 1971 compulsory education, which had previously lasted four years, extended to eight years. The number of children in school continued to grow at a steady pace. In 1980 the percentage of the population between seven and fourteen of age enrolled in school had risen to 80.2 (Câmara et al. 2000). Nevertheless, the debt crisis that affected the developing countries in the 1980s also influenced Brazil. The fiscal crisis and the inflation that followed made public services unstable, including education (Câmara et al. 2000). For higher education this decade was a period of stagnation (Durham 2004).

The military coup of 1964 left the country under military rule for more than twenty years, and not until 1985 was a civilian president elected. A new Constitution was established in 1988. The Constitution ascertained the right of every citizen to mandatory education, and it also confirmed the autonomy of the universities, and that all public education, basic and higher, should be provided for free. The Constitution affirms ‘the progressive universality of access to free secondary education’, signifying that secondary education should be progressively extended to all the students who finish fundamental education (Guimarães de Castro and Tiezzi 2004:90). Guimarães de Castro and Tiezzi (2004:90) maintain that secondary education now was to be recognized as prerequisite for exercising citizenship ‘and for access to productive activities, including study for personal development; that is to say, education in its own right’.

In 1996, a new education law, Lei de Diretrizes e Bases number 9,394 of 1996, also known as the ‘Darcy Ribeiro Law’, was approved after many years of debate. This law gave the education institutions at all levels much more freedom and flexibility, for instance in terms of setting up their own course programmes and manage their own affairs (Schwartzman 2004). Moreover, with the new education law, the idea of universal education went on from including only mandatory basic education (or primary education as it is called in many countries), to including nursery school and secondary education as well. This policy was in concordance with the aims of Education for All, adopted at the conference in Jomtien in 1990. Guimarães de Castro and Tiezzi recognize that in this respect, Brazil was one of the few countries in the world that incorporated the commitments of Jomtien into general education law (Guimarães de Castro and Tiezzi 2004).

Recent developments

Between 1995 and 2002, under the leadership of the Minister of Education, Paulo Renato de Souza, the old National Institute for Educational Research (INEP) was renewed. In addition, the National Fund for Basic Education (FUNDEF) was founded. The assignments of the latter was to work towards a reduction of regional differences in education, in addition to setting a floor for state and municipal expenditures on fundamental education (Schwartzman 2004). The 1988 Constitution determined that the federal government should spend 18 percent of its resources on education, and the state and local governments should spend 25 percent. The task of FUNDEF is to make sure the money is in fact spent on education, while

INEP was given the responsibility of implementing three large systems of education assessment: Sistema de Avaliação Básica (SAEB), which assesses students in fundamental education, The National Secondary Education Examination (ENEM), which is the national examination for students completing secondary school, and the National Course Examination, also known as the *Provão*, which is the national examination for all undergraduate programmes in university (Schwartzman 2004).

During the same period, enrolments in pre-school, fundamental and secondary education increased. By the end of the 1990s, for the first time in history, practically every child in Brazil was enrolled in fundamental education (Schwartzman 2004). When more than 95 percent of school-age children in a population have access to and complete a school level, education is considered universal (UNESCO 2008). In 2005, 97.3 percent of school-age children were enrolled in fundamental school (UNESCO 2008); hence Brazil has achieved to make fundamental education universal.

Secondary education experienced a major increase in enrolments rates in the 1990s and at the beginning of the millennium. Having been primarily an exclusive right of the elite, and served as a passage for higher education, the situation changed dramatically from the end of the 1980s and onwards (Guimarães de Castro and Tiezzi 2004). In 2002, around 8.7 million students were enrolled in secondary school, a figure which is double the enrolment of the early 1990s. In percentage, enrolment in secondary education increased by 71 percent in 1994-2001. Completion rates increased as well. From 1991 to 1994 the number of students completing secondary school increased by 40 percent from 660.000 to 917.000. In 2001, 1.8 million students graduated from secondary school. In percentage the number of students completing secondary education increased by 102 percent from 1994-2001 (Guimarães de Castro and Tiezzi 2004). Moreover, the net enrolment rate of people between 15 and 17 years of age increased from 16 percent in 1994 to 33 percent in 2001. In just eight years enrolment of youth in the right age group has doubled (Guimarães de Castro and Tiezzi 2004).

As for higher education this sector experienced new growth after the stagnation in the 1980s. Yet, the accomplishments of higher education were not as impressive as those of fundamental education between the years 1995-2002. About 20 percent of student population was enrolled in one of the 39 universities or 18 other higher education

institutions run by the federal government, and 15 percent were enrolled in public universities run by the state government (Schwartzman 2004).

1.4.4 The challenges of education in Brazil today

Low quality

As access is no longer a pressing problem, at least not in primary school, the quality of education on the other hand, represents new great challenges (Schwartzman 2004). High drop-out rates, high repetition and failing rates, and poor learning outcomes disclosed in tests and exams, are strong indicators of an education system that struggles to provide its children and youth with an education of quality (Schwartzman 2004; Câmara et al. 2000).

A large number of pupils in Brazilian schools have not learnt to read and write properly when they finish school. According to Schwartzman (2004), education in Brazil has suffered from poor teaching instruction. Schwartzman points to the fact that there has been a serious problem of teaching teachers how to teach, something which has limited the students' abilities to learn. Several assessment tests estimate the level of quality in Brazilian education. SAEB evaluates students in fourth, eight and eleventh grade. Results from SAEB in 1999 reveal that the majority of the public school students do not reach the minimum standards, and that the achievements of students in private schools are notably better than those in public schools (Batista Araújo e Oliveira 2004).

High repetition rate is one of Brazil's most serious educational problems (Câmara et al 2000, Schwartzman 2004). In 1994, a little more than fifty percent of the students completed the eight first years of basic education, and it took them 12 years to do so (Guimarães de Castro and Tiezzi 2004). A study done by the World Bank in 2001 shows that the students spend 35 percent longer time to complete the first four years of fundamental education (grade 1-4) than planned, and 23 percent longer time to complete the last four years of both fundamental education (grade 5-8) and secondary education. This indicates that the problem with high repetition rates is extensive (Blom et al. 2001).

Furthermore, a large number of pupils do not even finish primary and secondary education, but drop out of school years before they should. Fundamental education takes 11 years to complete, but according to official statistics students stay in school for an average of 8.5

years (Batista Araújo e Oliveira 2004). Figures from 2001 show that by age 16, 19 percent of Brazilian adolescents have dropped out of school. By the age of 18, the figure is 43 percent (Schwartzman 2004). The Brazil country case study prepared for the EFA Monitoring report 2008 states that while nearly all children between 7 and 14 years were in school, they started to drop-out at the age of 14 or 15, mainly due to repeating years that had made them fall behind (UNESCO 2008).

To sum up, the quality of education in Brazil suffers to a great extent. High drop-out rates, high repetition rates and poor learning outcomes reveal a system that struggles to provide the nation's young people with a solid education. These rates are not poor quality in themselves, but indicators, demonstrating that there is a serious problem of lack of learning taking place in Brazilian schools.

Insufficient spending in education

Brazil spends about 5 percent of its gross national product (GNP) on education (Schwartzman 2004). Moreover, this expenditure is strongly biased towards higher education. Figures from an estimation carried out by INEP in 1996 show that the cost of a higher education student was 12.8 times more than of one in basic education, and 9.9 times more than one in secondary education (Schwartzman 2004). Moreover, nearly all federal spending for higher education goes to the federal university system. The only exception is a small student loan program that subsidizes private education (World Bank 2002). According to Schwartzman, the public spending in education needs to be increased to a 7 percent level in order to change the situation, without reducing the expenditures to higher education (Schwartzman 2004). As already shown, students of higher socio-economic background more often attend private schools. Their achievements are considerably better than those in public schools (Batista Araújo e Oliveira 2004). Therefore, they are better qualified for passing the exam vestibular, and enter the high-status, public universities. As higher education is prioritized in federal spending in education, it becomes even more evident to which great extent the education system prioritizes and funds the students that are better of in the first place.

The role of secondary education in Brazil

The role of secondary education continues to be a subject of debate in countries worldwide, and constitutes a challenge in the Brazilian education system today. The discussion is more or less the same in all countries, namely that of the objectives of secondary education (Câmara et al 2000). The role of secondary education is challenging because it presents a complicated relationship between conclusiveness and continuity; conclusiveness in terms of readiness to enter the labor market, and continuity in terms of being prepared to enter higher education (Câmara et al 2000). In Brazil, secondary education has always fluctuated between the two alternatives; secondary school as the final stage of education which prepares students for professional life, or secondary school as preparation for higher education (Guimarães de Castro and Tiezzi 2004). The challenge of finding a way to balance general and vocational education is a classic problem. Should it prepare the students for professional life or for higher education? Should secondary education be comprehensive, or should there be different options or roads that the students can choose between (Câmara et al 2000)?

In the 1970s, secondary education experimented with different models and links between academic and professional curricula. These experiments however, were of little success (Schwartzman 2004). The Ministry of Education implemented a new curricular reform in secondary school, in the period between 1995 and 2002. The reform accompanied the huge increase in enrolment rates and the new evaluation system, ENEM. The aim of the reform was to ‘improve and expand secondary education in tune with the demands of the productive sector with the development needs of the country, society and citizens’ (Guimarães de Castro and Tiezzi 2004:92). Still, secondary education continues to be the level of schooling to receive least attention and several years of neglect by the politicians has made it necessary to initiate a comprehensive debate about the purpose and objectives of secondary education (Guimarães de Castro and Tiezzi 2004; Ação Educativa 2007).

1.5 Organizations

In total three organizations are involved either directly or indirectly in the JADE project. Two of them are Norwegian and one is Brazilian. Below I will give a brief presentation of them all, and explain the relationship between them.

1.5.1 Operation Dayswork

Operation Dayswork (OD) is a Norwegian solidarity action which was started up in 1964. It is carried out with, by and for youth. Every year on the last Thursday in October, Norwegian students have the opportunity of getting the day off from school and carry out one day's work instead. The money they earn is collected and given to a project supporting education of youth in countries in Africa, Asia or South America. To be a part of OD is voluntary. OD emphasizes solidarity, and to promote equality between youth all over the world are the action's most central objective (Operation Dayswork 2008).

Every year several Norwegian Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) apply to win OD. The applications are reviewed by OD's Project Council, which consists of six experts with extensive experience from development work and the OD leaders from the last four years. Those applications approved by the Project Council are forwarded to the General Assembly of the School Student Union of Norway, and voted on. The winning NGO has partner organizations in countries in the south, which in turn receive the money. The money from OD is normally spread over a five year period of time so the projects are ensured continuity. The Norwegian NGO submits a long-term plan for all five years consisting of one part with information common for all projects, and one more specific part with closer information about the various partner organizations and their projects. Additionally, the organization hands in a yearly report for each of their partner organizations, stating the activities carried out and the results obtained that year. They also submit a plan for next year. At the end of the five years, a final report is written and represented to the Project Council (Operation Dayswork 2008).

1.5.2 The Norwegian Church Aid

The Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) is a Norwegian NGO established in 1947. It is founded on the Christian faith. NCA fights for the rights and dignity of the human beings, and assists those who need it the most, regardless of sex, political view, religion and ethnicity. NCA provides emergency aid and gives long term development assistance in order to reach their objectives (Norwegian Church Aid 2008).

In 2005 NCA applied for OD and was selected winner by the General Assembly of the School Student Union. The money from the OD campaign went to five of NCA's partner

organizations in Brazil, Ação Educativa being one of them. NCA does not set the agenda for their partner organization, but the projects are developed through close dialogue with NCA, ensuring that NCA's focus areas are maintained.

1.5.3 Ação Educativa

Ação Educativa is a non-governmental, non-profit civil society organization founded in 1994. It is based in São Paulo, Brazil. 42 statutory associates constitute its General Assembly, and the organization has 114 supporting associates. The organization is one of NCA's partner organizations in Brazil, and is supported financially by NCA and OD. The core activities of the work of Ação Educativa regard the promotion of education and youth rights. In 2005 the Brazilian government established the National Secretariat for Youth, in which Ação Educativa is represented.

Ação Educativa's main mission is expressed as follows: 'Ação Educativa's main mission is to contribute towards constituting and making effective education rights and those of youth considering the promotion of social justice, of participatory democracy and of sustainable development in Brazil' (Ação Educativa 2007:1). The organization believes that participation by all members of society in local, national and global processes is a prerequisite for creating a more just society, and thus it works determined to give voice to society's vulnerable groups so that they also are given the possibility to influence public policy. The organization has vast experiences in the field of youth and education rights, and by encouraging youth participation, Ação Educativa aims at supporting young people to become agents for development and change both in their own lives and in their local community.

Moreover, Ação Educativa cooperates with a considerable amount of partners who also work with defense and promotion of youth and educational rights, and the organization plays an important role in connecting different social actors such as social movements, researchers, policy makers, public institutions etc. (Ação Educativa 2007).

Ação Educativa maintains a partner relationship with several public secondary schools in the East zone in the city of São Paulo, and this cooperation has resulted in several projects with the overall aim of promoting youth to active participation in constructing an education with quality. The projects aim at establishing a channel for dialogue between youth and educators

so that the youth are able to express their views and opinions, and qualify their demands (Acção Educativa 2007). One of these projects, ‘Jovens Agentes pelo Direito à Educação’ (JADE), in English: ‘Youth Agents for the Right to Education’, is the focal point of this study, and is described in detail below. From now on I will use the abbreviation JADE to refer to the project.

The project: ‘Jovens Agentes pelo Direito à Educação’ (JADE)

Background and purpose of the JADE project

The JADE project was started up and realized by Acção Educativa in 2007³. The background for developing the initiative was an alarming decline in the quality of education in Brazilian secondary schools. Acção Educativa saw the need to draw attention to the state of the secondary schools. By mobilizing all stakeholders in education to participate in a debate about education quality they hoped to add focus to the problem and stimulate change.

In the project proposal it is stated that ‘the general objective of the JADE project is to create guidelines for public secondary education in São Paulo’. The document further explains the specific objectives of the JADE project:

1. Develop and implement an experimental educational program for youth to become education agents.
2. Create guidelines for public secondary education, in particular guidelines which can demonstrate new paths for the curriculum in the five secondary schools which participate in the project⁴.
3. Disseminate the experiences from the experimental educational program for the youth agents.

³ I use the past tense when I refer to the project. At the time of my fieldwork it was not clear whether the project would continue or not, and the first stage, and possibly last, of the project was finished. I will return to this topic in chapter 6 in which I will explain the reason for the project’s uncertain future and discuss the implications of this.

⁴ This goal is translated directly from the research proposal of the JADE project. It was not quite clear to me what this objective in fact signified, but I was hoping to find out during the course of the fieldwork.

Concerning the general objective of the JADE project it is not clear from the project proposal how the organization plans to use the guidelines to improve the quality of education. However, by the way the objective is phrased, I interpret that the ultimate goal is in fact to make an attempt at changing the education policies.

The intention of the project was to let the stakeholders in education on the grass-roots level give their opinion and viewpoints on education and what quality in education means to them. In other words, the project wanted to give voice to the people that are rarely being heard when education policies are being discussed and formed. The recommendations were to be formed and elaborated on the background of the dialogues among stakeholders in education. All members of the school society were encouraged to participate in the discussion about secondary education. Through dialogue among students and their families, teachers, school leaders, administration staff and other school staff, local government officials, the civil society and other member of the local community, knowledge about how secondary school can be improved were to be generated. Five secondary schools in the East zone of São Paulo city, one of the poorest regions of the city, were selected to participate in the project.

The youth agents and the educational course

Acção Educativa chose to involve and work together with local youth throughout the entire project. Youth were central in all phases of the project, from the planning and realization of the project, to analysis of data. Meetings with teachers at the cooperating schools, creating and conducting a quantitative survey, and carrying out group dialogues were also among the activities the youth engaged in. 25 youth from the communities in which the five secondary schools are situated were selected by Acção Educativa and the teachers at the respective schools to participate in the JADE project. Some youth quit during the course of the project, but 15–20 youth stayed in the project throughout the entire project period.

Acção Educativa wanted to work with youth with different ‘profiles’, for instance was it particularly important that the youth had different relations to the school and the local community. This was due to the belief that youth with different backgrounds and relation to school would contribute to fruitful exchange of opinions and views. Former students, present day students and youth from the community were chosen to participate in the JADE project. Most of the youth were former students of these schools, and either in college or university or working at the time of the conduction of the project. Some were students in the final year

of secondary school, and a small minority was in second grade of secondary school. The youth were called ‘jovens agentes’, or youth agents, and will from now on be referred to by this name. Prior to the planning and realization of the project, the youth agents underwent a four month long educational course created and carried out by staff at Ação Educativa. In this course the youth agents learnt about the history of education in Brazil, the education system, education rights and other relevant topics in the field of education, with particular focus on secondary education. Special attention was given to secondary school’s challenge of offering an education that corresponds with the learning needs and demands of the youth. This knowledge was supposed to make the youth agents capable of creating their own opinions about the public school and the education policies, and enable them to mobilize other youth to contemplate the education they receive and engage in the educational debate.

The quantitative survey and the group dialogues

After the education program was finished, the first part of the project was carried out. This was a quantitative survey that was conducted among 880 students at the five secondary schools involved in JADE. The main objective of the survey was to get to know the students better, learn about their opinions about the school, and what role they consider secondary education to play in their future plans.

The second part of the project involved group dialogues among all stakeholders in education. In total seven groups were organized. Five groups consisted of students only, one at each of the five secondary schools. The last two groups included a mix of teachers, students, parents, local government officials, school leaders, administration staff and other school staff. In total 177 people were involved in the group dialogues, among them 112 students, 17 family members, 27 teachers, in addition to other staff at the school and people from the school administration. Each group dialogue was carried out in one day.

The main objective of the group dialogues was to create a debate about secondary school and its content, and the main question to be answered was; what kind of secondary education do we want? The participants were divided into subgroups, and in the group dialogues involving the students the central questions to be asked was: ‘considering your future plans, what is important for you to learn in secondary school?’ And further, in the mixed groups the question was; ‘what kind of knowledge is it important that we provide the students with, considering their future plans and possibilities?’ To guide the participants through the

dialogue, Ação Educativa and the youth agents had developed a workbook with the title: ‘What kind of secondary education do we want?’. The workbook listed three possible ‘roads’ that could serve as the main purposes of secondary education: secondary school should prepare the students for (1) higher education, (2) work or (3) citizenship. Information about the three ‘roads’, and positive and negative aspects of them were included in the workbook. The group dialogue day also included information about education laws and rights.

The youth agents carried out the quantitative survey and the group dialogues with the assistance of Ação Educativa staff. All knowledge and information generated from these two research actions were gathered and analyzed, and put down in a report written by one of the staff at Ação Educativa. The youth agents were also involved in this analysis. Moreover, a group of education specialists and public officials, including the representative for Maria Helena Guimarães, the Education Secretary for São Paulo, was gathered in order to elaborate recommendations for public secondary education based on the results from the survey and the group dialogues.

1.6 Chapter summary

The secondary education system in Brazil has experienced a substantial expansion since the 1990s. The quality suffers to a great extent which high drop out and repetition rates, as well as poor test results, demonstrate. Secondary education is neglected in the Brazilian education debate, and Ação Educativa has started an initiative to raise the debate on secondary education in Brazil and focus on how quality in secondary education can be improved. Furthermore, the private education system is strong in Brazil, and it appears that these students perform better in school than the students in public school. This affects the opportunities for higher education for the students, as students from private schools are better prepared to pass vestibular and enter university. How substantial is this problem in the Brazilian society today? It is hoped that the analysis will provide insight to this topic.

However, what does quality in education in fact entail, and is it possible to define the concept ‘education quality’ at all? Can dialogue and youth participation serve as methods to achieve quality in education? The next chapter offers a theoretical framework for giving

answers to these questions. The thoughts and ideas of Paulo Freire are central both in the discussion on quality in education, and for understanding the role of dialogue and participation in achieving quality in education, and are presented in the next chapter.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the theoretical aspects of the concepts used in this thesis. The first part of the chapter explores the concept ‘education quality’, and investigates whether it is possible to reach a universal definition of the concept or not. Further, Freire’s theories on dialogue and participation in education for liberation serve as an important framework for understanding and interpreting the JADE project, and are presented in the last part of the chapter. The chapter also reviews literature on the topic ‘youth participation in educational projects’.

2.2 Quality in education

I begin this chapter by exploring the concept of education. I look briefly at various views on the purpose of education and define the concept ‘education’. Further, I introduce the topic ‘education quality’ by looking briefly at the origin of the concept in the educational discourse. The discussion on how quality in education can be defined follows subsequently, and questions whether it is possible to reach a universal definition of the concept at all. Substantial attention is also given to the possibilities of decentralization and democracy in education in facilitating improved quality in education.

2.2.1 The purpose of education

Education is a human right. The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26 states that all people have the right to education:

‘Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit’ (UN 1948).

The Universal Declaration was adopted by the General Assembly on the 10th of December 1948 by 48 countries, Brazil being one of them. As stated in the first chapter is basic education free and compulsory in Brazil. However, while higher education is in theory equally accessible to all, it might seem that the poor quality in public schools hinder the students in attaining grades that are comparable to those of the students who attend private school. The conditions in which the students compete appear to be unjust, and to a large extent out of the students' control. I will pursue this topic in the analysis and conclusion of this thesis.

Furthermore, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Article 28, which protects the rights and dignity of children in developed and developing nations, also states the right to education. Article 29 in the same convention declares the aims for basic education (UN 1948, UNICEF 1989).

Brazil ratified the CRC on the 24th of October 1990. Altogether 191 nations have signed the CRC, and this can be seen as one of the most significant steps towards an equitable youth policy (Cammarota et al 2006).

Further, having established that education is above all a human right, global views on the purpose and role of education are diverse. Nagel (2003) argues that education is recognized as one of the main vehicles for facilitating development in poor countries. However, education's role in poverty reduction appears to be an object of debate. Johannessen (2006) has noticed another global view on education which questions the effect of education in terms of reducing poverty all the time the more fundamental causes of poverty are not dealt with.

Moreover, education is seen as an instrument for promoting democratic values and ideas. By enlightening a population, democratic rule can be encouraged (Nagel 2003).

2.2.2 Defining education

The concept of education can be defined in several ways. I have chosen the English educational philosopher R. S. Peters' (1973) definition. Peters has developed four criterions that must be fulfilled in order for something to be called education. Firstly, Peters states that education is inseparable from the judgment of value. The concept 'education' entails that

‘what is learnt must be considered as worth-while... for not all learning is ‘educational’ in relation to the content of what is learnt’ (Peters 1973:4). Peters hereby introduces the moral requirements of education when he argues that ‘something valuable’ can only be considered education when it is morally unobjectionable (Peters 1973). Peters points out that the connection between ‘education’ and what is valuable can be made without commitment to content, and that it is a *further question* to determine what is valuable and on which grounds these decisions regarding what is to be considered valuable are made. Peters states that ‘we need not think that what is going on is worth-while, but members of the society, whose [educational] system it is, must think it is’ (Peters 1973:5). This indicates that Peters thinks it is the task of the members of the society to decide what is to be regarded as ‘valuable’ in an educational context. However, one might ask in this connection: which members of society should define what is ‘worth-while’? And according to which criteria should the ‘decisions’ on what is to be considered valuable be made? As far as I am able to tell, Peters does not give answers to these questions. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the emphasis given to the members of society’s perception of ‘what is going on’ as valuable, could indicate that Peters advocates for each society’s right to define ‘education quality’.

In the second criteria, Peters argues that to be educated entails more than merely possessing knowledge. Education requires that the knowledge acquired must affect the person’s way of understanding the world. ‘Education’ implies that a man’s outlook is transformed by what he knows’ (Peters 1973:7). In other words, education involves cognitive progress, and development of the ability to make use of knowledge to interpret reality. Thirdly, Peters points out that all elements involving coercion should be ruled out as education should always be entirely voluntary, and in this manner highlights another moral aspect of education. ‘What is considered worth-while’ should be transmitted in a morally harmless manner, for instance would discouragement of individual choice or giving orders be considered immoral? The fourth criterion states that the learners shall at all time be aware of what is going. This criterion is included in order to indicate the distinction between education and indoctrination (Peters 1973).

Narrowed down, Peters’ definition of education appears to include two main factors; (1) the learning process (cognitive development that transforms the learner’s understanding of reality should take place in a morally agreeable manner in which the learner at all time is

aware of what is going on) and (2) content (what is learnt should be considered worth-while by the member of the society whose educational system it is).

The discussion on what constitutes quality in education follows shortly. However, before we discuss ‘education quality’ a look at the concept ‘quality’ is essential.

2.2.3 The concept of quality

In everyday life we use the concept of quality to judge whether something, a person, an object, a process etc, is “good” or “bad” according to certain standards, i.e. it says something about a degree or grade of excellence or worth (Wehmeier 2000). Historically speaking, Peters (1973) argues that the word *quality*, or *qualitas*, is a translation from the Greek word ποιότης. This word was used by Plato and Aristotle to describe a thing’s distinctiveness. What distinguishes a thing from other things? When answering this question we are left with the thing’s *essence* (Peters 1973). When transferred to this topic, what does quality mean in an educational context? How can we capture the *essence of education* in order to determine whether or not the education is one of quality? I introduce the topic ‘education quality’ by placing the concept in a historical context.

2.2.4 A historical introduction to ‘education quality’

The issue of quality in international education is not a new phenomenon, and quality has fought alongside quantity for attention in the educational debate for decades. As early as the 1960s, the International Institution for Educational Planning (IIEP) raised awareness on the matter. IIEP arranged a conference on quality and standards in educational planning, and in connection with the conference the publication ‘Qualitative Aspects of Educational Planning’ was issued. In this publication, IIEP’s attempt to clarify what is meant by education quality generated two different ways of viewing quality. One way entailed to view quality from within the educational system, and assess the quality relative to the institution’s own criteria. The other way involved to consider the quality of the institution on the basis of external criteria, such as relevance to the needs of society (Coombs 1968). Further, the question if educational standards should be universal, and exportation of industrialized countries’ educational standards to developing countries encouraged, brought about a collectively no; ‘educational standards-if they are to make any sense and serve any useful

purpose-must be viewed as being relative to the particular purpose, place and time of the student clientele' (Coombs 1968:106). To judge quality and standards of an educational system on any other basis than the nation's own, was emphasized as pointless in terms of facilitating a nation's development (Coombs 1968). Without contemplating this issue further is it worth-while to notice that IIEP, in regard to what purpose education is supposed to serve, appears to represent a view on education as means to facilitate development.

In 'Qualitative Aspects of Educational Planning', the IIEP Director at the time, Philip H. Coombs, proposed a definition of the concept 'education quality'. He advocated for a dynamic conception of the term:

'[Quality education is] a living, moving thing, whose goodness resides not only in its excellence relative to certain 'standards' but in its *relevance* and *fitness* to the changing needs of the particular students and society it is intended to serve' (Coombs 1969:18).

In relation to Peters' first criterion, Coombs seems to consider it the task of both students and society to decide what is 'worth-while'.

However, as the following discussion demonstrates there are several ways of defining quality in education.

2.2.5 Defining quality in education

The concept 'education quality' is complex and multifaceted. Many attempts have been made at defining the concept but there is generally little agreement about the meanings and implications of the concept (Leu 2005).

Furthermore, all stakeholders in education, students, teachers, advisors, school leaders, parents and politicians etc, are likely to have different opinions of what constitutes quality in education (UNICEF 2000). The notion of quality in education as a concept all stakeholders have the right to state their opinions about and be heard, could serve as an argument for facilitating and promoting dialogue in the educational debate. It is this idea Ação Educativa is defending and promoting by initiating the JADE project.

When discussing quality in education, indicators quality, such as test results, drop out rates and repetition rates, are often mistakenly referred to as quality (Nagel 2003). In the same

manner are also factors that are believed to produce quality, such as well-prepared teachers, school buildings, textbooks, didactic material etc, confused as being ‘education quality’ (Johannessen 2006). In an analysis of the discourse on quality in education carried out for Save the Children Norway, Johannessen (2006:33) argues that such factors are important, but that they do not produce quality per se. ‘The exact influence of the inputs is difficult to measure and research findings do not provide clear messages regarding which factors are most important’. Moreover, often the concept ‘education quality’ is not defined in documents and papers addressing the subject at all (Johannessen 2006). This demonstrates the necessity of establishing what we mean by education quality. By ways of limiting the scope of this discussion, I will concentrate on the attempt to define the concept ‘education quality’ without paying particular attention to factors that are believed to produce quality in education.

2.2.6 The essence of education

To name all the factors that constitute the phenomena and claim that they must all be good is one common way of defining the concept (Nagel 2003). ‘Defining quality in education’, a document published by UNICEF after the second EFA conference in 2000, divides the concept of quality into five elements: content, processes, environment, learner and outcome. The argument is that quality in content, processes, environments and learners contributes to achieving quality outcomes and hence education quality (UNICEF 2000). Definitions of this type appear to be problematic. For instance, in relation to the learner, ‘Defining quality in education’ states that by nature some humans grasp and understand things quicker than others, but also external factors play an impact on how well pupils learn. The student’s health, early childhood experiences and home support are elements that promote or restrain learning in the student (UNICEF 2000). Does this mean that a disabled child or a child with little support from the home, i.e. a child that is not a ‘quality learner’, will not be able to fully experience quality in education?

Nagel (2003) also points to several negative sides to such definitions, and warns particularly against two disadvantageous circumstances that may occur as a result of fragmenting the concept into elements. Firstly, as the professional becomes centered on the system, the system surpasses the person in importance, viewing the latter merely as objects. Even though not intentional, the fact that the educational system consists of live human beings is

forgotten. Secondly, by taking the whole and divide it into different components, studying each part separately and independently from the other parts, the phenomenon loses its character, its essence. This argument appears to capture one key in the attempt to define 'education quality'.

'Quality is more than the sum of different parts; it is something more than the sum of certain attributes.... To gain insight into quality we have to investigate what the essence of education is, what it OUGHT to be and what we want it to achieve' (Nagel 2003:5).

In other words, to contemplate the essence of education, its aims and purposes, is a prerequisite for being able to assess the quality. Only when achieving deeper insight into the core objectives for every unique education system is it possible to know how to operate in order to achieve the desired goals (Nagel 2003).

In regard to difference between purpose and aim of education, it is worth noting that Dewey views 'purpose' and 'aim' in education as being equivalents. Peters (1973) argues that even though the two concepts are connected, and both contain elements of action and activities, there are slight differences between them in the way they are connected. Peters clarifies the concept 'aims in education' by stating that aims generate more specific answers than purpose would do. Moreover, 'aims' suggest the direction of efforts towards an objective that is not too close at hand, and also the possibility of failure (Peters 1973). Peters employs the term 'aim' in his exploration of the concept education and quality in education, and so do I.

2.2.7 The aims of education

Learning at the core of each education system

It appears to be general agreement on the main aim of education; learning or cognitive development should take place in the learner. The EFA Global Monitoring Report from 2005, 'The Quality Imperative', does not advocate one particular definition of education quality, but states that most definitions include two principles. The first principle sets cognitive development as the ultimate goal for education. In other words, learning is at the core of education, which is in correspondence with Peters' (1973) second criterion in the definition of education. Further, the second principle most definitions of education quality

appear to include is the role of education in ‘promoting values and attitudes of responsible citizenship and in nurturing creative and emotional development’ (UNESCO 2004a:6). This principle refers to content and outcome of education.

Nagel (2003) argues that if learning is at the core of education, the learning process, the meeting between teacher and student, is where quality is created. At the International Conference on Quality in Education that took place in Oslo in 2003 Nagel launched a definition of ‘education quality’:

‘Quality education is a learning situation which vibrates with positive energy and where the learner and the learned both are eagerly absorbed in understanding and communicating through a knowledge construction process. The emphasis lies with the learner’ (Nagel 2003:13).

This definition emphasizes the importance of the teaching-learning process in order to understand education quality. If learning is at the core of education then the learning process, the meeting between teacher and student, need to be in centre. This view supports the importance of the role of the teacher in the process towards achieving quality education. Teachers are recognised as a key to solve the quality issue and to focus on the teaching profession in the attempt to restore and improve quality in education is crucial (Leu 2005, UNESCO 2004a).

However, Nagel’s definition focuses solely on the learning process itself, and disregards *what* students should learn. Peters (1973) has established that not all learning is educational; hence I ask; should not a definition of quality education include some reference to content or ‘something that is worth-while’, as well? Moreover, in this definition, quality appears to occur only in moments when the learning situation ‘vibrates with positive energy’. Is a definition of quality which only embraces the learning process reasonable and hence narrows down the definition of quality in education to include solely specific moments in the learning process? Can quality in education not also be present when the classroom does not ‘vibrate with positive energy’? Would it be more reasonable to employ a wider perception on education quality? Johannessen (2006) also questions the definition by pointing at the challenge of identifying a learning situation which ‘vibrates with positive energy’, and consequently it is difficult to determine whether the education is characterized by quality or not.

Learning as an exchange of knowledge

The Brazilian educator Paulo Freire is celebrated around the world for his contributions to the field of education. Some of his most central theories of education, presented in the works *'Education for Critical Consciousness'* and *'Pedagogy of the Oppressed'*, serve as important sources for understanding and analyzing the JADE project.

Paulo Freire was concerned with the learning process and the meeting between student and teacher. However, Freire's emphasis on the learning process does not imply that he defined quality solely in these terms. Nevertheless, having established that learning is at the core of education, I will bring forth Freire's thoughts and ideas on the learning process. Freire advocated for dialogue, and a more equal relationship, between students and teachers. By claiming that in the same manner as students learn from teachers, can teachers learn from students, Freire introduced the idea of education as an exchange of knowledge between two equal parts. The term 'teacher-student' and 'student-teacher' are introduced in order to underline this idea. Both parts become responsible for a process in which human growth is achieved. Through active dialogue, students can become conscious of their own experiences and develop an ability to reflect upon their own lives (Freire 1996).

This view on education was developed through an analysis of the relationship between teacher and student, from which Freire disclosed the teacher as the narrating subject and the students as the listening objects. The teacher 'fills' the students with content irrelevant to the students because the knowledge that is being conveyed do not carry meaning. The knowledge is fragmented, detached from reality (Freire 1996). The students become passive recipients of what the teachers pass on and in this manner, Freire argues, are the students turned into 'containers' which are 'filled' by the teacher. The volume of the containers becomes measures for how successful the teacher is and how good the students are, and this is what Freire refers to as the 'banking' concept of education. Being preoccupied with the depositing, the students do not develop critical consciousness, and do therefore passively accept their role in society (Freire 1996).

This observation of what cannot be called education can be said to be comparable to that of Peters' (1973) second criterion, in which a clear distinction between education and merely possessing knowledge is made. For something to pass as education, the knowledge conveyed should transform the way the learners interpret the world, and clearly; an education system

which promotes, being it intentionally or unintentionally, a banking-system cannot be considered to offer education. Freire presented these theories in the late 1960s⁵; however, is this form of ‘education’ still exercised in Brazilian classrooms? I will not elaborate further on this topic as the objective of this thesis is not to investigate the teaching taking place in Brazilian classrooms. However, if the teaching-learning in the schools a still problem I assume that the youth will shed light on this topic in their perceptions of quality in education.

Conscientization is the aim of education

Having established that learning is at the core of education, the subsequent question to ask is: what should the students learn? Peters (1973) states that a definition of education needs reference to content in terms of deciding what is to be considered ‘worth-while’ knowledge. As already pointed out, it is crucial in this connection to debate who should consider what is ‘worth-while’. By asking the students what they want and expect from secondary school, Ação Educativa provides the students with an opportunity to state their opinions of what should be taught in school. How and to which extent the students’ opinions are truly given voice for instance in terms of influencing educational policies will be examined and discussed in the analysis of this thesis.

Freire’s view of the content in education was that it should facilitate for *conscientização*, or *conscientization*, and in his opinion was to reach conscientization the aim of education. Freire explains the term conscientization as meaning to teach individuals to perceive social, political and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality (Freire 1996). The term will be more thoroughly described under section 2.4.1. However, quite briefly the term entails that every individual should have the ability to reflect upon, and evaluate, its own life and position in society. Education should entail the acquisition of knowledge through a pedagogy aiming at stimulating critical thinking among the participants. Only in this manner can individuals become active participants of the society to which they belong. This is the only way they can advocate for development and change in important matters regarding their life (Freire 1996). To reach conscientization is

⁵ Freire’s ‘Pedagogy of the Oppressed’ was published in Portuguese in 1968 and in English in 1970.

the aim of education, and the aim can be reached by acquiring knowledge, the instrument of struggle (Ocadiz et al. 1998).

2.2.8 Arriving at a definition of quality in education?

Learning is at the main aim of education. However, what should be considered worth-while knowledge, and in which manners the teaching and learning should take place, are open to variations. Equally important when discussing content of education and classroom characteristics is to contemplate which members of society should participate in this debate. Is it then possible to reach a universal definition of education? Johannessen (2006) asserts the improbability of arriving at a universal definition of education quality. The Academy for Educational Development (AED) also reached this conclusion in their literature review on current trends in the education discourse (Leu 2005). Johannessen (2006) also discusses the pointlessness in striving to find a universal definition of the concept and concludes that to achieve quality in education, learner characteristics, the teaching-learning process, outcomes of learning has to be taken into account, and variations in classroom profiles should be accepted. The cultural, political and social context in which education takes place must also be considered when defining and assessing the quality of education (Johannessen 2006).

Learning is the core of all educational systems. However, to consider the aims and purposes of each, unique education system is a prerequisite for defining and assessing the quality of education. This task should be left to the stakeholders in the respective education systems. In this connection it is worth-while to pay attention to factors that prevent each education system to define quality on their own terms. Evidently, researchers and theorists that attempt at reaching a universal definition of 'education quality' can hinder each education system to define quality in their own terms. Furthermore, Brock-Utne (2000) argues that developing countries in some cases receive aid with conditions, forcing these countries to use school material that is written, printed and published in foreign countries. Moreover, Breidlid (2004) has noticed how the new South African Curriculum 2005 to a large extent neglects indigenous knowledge systems but rather favors a modernist knowledge discourse, possibly due to fear of being left out of the process of globalization. Breidlid, who has researched among the Xhosa, points to the deep-rooted spirituality in indigenous cultures and knowledge system, and draws particular attention to the connection between indigenous knowledge system and sustainable development. A negligence of indigenous knowledge in

the national curriculum might lead to severe consequences for the Xhosa people, their culture, and the environment (Breidlid 2004).

Johannessen (2006) encourages research concerning quality in education to look at different approaches for reaching quality in education, and claims that particular attention should be given to context specifics. This argument advocates decentralization and participation by grass root stakeholders in order to define education quality.

2.2.9 Decentralization, democracy and dialouge in education

AED has noticed that a trend of increased decentralization of authority and responsibility to local levels has taken place during the past ten years. Moreover, decentralization is related to another trend, namely democratization and strengthening of civil society.

In education, decentralization has had a significant impact by empowering communities to take increased responsibility for schools and empowering teachers and school leaders to take greater control of their practice and responsibility for their professional development (Leu 2005:2).

AED emphasizes the importance of allowing quality to be locally defined, at the school and community levels, and not only at the district and national levels.

Ginsburg and Gorostiaga (2003) also favor decentralization in education when they claim that dialogue and participation by a wide range of stakeholders in education will contribute to better and more relevant educational research. 'Dialogue is not necessarily more efficient, but it is more democratic and, therefore, more effective' (Ginsburg and Gorostiaga 2003:IX). The authors recognize that a communication gap between theorists and researchers on one side and policy makers and practitioners on the other side appears to exist in the field of education. If not all groups of stakeholders are involved in educational planning, decision making and execution, the quality of the judgment may be lower and the activities of one group may negate those of other groups (Ginsburg and Gorostiaga 2003).

Stakeholders in education excluded from the educational discourse

It appears that a communication gap in some cases also exists between practitioners and other stakeholders in education. Fossum and Kubow (2003) claim that the voices of the teachers tend to be devalued to the periphery of the educational discourse for various

reasons, and researchers and policy makers currently constitute an elite that occupies the field's core terrain. The teachers have become alienated from the educational debate due to the way knowledge has come to be valued through the development of the field of comparative education, and also because of the way the term 'policy' is constructed (Fossum and Kubow 2003).

Furthermore, it appears that also community members are abandoned from the educational discourse. Wishart and DeStefano argue that time has come to include 'the marginalized and silent', the community stakeholders, in the educational debate (Wishart and DeStefano 2003:127). Youth are one of the community stakeholders in education, and Checkoway and Richards-Schuster (2006) point out that despite the fact that youth are directly affected by educational policies, they are seldom invited to engage in educational issues, but are on the contrary often displaced from the process. This point is also recognized by Ansell, who observes that although parents, and to a much lesser extent students, exert some influence on education, it has 'remained the preserve of state policy to a greater extent than many other areas of children's lives' (Ansell 2005:148).

According to Ginsburg and Gorostiaga is community members' participation in educational activities to a great extent dependent upon 'whether one subscribes to a public or privatized conception of democracy' (Ginsburg and Gorostiaga 2003: 11). David Sehr claims that in the public notion of democracy, the common people are 'the only ones who [can] guarantee that the government would not be corrupted because they do not have privileged positions to preserve, and thus the active involvement of community members in governing is essential (cited in Ginsburg and Gorostiaga 2003:11). A private conception of democracy, on the other hand, implies a less active role for citizens and is, according to Sehr, grounded in the belief that people are not able to govern themselves, 'without threatening established property relations' (cited in Ginsburg and Gorostiaga 2003:11). Participation of community members in educational policy-making is less likely to be encouraged in a privatized than in a public conception of democracy. Only discussing educational policy would be more difficult in a society with a privatized conception of democracy, hence allowing community members to influence educational policy decisions would be even more improbable (Ginsburg and Gorostiaga 2003).

2.2.10 Education quality summarized

The discussion on how ‘education quality’ can be defined has shown the difficulties in reaching a universal definition of the concept. Each educational system is unique, and the aims and purposes of each system will vary. In order to establish and assess quality in education, the aims of each education system must be defined first. Learner characteristics, the teaching-learning process, outcomes of learning and the context are all factors that have to be taken into account when defining quality in education, and variations in these factors should be appreciated and accepted. Moreover, decentralization and participation of stakeholders on the grass roots level appear to be new trends in the educational discourse, and it is hoped that these tendencies can let stakeholders on local and municipal levels of education participate in the process towards defining quality in education for the respective educational systems. In this process are dialogue and participation central methods. Youth constitute one of the groups that should be included in the educational debate. As already stated are youth apparently excluded from educational planning and decision-making to a large extent. The next section demonstrates that the attempt to gather and examine previous experiences from youth participation in the educational debate generated few relevant sources, indicating that this topic might be neglected among researchers.

2.3 Youth participation in educational projects

There seems to be very little literature on youth participation in educational issues available. I used the Norwegian library system, BIBSYS, and ERIC to search for literature in various libraries around the country. The results were poor, something that can indicate that not enough attention is given to this subject. Also, literature from Brazil on youth participation was often only available in Portuguese and not in English. Even though I have developed skills in Portuguese, it became too demanding and time-consuming to acquire information about this topic in Portuguese. Moreover, lack of relevant literature demonstrates that this thesis is opening up an important research field, and I anticipate that it can contribute with valuable information on the subject. However, before present literature on youth participation in educational projects I want to define the concept of ‘youth’.

2.3.1 Definition of youth

There is no universal definition of 'youth'. The concept of youth can be hard to define as there are various factors that can be emphasized when making a definition. Some authors consider youth as a stage characterized by factors of a biological nature, others emphasize psychological aspects. 'Youth' can also be defined according to legal and institutional criteria, stating the rights and duties of young people, yet others consider factors of social responsibility of the individual (Gómez de Souza and Ribeiro 1976). Hence the concept is hard, almost impossible to define.

The United Nations (UN) defines 'youth' as people between the age of 15 and 24. In other words they have chosen to define the concept of youth according to age only. Despite the fact that I think the definition is somewhat narrow, I have chosen to employ this definition to this thesis. Within the category of 'youth' the UN definition distinguishes between teenagers (13-19) and young adults (20-24) due to variations in the sociological, psychological and health problems these groups may face (UNESCO 2004b).

2.3.1 Youth participation for educational reform in low-income communities of color

Checkoway and Richards-Schuster (2006) provides strong arguments why young people should participate in educational reform. In the publication *Beyond Resistance! Youth Activism and Community Change (2006)*, 'Youth Participation for Educational Reform in Low-Income Communities of Color', the authors call for more systematic research on youth participation in educational reform. Checkoway and Richards-Schuster point out that the literature available on this specific topic is scarce, and argue that 'more knowledge of youth participation as a subject of study will contribute to its quality as a field of practice' (Checkoway and Richards-Schuster 2006:320). In addition to reviews on the limited literature, their chapter is based on experiences from Lifting New Voices, an American demonstration project to increase participation in organizational development and community change.

Checkoway and Richards-Schuster define youth participation as 'a process of involving young people in the educational policy, planning, and program institutions and decisions that affect their lives' (Checkoway and Richards-Schuster 2006:320). Young people have

everyday experience from the school reality, and if taken seriously, these experiences can prove to be valuable sources for new ideas and ways of thinking within educational policy planning and making (Checkoway and Richards-Schuster 2006). Further, in particular youth in low-income communities of color should have a special stake in educational reform due to the fact that they often experience ‘disproportionate under-education and have potential to create a new constituency for change – if their voices are heard’ (Checkoway and Richards-Schuster 2006:319). Moreover, by participating in educational issues, youth are trained in exercising their political rights, and they become experienced with active participation in a democratic society. Roger Hart (1997) also argues strongly for the importance of giving children and youth the possibility of participating in issues that affect them in their everyday life. Hart claims that ‘only through direct participation can children develop a genuine appreciation of democracy and a sense of their own competence and responsibility to participate’ (Hart 1997:3). Hart (1997) has developed a ladder of participation, a theoretical framework for use in children’s participation. Although his book mainly concerns participation of children up to the age of fourteen, the author points out that he has found many valuable ideas from work with older teenagers, and he recommends that his ideas and theories are employed to work with youth as well.

2.3.2 Hart’s ladder of participation

The ladder’s various steps demonstrate degrees of participation, and they also show what participation is *not*. The first three steps of the ladder are unacceptable to consider as real participation, and a crucial principle of the ladder is to avoid working on these rungs. These steps include manipulation, decoration and tokenism. Manipulation refers to those situations in which adults use children’s voice to get their own message through. By decoration Hart refers to the action of simply using children for decoration without including them in the planning and realization of the event. Tokenism is difficult to deal with, Hart argues, because it is often put through by adults with a desire to give children a voice, but who have not contemplated well enough what child participation in fact *is*, and they have not been self-critical in the process. The result is the design of a project in which the children apparently have a voice, but in fact they have had little time to formulate an opinion and/or influence choice of topic (Hart 1997).

The last five steps of the ladder are models of genuine participation and Hart refers to these as: (4) assigned but informed ('social mobilization'), (5) consulted and informed, (6) adult-initiated, shared decisions with children, (7) child-initiated and directed and (8) child-initiated, shared decisions with adults. I will only discuss the sixth step of the ladder as the JADE project falls into this category. Hart argues that participation on this step of the ladder is important and that this type of participation should be promoted in order to challenge the most politically powerful age groups (those over 25 years of age), who dominate decision making:

'The goal should be to involve all persons, but, given the natural tendency to exclude certain groups, adult-initiated projects should pay particular attention to involving the young, the elderly and those who might be excluded because of a particular personal characteristic or disability. This is an important level of involvement on the ladder, for, if adults cannot foster a sense of competence and the confidence to participate at this level, the upper rungs of the ladder are unlikely to be reached' (Hart 1997:43).

However, it appears that a shift in the way young people are perceived by society is a prerequisite for encouraging participation on the sixth step of the ladder. Checkoway and Richards-Schuster (2006) point out that far too often youth receive the label of being, and meaning, 'trouble', and that this notion excludes youth from educational planning and policy-making. It is argued that if given the chance, young people are *willing* and *able* to participate. It is society's responsibility to start viewing youth as competent citizens, and give them the opportunity to contribute in changing policies that directly affect them in their everyday lives. If society lets them, young people can 'create a powerful new constituency for educational reform' (Checkoway and Richards-Schuster 2006:319).

Furthermore, also Paulo Freire favored participation and dialogue among all stakeholders in education. Freire's educational theories serve as an important framework for understanding and interpreting the JADE project, and are presented in this final section of the chapter.

2.4 Paulo Freire and education for critical consciousness

Paulo Freire grew up witnessing the impact of unjust societal structures on the Brazilian people. His theories and ideas on education as an instrument for liberation and critical consciousness are rooted in these experiences. I acknowledge that Freire's theories emerged

out of experience with adult informal education. However, I do not find Freire's theories limited to only this aspect of education and society. Rather I argue that the JADE project demonstrates that Freire's theories are applicable to youth in formal education as well. I will display this in the chapters that reveal the main findings of the research.

2.4.1 Conscientization and the role of dialogue

Fundamental to Freire's theories about the oppressed in society and how they can fight against the oppressors to achieve justice, is the idea of developing conscientization. As already stated is it implied in the term to 'learn to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against oppressive elements of reality' (Freire 1996:17). Conscientization makes it possible for people to enter the historical process (the process of liberation) as *Subject* in the world; a person who acts. A person that is Subject in the world is integrated with his or her context (Freire 1974). A man⁶ that is integrated with his own context possesses the capacity to adapt to reality plus the capacity to make choices and to transform reality. Put in other words, a person that is Subject in his own life has the strength and capability to take a stand against unjust structures in society and to act in order to end the injustice. To put an end to oppression in society requires people that have reached conscientization and have become Subjects in the world. On the contrary, a person that is not integrated does not make his own choices, but is rather subject to the decisions of others. A man incapable of changing his reality adjusts himself instead, and accepts reality the way it is. A person that has adjusted, or adapted, to society is only *object* in his own life (Freire 1974).

The task of the oppressed is to fight against the oppressors, and this can only be done through praxis. Praxis implies two elements: reflection and action. Through praxis, the oppressed can transform reality (Freire 1996). However, in order to reach a position so that praxis can be carried out, the oppressed need to truly understand their situation. The oppressed themselves need to become aware of the oppression, and the fact that it restrains them. Moreover, they need to discover that their unfortunate situation can be changed (Freire 1996). To become aware of their situation and wanting to take action in order to transform

⁶ I recognize that Freire's language can be considered sexist as he only used a vocabulary that addressed men.

reality requires true reflection. However, it is crucial that this reflection does not remain a mere intellectual notion, but that it is followed by action. Reflection without action is reduced to verbalism. Likewise, action must be accompanied by serious reflection in order to avoid pure activism (actions for action's sake). When reflection and action operate together it becomes a praxis (Freire 1996). Dialogue plays a central role in Freire's theories, and when analyzing Freire's view on dialogue one discovers that dialogue in fact equals praxis. According to Freire, the essence of dialogue is the word. Furthermore, Freire claims that the word consists of two dimensions: action and reflection. A true word encompasses both dimensions. A word that lacks the dimension of action is reduced to verbalism. A word without reflection becomes activism. Hence, a true word equals dialogue, which equals praxis, which in turn equals the method to fight against oppression.

Freire defines dialogue as 'the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world' (Freire 1996:69). Dialogue allows the oppressed to name the world, rather than having it named for them. To name the world is to change it, and to say the true word – which is to praxis- is not the privilege of a few people but is a right that belongs to everyone. Freire clarifies that dialogue cannot occur between those who deny others the right to speak and those whose right to speak has been denied them (Freire 1996). The climate for dialogue needs to be filled with love. Without love for the people and the world, dialogue cannot take place. In fact, Freire argues that love is both the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself (Freire 1996). Another prerequisite for dialogue is humbleness. Arrogance can never promote dialogue. Furthermore, dialogue cannot exist without faith in humankind, hope and dialoguers who engage in critical thinking (Freire 1996).

'Critical and liberating dialogue, which presupposes action, must be carried on with the oppressed at whatever the stage of their struggle for liberation' (Freire 1996:47). Freire underlines the importance of ensuring that the oppressed participate in the liberation process. Only when the oppressed become involved in the organized struggle for their liberation do they begin to believe in themselves. This participation must be of the active and reflective kind. If not, the oppressed are treated as objects, and one runs the risk of turning them into masses that can be manipulated. Moreover, in order to attain praxis it is necessary to demonstrate faith in the oppressed, and their ability to reflect and think logically. Without trust between the oppressed and those involved in the fight for their liberation, the attempt to establish dialogue, reflection and communication will fail (Freire 1996). Freire maintains

that the only effective instrument to achieve liberty and end oppression is a humanist pedagogy in which dialogue with the oppressed is the central method.

2.4.2 A society's themes and tasks

During the 1950s and 1960s, Freire recognized that Brazil was a society in transition, moving from one epoch to another. In this process, the need for an education that stimulated critical consciousness in people and developed their conscientização was more crucial than ever. Freire defines an epoch as being characterized by 'a series of aspirations, concerns, and values in search of fulfillment, by ways of being and behaving; by more or less generalized attitudes' (Freire 1974:5). Further, Freire also speaks about themes and tasks belonging to one epoch: 'The concrete representations of many of these aspirations, concerns, and values, as well as the obstacles to their fulfillment, constitute the *themes* of that epoch' (Freire 1974:5). Moreover, various *tasks* are attached to the themes. The themes of the epoch need to be identified and the tasks solved, in order for the epoch to be fulfilled. When the themes and tasks no longer meet new, emerging matters, the epoch is outdated and a new epoch, with a search for new themes and tasks, starts (Freire 1974).

According to Freire was the strongest characteristic of the Brazilian society at the beginning of the transition the lack of democratic experience (Freire 1974). The themes and tasks of the society they were moving away from were those themes and tasks typical of a closed society. Freire gives an example of a theme of the closed society to illustrate his reasoning, namely that of cultural alienation. According to Freire, both the elite and the people suffered from cultural alienation and both groups 'lacked integration with Brazilian reality' (Freire 1974:8). Various tasks were attached to the theme. For the elite was the task to import foreign cultural models. Having no power or influence on their own, the task of the people was to follow and obey the elite.

This thesis does not provide a full analysis of the society in Brazil today; however, some characteristics of the society have already been identified, in particular with reference to the education sector. The Brazilian society is, as it was when Freire made his observation and launched his theories, highly unequal and the differences between rich and poor are still vast. In particular are the colored population victims of an unjust income distribution and education system. Further, in the identification of themes and tasks of the Brazilian society

today, I argue that what appears to be a failure in providing all children and youth with an equal education constitute one theme. The tasks connected to this theme is for the rich to follow private fundamental and secondary education and subsequently enter public universities, and for the poor to struggle through a poor public education system and in the continuation to a large extent be excluded from public higher education.

Further, Freire underlines that whether or not these themes are identified and acted upon depends upon the people. Freire claims that men should participate in these epochs. Simultaneously he warns against what he sees as perhaps the greatest tragedy of modern man: that the ordinary man fails to identify and perceive the tasks but leaves this assignment to the elite, and in turn the elite present 'prescriptions' to the tasks. The ordinary man accepts the prescriptions of the elite, and gradually gives up his capacity for choice and becomes evicted from decision-making. All happens without the ordinary even man realizing it, and abruptly he finds himself, 'without hope and without faith, domesticated and adjusted' (Freire 1974:6).

At times of transition it is more important than ever that people are integrated with their context. How they act upon the reality in which these themes are generated, demonstrates to a great extent whether the people are Subjects in the world or only objects. The people's actions will either affirm their status as Subjects or their decline as objects. The first step in order to intervene in reality is to identify the themes. Only when they have grasped the themes can they get involved, and cease to be merely observers of reality.

In this regard I pose the question if the JADE project, through youth participation and dialogue, can contribute to letting the community stakeholders identify themes and tasks of today's Brazilian society, in particular within the area of education?

In the time of transition, the state of what Freire calls *naïve transitivity* dominated in Brazilian urban centers. Some features that describe the state of naïve transitivity are; oversimplification of problems, underestimation of the common man, fragility of argument and practice of polemics rather than dialogue (Freire 1974). People in the state of naïve transitivity are still part of the mass, and the capacity to engage in true dialogue is not yet well developed. In this situation, it is vital that the people move forward and into the state of *critical transitivity*. The critical transitivity state is characterized by depth in the interpretation of problems, by soundness of argumentation, by practice of dialogue rather

than polemics. Freire notes that critical transitivity is characteristic of authentically democratic regimes (Freire 1974).

However, critical transitivity does not automatically follow naïve transitivity. A prerequisite for a successful transition to critical transitivity is an education that would make people capable of reflecting upon themselves and their role in society, and leave the people with an increased capacity for *choice* to act upon their situation. The danger is that naïve transitivity will lead to ‘massification’ – a situation in which the people are manipulated by the elite into a state of not thinking, and in this way representing the opposite of obtaining and possessing a critical consciousness – rather than critical transitivity (Freire 1974). As men become ‘transitive’ their ability to respond to questions arising in their context increases, so does their capability to enter into dialogue with both other men and the world. Men in a transitive state replace disengagement with total engagement. On the contrary, the adapted man does not engage in dialogue nor participate (Freire 1974).

Freire argues that ‘an active, dialogical educational program concerned with social and political responsibility, and prepared to avoid the danger of massification’ was needed in order to take the step into critical transitivity and for men to become transitive (Freire 1974:19). However, according to Freire, resistance against an educational program that would encourage critical human beings grew strong during the Brazilian transition. This type of education would constitute a major threat towards the elite and their privileges. A society starting to open up is characterized by people who want to participate and refuse to be suppressed any longer. Earlier, the elite would then accuse them of being ‘un-well’, wanting to find a ‘medicine’ to ‘cure’ the people (Freire 1974). If people received an education that encouraged their critical awareness towards the unjust structures of the society, the people would then have the ability to reject the ‘prescription’ of the elite. And in the case of Brazil, Freire explains, the elite felt threatened to such a degree that popular participation was ended by putting forth a military coup (Freire 1974).

In this connection I ask, can the JADE project facilitate the transition from naïve transitivity to critical transitivity for the grass root stakeholders in education?

The fundamental idea with a ‘critical education’ is to help people (or nations) help themselves by awakening their critical awareness. In other words, conscientization is the goal of critical education. Freire strongly advocated for an approach that did not *impose*

solutions on its people, but on the contrary found solutions *with* the people. The people should be confronted with their problems in a conscious, critical manner, and become agents of their own recovery. This principle appears to be a strong argument for involving youth in the JADE project. Something is not right with the education system in Brazil, and in the process to address the issues and raise awareness towards the problems in the education system is participation of the youth essential. The education system is *for* the students, and they are the ones that become victims of the immense inequalities between the public and private schools. According to Freire must therefore the problems connected to the education system be addressed together with the youth, only in this manner can the youth become agents of their own recovery. Moreover, it remains to be seen if the youth have become Subjects in their own lives and agents of their own recovery. The analysis will hopefully disclose this.

Moreover, having established that dialogue is important in the discourse on education quality, a look at how dialogue can be promoted and hence facilitate improvements in education is worth-while.

2.4.3 How can dialogue be promoted?

Ginsburg and Gorostiaga (2003) propose six approaches for facilitating and promoting dialogue between/among theorists/researchers, policy makers/practitioners, and other community members. The six approaches are placed within the framework of Freire's concept of dialogue, and evaluated according to which degree they are likely to contribute to genuine dialogue; joint reflection and action. The anti-thesis to joint reflection and action is one-way communication, which entails to 'deposit ideas in another', and two-way transmission of ideas which merely constitutes an exchange of ideas to be consumed by the discussants (Ginsburg and Gorostiaga 2003).

The six approaches can be used individually or in combination to enhance communication, and the degree to which these approaches contribute to closing the communication gap varies. The approaches include: (1) translation/mediation between the groups through individuals who facilitate communication of knowledge, (2) education of individuals for better communication with members of another group, (3) role expansion, implying a weakening of the boundaries between the activities of members of the groups, (4) decision-

oriented research, which aims to direct theorists and researchers toward policy and practice concerns, (5) collaborative action research, which promotes an active role of practitioners/policy makers in research process, (6) collective research and praxis, which involves joint construction of theory and research as well as policy and practice. Only the last approach, collective research and praxis, is recognized by Ginsburg and Gorostiaga to facilitate dialogue; that is to facilitate communication, reflection and action (Ginsburg and Gorostiaga 2003).

2.4.4 Concluding remarks

Paulo Freire strongly advocated for the use of dialogue as a method for fighting against the unjust structures in society. By letting the oppressed name their world, change can take place. However, in order for changes to take place the oppressed must first realize the themes and tasks of the society. Only when they have realized the themes and the tasks that are attached to these themes, can they advocate change. By advocating change, people become subjects in their own life; a person who acts. A person who has adapted and passively accepts the role in society is reduced to being object in one's life. A person that has become subject in his or her own life has moved from the state of naïve transitivity in to the state of critical transitivity, the state in which action against oppressive elements in society takes place. An active, dialogical educational program can facilitate the transition to the critical transitivity. It remains to be seen if perhaps the educational course and the JADE project can turn out to be an education that promotes conscientization in the youth agents and hence stimulate their ability to act against oppressive elements in society, in this case within the school system.

However, before the main findings of the research are revealed, the methodology exercised in the field in order to obtain data on dialogue and youth participation in education quality is presented.

3. Research methodology

3.1 Introduction

The research questions presented in chapter one have guided this enquiry, in particular in terms of deciding upon which methods to use. The objective of the thesis is to learn about the perceptions and opinions of the various participants of the JADE project. I try to understand the worldview of these participants, and the meanings and values they attribute to aspects in their life. Qualitative research is a research strategy that emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data, favoring an emphasis on the ways in which individuals interpret their social world (Bryman 2004). Consequently this is a qualitative research project.

The intention of the study is not to test any theories. That no specific theory precedes the research is often the case in qualitative research. More often theories are generated through data collection and analysis, rather than serving as a starting point for research (Bryman 2004). However, in this connection I want to emphasize that I do not seek to generate theories from this inquiry.

3.2 Research design

According to Bryman (2004:27), a research design ‘provides a framework for the collection and analysis of data’. I have employed a case study design in this research project.

According to Bryman does the basic case study entail ‘the detailed and intensive analysis of one single case’ (Bryman 2004:48). This study investigates one single project carried out by one organization. The case was chosen as a result of my contact with Operation Dayswork (OD) and the Norwegian Church Aid (NCA). I contacted OD suggesting collaboration for this thesis. Quite randomly Brazil was mentioned as an interesting country in which to study education. OD does not have projects of their own, but channel the income of their yearly action to other organizations. NCA has several partner organizations in Brazil hence OD contacted NCA on my behalf. Ação Educativa is one of NCA’s partner organizations, and

was chosen as the organization for me to cooperate since this organization dedicates a vast part of their work on education. Based on recommendations from the NCA representative, the JADE project was deemed most suitable to my topics of interest and therefore chosen as the project to research.

Semi-structured interviews constitute the main method for data collection employed for this research. Originally I had planned to use the method of observation in order to collect data as well, but as the next section demonstrates, challenges in the field forced me to change the research design slightly during the course of the fieldwork.

3.3 Fieldwork

Fieldwork is a creative process, and to use every part of oneself to experience and understand what is happening is important. Unforeseen incidents might occur, things can change and things might turn out differently than previously expected. Fieldwork is not a process in which one starts out with a checklist to guide all aspects of the fieldwork, expecting to be able to follow this checklist in detail (Patton 1980). In my situation, to maneuver in the field proved to be a challenging task.

Before I arrived in Brazil I was under the impression that the project was still running and that the dialogue groups were still taking place. However, misunderstandings between the representative from NCA and me had occurred, and after my arrival in São Paulo I discovered that the group dialogues were finished and not to take place again. Consequently observation as a research method was abandoned. I consider it a loss to the research process that I was not able to take part in these dialogue groups. However, it is frequently the reality in field research that conditions are not as expected, which means that it is important to stay flexible and adaptable. Through the qualitative interviews I was able to acquire information about the group dialogues.

Moreover, other opportunities for obtaining information emerged during the fieldwork. I attended a youth conference on education in São Paulo together with the coordinator of the JADE project and one youth agent. Moreover, I was invited to participate in a meeting where all the youth agents were gathered to evaluate the JADE project. Time was limited during this meeting, but I was given the opportunity to ask the youth agents a few questions.

The youth agents that spoke English translated for me. This meeting was beneficial to the research process as it provided me with useful clues to what could be interesting topics to investigate further. Further, I also met with some teachers that were involved in the project at a meeting held at Ação Educativa's headquarters. Additionally, I was able to have a short conversation with the principal at one of the schools I visited.

During the entire time in the field I took field notes⁷. I was careful to write down everything I noticed and observed, even the things that seemed obvious to me that I would recall later. When the situation is still fresh the researcher might believe that she/he will remember details of the situation, however Patton (1980) warns that it can be risky to trust that one will be able to recall all particular elements of a situation in the future. I took Bryman's advice of making notes about how the interview went, where the interview took place and the setting. If new or interesting topics were brought up during the course of the interview I used them to adjust my interview guide for the next interviews in order to follow up on these subjects (Bryman 2004). Moreover, I was careful to make notes after the meetings and conference I attended, and after I had acquired new information about the project through informal conversations with the coordinator of the JADE project.

3.3.1 Challenges in the field

Although I would never have chosen differently in terms of country and project, I underestimated the challenges the language barrier posed. When I decided to carry out the fieldwork in Brazil, I was not aware of the fact that very few Brazilians master the English language. When this piece of information became known to me I was already involved in the project and deemed it too late to withdraw. Moreover, I was not willing to abandon a possibly highly interesting project due to language issues. I was aware of the fact that this would be a challenging fieldwork, but I made the choice to be ambitious and try. As all written material about the project was only available in Portuguese and the staff at Ação Educativa only spoke Portuguese⁸, it took a while before I obtained a better understanding of

⁷ 'Field notes contain the description of what has been observed. They should contain everything the observer believes to be worth noting' (Patton 1980)

⁸ None of the staff members at Ação Educativa in the department that was responsible for the JADE project spoke English. However, a few members of staff in other departments spoke English, and they willingly assisted me when I needed help with translations.

the project. Part of my intention of spending five months on fieldwork was to acquire new language skills, and I was therefore prepared to spend the first months of my stay studying the language and getting to know the project in Portuguese. For this reason the ‘actual’ fieldwork, the period I carried out interviews, became limited to seven weeks. The fact that I have some Spanish language skills made the learning process considerably easier. I was able to carry out a large number of interviews that generated useful information for the research, and I therefore felt pleased with the results of the fieldwork despite the challenges the language issues constituted.

Logistics presented an additional challenge. São Paulo is among the largest cities in the world and the distances in the city are vast. This turned out to be a problem in relation to the translator. The long distances between the translator’s office and the various schools made the job of translating only one interview a full-day job, as so much time is spent on traveling. Translator services are expensive in São Paulo, and I had a limited amount available to spend on these services. For this reason it became necessary for me to arrange as many interviews as possible on the same day and at the same location. To complicate matters further, sometimes people did not show up for interviews.

3.4 Sample

I have used the strategy of purposive sampling in this study. This means that the researcher selects candidates for interviewing that are relevant to the research questions (Bryman 2004). I interviewed teachers, parents, youth agents and staff from Ação Educativa that had participated in the JADE project.

According to Bryman (Bryman 2004:285), in qualitative research it is sometimes difficult to understand from the study’s conclusion what the researcher in fact has done during the actual research process, and how the researcher arrived at the conclusion. He points to the fact that sometimes qualitative studies do not clearly show *how* people were chosen for interviews or observations, and often it is not evident to the reader how the analysis was carried out. This affects the transparency of the research, and lack of transparency is one of the critiques against qualitative research (Bryman 2004). For this reason I have tried to be clear about how the candidates for interviewing were chosen. I contacted teachers from all five secondary schools who participated in the project and tried to arrange interviews with

all of them. However, I only managed to interview teachers from four of the school due to lack of time and busy schedules. When I selected candidates to interview among the youth agents the one criterion I had was that they spoke English. There was no participant list or phone numbers available for the students who participated in the group dialogues⁹, and accordingly it was difficult for me to get hold of these students myself. The teachers agreed to contact some students on my behalf, but one big misunderstanding led to the unfortunate situation that I only succeeded in interviewing two students that participated in the group dialogues. When I asked the teachers to set me up with the students that participated in the group dialogues, the teachers thought I was referring to the youth agents. In addition, some teachers experienced difficulties in getting hold of students, youth agents or students that participated in the group dialogues, because they had already finished secondary school. I interviewed two parents that participated in the group dialogues, but after these interviews I made the decision not to contact more parents. The findings in chapter six will reveal the reason for this decision.

In the last interviews I did not use translator as I was almost at the end of my stay and had acquired sufficient language skills during the past five months to be able to communicate with the local population alone. Moreover, I noticed in the previous interviews that it was easier to communicate without a translator. My experience had been that to communicate via a translator is both more demanding and creates a distance between the interviewer and the person that is being interview. It was evident that the persons I interviewed seemed more comfortable when I talked to them in Portuguese and did not use a translator. The table below summarizes the total number of people I interviewed, and whether or not they were interviewed with a translator.

⁹ When I refer to the students I refer not to the youth agents but to the students who were invited to participate in the group dialogues.

Table 1: Description of interviews

	Total number interviewed	Interviewed with translator	Interviewed without translator
Teachers	4	2	2
Parents	2	2	
Youth agents	6	1	5
Students	4 ¹⁰	1	3
Staff from Ação Educativa ¹¹	2		2

3.5 Qualitative interviews

The interview is, according to Bryman (2004), probably the most utilized method in qualitative research. In qualitative interview the aim is to grasp the interviewee's perspectives and point of views. Qualitative interview emphasizes the attempt to understand 'what the interviewee views as important in explaining and understanding events, patterns, and forms of behavior' (Bryman 2004:321). Put in the words of Patton (1980:205): 'the fundamental principle of qualitative interviewing is to provide a framework within which respondents can express their own understandings in their own terms'.

When conducting semi-structured interviews, the researcher notes down all questions of interested in an interview guide in advance, but depending upon the responses, the interviewer is free to follow-up any interesting topics that may turn up during the interview. Hence, the interviewer does not have to follow the guide point by point, as a semi-structured

¹⁰ Of these four students two students had participated in the group dialogue at school C, one was a student at school C and one was a former student at school B.

¹¹ Five employees at Ação Educativa had been/was involved in the JADE project. Two of them no longer worked for the organization when I conducted the fieldwork, and one was continuously travelling. I therefore interviewed two members of staff at Ação Educativa: the coordinator of the project and the employee that had been particularly involved in the education of the youth agents through the educational course.

interview allows the researcher to take advantage of issues arising from the original questions during the course of the interview. Moreover, the researcher should aim at asking all questions of interest, and the questions should be asked in a more or less similar wording for all of the candidates in order to ensure comparability among respondents' answers (Bryman 2004). The interview guide is particularly useful when carrying out a group interview (Patton 1980), something I experienced when I unexpectedly interviewed five students at the same time. The interview guide then made it easier to maintain focus on the topics of interest¹². The questions were mostly open-ended. In qualitative research a fundamental objective is to 'minimize the imposition of predetermined responses when gathering data' (Patton 1980:211). Truly open-ended questions that allow the interviewee to answer the questions in his or her own wording are therefore a prerequisite in qualitative interviewing (Patton 1980). In regard to the questions aiming at capturing the youth's perception of what constitutes quality in education, I contemplated which questions to ask. Rather than asking them directly what they considered quality in education to be, I posed open-ended questions that allowed them to describe their experiences from secondary school. I wanted to give the youth the opportunity to talk about what was important to them without forcing their responses into already established categories.

According to Patton (1980), the quality of the information obtained during an interview is to a great extent dependent upon the interviewer, and to which degree the interviewer succeeds in allowing the interviewee to display his or her world. To perform high quality interviews therefore requires a skilled interviewer. Marshall and Rossman state that 'interviewers should have superb listening skills and be skilful at personal interaction, question framing, and gentle probing for elaboration' (Marshall and Rossman 1995).

3.5.1 Interviewing youth

Half of the informants were youth. To interview youth offers specific challenges as they can be very self-conscious. Some might be more confident in a focus group while others will feel more comfortable in a one-to-one interview. A researcher needs to be flexible when decisions concerning data collection are made, and it is important to be sensitive towards the

¹² The interview guides are found in appendix A and B.

youth's needs (Marshall and Rossman 2006). I contemplated in advance how to conduct the interviews. A focus group would most likely be a useful and appropriate way of getting to know the youth's views and opinions, but considering the language issues, it seemed inconvenient to carry out focus groups using a translator. I decided to simply ask the youth what they preferred when arranging the interview, hoping they would give an honest answer. I ended up interviewing some of the youth alone, some in pairs, and some in a group of five.

I thought I was careful to explain the objectives of the interview before the interview started, but I obviously did not emphasize thoroughly enough that I was looking for their personal meanings, and that there were no right or wrong answers. The response of the first youth when the interview was: 'so, how did I do?' This made me realize that he was quite nervous during the interview, perhaps feeling he was being tested. His nervousness can also be due to the use of record player, and the fact that he spoke in a foreign language. I learned from the episode, and was extremely careful in the following interviews to explain even more thoroughly the exact intentions with the interview, and what kind of information I was looking for. I also scheduled a new interview with the first youth, this time we created a more informal setting by going for a walk. I did not use the record player, but took notes afterwards. The purpose was to make him relax more, and to see whether or not his responses were the same as in the first interview in which he to some extent felt that he was being tested. This was also a way for me to increase the validity of my research in terms of achieving credible findings. Clearly, emphasizing the purpose of the interview is of utmost importance in all interview situations, and one of the criteria of a successful interviewer (Kvale 1996). My experience shows that when interviewing youth, in particular in a language foreign to them you simply cannot be too clear about the intention and purpose of the interview. This brings me to the important topic of ethics in research.

3.6 Ethical considerations

In an interview situation it is important to be ethically sensitive. Bryman explains that this entails to ensure that the interviewees are aware of what the research is about and of the purpose of the research, and also inform the interviewee's that their answers will be treated confidentially (Bryman 2004). Kvale (1996) emphasizes that ethical decisions arise during the entire process and are not limited to one specific stage of the research process, for

instance the interview situation. Ethical consideration should be taken into account at all times from the thematizing and designing of the study, to the interview situation and the transcription of interviews, to the analysis, verification and finally reporting of the study (Kvale 1996). Substantial knowledge of moral issues that can arise during the research process strengthens the researcher's competence to make reflected decisions during the planning of the study. It also makes the researcher more aware of sensitive issues that may surface during the course of the research (Kvale 1996).

Possessing moral knowledge and consciousness towards sensitive topics that may turn up during the research is not sufficient for a researcher. The researcher must also have commitment to moral issues and action (Kvale 1996). Eisner & Peshin point out that 'researchers need two attributes; the sensitivity to identify an ethical issue and the responsibility to feel committed to acting appropriately in regard to such issues' (cited in Kvale 1996:117). The person of the researcher is decisive for the quality of the scientific knowledge, and also that sensible ethical decisions are made. In qualitative interviews the researcher is the main instrument for obtaining knowledge; hence the person of the researcher is exceedingly important. Kvale recognizes that in choices concerning ethical versus scientific issues 'the integrity of the researcher – his or her honesty and fairness, knowledge, and experience – are the decisive factors' (Kvale 1996:117).

In the design of the study is a central ethical issue to obtain informed consent from the research participants. Informed consent is a key principle in social research ethics (Bryman 2004). It implies to give the prospective participants information about the project, its overall purpose and the main features of the design, in addition to state possible risks and benefits of participating in the research. Thus the participants can make a decision about whether or not they want to participate in the study (Kvale 1996).

I had asked all informants for their consent prior to the interview. I explained the purpose of the research as clearly as I could, however as already demonstrated I was not thorough enough in my explanation to first youth I interviewed. After the episode with the first youth agent I was careful to act according to what I had learnt and showed even more consideration when interviewing youth. As all my informants were 18 years of age or older I did not contemplate *who* should give the consent. This would be more relevant to consider if I were to interview for instance school children, in which case one would have to consider if

the children themselves, the school board, the teachers or the parents should give the consent (Kvale 1996).

Moreover, I asked the informants for permission to record the conversations, and I assured them full anonymity. I also ensured the informants that I was the only person who would listen to the interviews. Also transcription involves ethical issues (Kvale 1996). The interviews in this study did not treat particularly sensitive topics, but the researcher should always strive to protect the confidentiality of the informants. In order to best preserve the anonymity of the informants I have left out which school the teachers and youth belong to in the citations. Few schools and people are involved in the project, hence the identity of the informants could more easily be revealed by the persons who know the project, for instance staff at Ação Educativa, if I reported which school the informants belong to.

3.7 Analysis

The purpose of qualitative research is to produce findings, and the challenge in qualitative analysis is to ‘make sense of massive amounts of data, reduce the volume of information, identify significant patterns, and construct a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal’ (Patton 1980: 372). I approached the challenge of generating findings from the data I had collected by starting to transcribe the interviews. Transcriptions are translations from one language to another: oral discourse is transformed to written discourse (Kvale 1996). There are several ways of conducting transcriptions, and Kvale points out there are no true, objective transformation from the oral to the written mode. The essential question to contemplate is which transcription would be useful for the particular research in focus (Kvale 1996). I chose a verbatim transcription, excluding sighs, laughter, tone of voice and pauses. These features are relevant for psychological interpretations, while verbatim transcriptions are useful in linguistic analysis (Kvale 1996). While a psychological interpretation could be of interest this is not within the scope of this analysis due to time and resources constraints. Further, I transcribed the answers of the English speaking informants without ‘polishing’ the language, and the citations which are broken and grammatically incorrect are direct statements from these informants. The citations that are grammatically correct and in complete sentences are consequences of translation.

Further, I started the process of coding the data. I juxtaposed my field notes with the transcriptions of the interviews and as I read through the interviews several times, topics and patterns started to emerge. I conducted a cross-case analysis by grouping together answers from the various informants to the specific questions or topics, and I organized a coding system. Both the interview guide and the research questions presented in chapter 1 guided the development of the coding system. I carried out content analysis, in which the content of interviews and observations are analyzed. The process entails to identify, code, and categorize the primary patterns in the data (Patton 1980). According to Bryman is the role of the researcher in interpreting the meaning of and in texts emphasized in qualitative content analysis. Categories can emerge out of data during the analysis process, and emphasis is put on 'recognizing the significance for understanding the meaning of the context in which an item being analyzed appeared' (Bryman 2004:542).

Patton (1980) states that there are no absolute rules in qualitative analysis, interpretation and reporting. Since all qualitative study is unique, the analytical approach for each study will be unique as well. However, guidelines exist, and these require both judgment and creativity. 'The human factor is the great strength and the fundamental weakness of qualitative inquiry and analysis' (Patton 1980:372). However, the researcher is responsible for monitoring and reporting the analytical procedures and processes as truthfully as possible (Patton 1980).

In the analysis of the interviews I was careful to look for contradictions in the statements of the informants before I drew a conclusion. I identified a few contradictions, for instance did one youth claim that what was missing in secondary school was the stimulation for the students to wish to learn. According to him, if the classes had been more varied and not so monotonous the desire to learn would have been stronger. He referred to the teacher at school B to exemplify what he meant. This teacher made use of various methodologies in class in order to create variation in the teaching. However, a bit later in the interview the youth referred to the same teacher and claimed that the students did not really appreciate such classes until *after* they had finished secondary school, and the students did not pay particular attention in these classes either. In other words, the youth claimed that more dynamic classes with variation in methodology would make the students want to learn. However, he also declared that the students did not appreciate such classes when they were students, but realized the value of these classes after they had graduated.

3.8 Validity in qualitative research

‘Validity’ is another word for truth (Silverman 2005:210). All research must be confronted with criteria against which the trustworthiness of the project can be evaluated (Marshall and Rossman 2006). In other words, in all research one must consider how true the findings and conclusions of this piece of research are. Do the conclusions of the research have integrity (Bryman 2004)? Marshall and Rossman put forward four questions that are important to contemplate when considering the study’s validity. First, how credible are the particular findings of the study and by what criteria can we judge them? Second, how transferable and applicable are these findings to other similar settings? Third, how can we be fairly sure that the findings would be replicated if the study were conducted with the same participants in the same context one more time? Fourth, how can we be sure the findings reflect the participants’ true opinions rather than being a mere fabrication from the researcher’s biases? (Marshall and Rossman 2006)

These questions summarize the concepts that are often referred to as internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity (Bryman 2004). It is crucial to contemplate them all during the entire process of the research. Internal validity has mainly to do with causality and whether we can be certain that there is a relation between two variables or not. External validity is often referred to as generalizability or transferability and has to do with whether or not it is possible to apply findings from one particular case more generally to other cases (Marshall and Rossman 2006). This is quite problematic in qualitative research as it is not possible to ‘freeze’ social situations. Moreover, in case studies it is simply impossible to generalize as a case study is a sample of one (Bryman 2004). This means that the findings from this analysis can only say something about this specific case, and not necessarily be transferred to similar cases.

Reliability refers to ‘the degree to which a measure of a concept is stable’ (Bryman 2004:543). If a different researcher repeated the research project at another time would he/she arrive at similar conclusions? Or if I, as a researcher, carried out the project at another time reach the same results again? One way of enhancing the reliability of the project is to make the research process as transparent as possible by describing research strategy and data analysis methods in details (Silverman 2005).

When it comes to objectivity, this is impossible in social research. However, it should be apparent that the researcher has not ‘overtly allowed personal values or theoretical inclinations manifestly to sway the conduct of the research and finding deriving from it’ (Bryman 2004:276). Objectivity is a substantial area of focus social science and philosophy. However, due to magnitude of this topic and the limitations of this thesis I will not pursue this topic further.

I have made an effort during the entire research project to ensure the validity and reliability of this inquiry. I carried out respondent validation in cases in which I had the informants email address. Respondent validation entails to provide the people involved in the research with an account of what the researcher has found out, and then to request feedback on that account (Bryman 2004). The fact that I kept contact with many of the informants after my return to Norway also allowed me to send them emails with questions that occurred during the transcription of the interviews and the analysis of the data. It is quite common that researchers experience that central questions surface later in the research process when the field work is accomplished and the researcher has started the analysis (Patton 1980). In my situation, important questions emerged when I was transcribing and analyzing data. I did not ask the informants these questions while in Brazil simply because I did not perceive or discover the relevance of these topics and questions at the time. To some of the questions that emerged later I received answers via email, while others were left unanswered because I could not get in touch with the informants.

Moreover, by keeping a fieldwork diary, recording all conversations, continuously contemplating my effort and skills as an interviewer, keeping contact with the interviewees so that data could be verified and more information exchanged, and being clear in my choices concerning strategy, methods, sampling and analysis, I have striven to strengthen the validity and reliability of this study.

3.9 Limitations to thesis

Brazil is a federal republic consisting of 26 states. The states are responsible for the secondary education system hence this thesis concerns the secondary education system in the state of São Paulo. The findings presented in this thesis may therefore not be transferable to

the secondary education systems in the other 26 states. Moreover, as this study is a case study the findings may not be transferable to the situation in other secondary schools in São Paulo either. Further, the thesis looks at one youth project in particular and if and/or how this project contributes to education quality, and it will not be possible to transfer findings from this project to other educational projects involving youth.

Few people speak English in Brazil. As I did not speak Portuguese at the time of arrival I was dependent on a translator most of the time. When researcher and informants are not able to communicate directly, language constitutes a limitation to access of information.

Information can be lost in the communication between informant, translator and researcher. The skills of the translator also matter greatly. Some of the informants spoke English, but when the communication cannot take place in the mother tongue, language is a barrier to information. The informants' English vocabulary is not as rich as their mother tongue vocabulary, and the conversations become less fluent. Hence, language composes certain limitations to the possibilities of obtaining rich description of the issues at hand.

3.10 Conclusion

The fieldwork turned out to be challenging, but I am of the opinion that I was able to obtain useful information. The methods chosen turned out to be valuable for getting the information I was looking for. Through the interviews I obtained a good understanding of the youth's opinions about school, education and the JADE project. In relation to their experiences of the school day and their perceptions of the school and the education I feel content with the use of open-ended questions. This allowed the youth to emphasize and bring attention to the factors in school that are most important to them. The next three chapters reveal the main findings brought about by the interviews. The main findings of youth's perception of education quality are presented first.

4. Education quality as perceived by youth

4.1 Introduction

The main focus of this chapter is to present youth's perception of what quality in education entails. Out of the analysis emerged two main themes the youth were concerned about in their everyday role as students: learning, or the lack of it, and the psychosocial environment in school. In relation to the presentation of these two main topics I also discuss the limitations in exercising an education of quality as perceived by the youth. The chapter culminates in a discussion on the consequences of the poor public education system for the students in secondary schools in São Paulo. As a way of setting the stage and give attention to the physical environment the students experience every day, I open the chapter with a description of the physical facilities of the secondary schools.

4.2 Observations in school

The appearance of the school buildings gave varied impressions. School A was surrounded by a thick, brick wall. The gates were locked. The teacher I interviewed explained that the school administration was forced to keep the gates closed at all times to prevent drug dealers from entering the school area. Drug dealing frequently took place inside the school, and in addition to outsiders did also students operated as drug dealers. The problem had worsened in the past years. Moreover, locked gates prevent the parents from entering the school area both because it limits access and also because the drug dealing makes parents afraid to enter the school property. The teacher claimed that this contributed to increasing the distance between the schools and the homes, a relation that was already weak. Not only did the drug dealers scare the parents, but the drug problem scared students as well. Inside the walls, the physical space available to the students was scarce. A partially open area with three walls and small windows covered with bars on top, and some benches in the middle of the 'room' was the only available area for the students to spend the breaks. When I arrived at the school I noticed a woman cleaning the windows on the outside. The teacher I interviewed later explained that it was the principal I had seen cleaning the windows. Due to lack of resources

there is not enough staff employed in the school, hence the principal has to contribute to the cleaning.



In school C I was also met by closed gates. The windows were all covered with bars, and as far as I could tell the students had no space but the hallways to spend the free time. One thing all schools had in common was the bell signaling the beginning and the end of each class. To call it a bell is highly misleading, and the version in school C was the worse. The earsplitting sound reminded more of a siren alerting sincere danger. The teacher commented; 'it's the signal of a factory. This is a factory and we produce students. At least that is what the government wants us to think'. School C is an evening school for secondary students. During the day the school is a primary school, meaning that if the secondary school students want to go to this specific school, the students have no choice but to follow classes in the evening. The first class starts at 7 PM in the evening and the last class finishes at 11 PM. Moreover, the poverty in this neighborhood forces most of the students to work during the day. The students I spoke with told me that they are tired and lack focus after a day at work. The learning conditions for these students are most likely not optimal. In school B the students had little physical space to their disposal, but the gates were not locked when I came and the building was surrounded by trees and flowers. The classrooms were in quite

good conditions although a bit simple. I did not get the opportunity to get a good impression of School D because the teacher insisted on carrying out the interview at a restaurant nearby.



In general the environments of these schools, in particular school A and C, are worthy of critique. Limited physical space, walls that surround the school, closed gates, drug dealers that frequent the school area and a siren that continuously pollutes the air cannot be claimed to promote well-being and hence contribute to education quality for the students. However, the youth were not primarily concerned with these aspects of the school. In the responses, the youth highlighted other factors they perceived as most important: the learning itself and the psychosocial environment.

4.3 Learning

It appears that youth put learning as the center of education. From the open questions that allowed the youth to describe their secondary school experiences and state what they liked and what they wished were different in school, learning, or lack of it, emerged as a subject the youth were highly concerned about. On the whole, the youth expressed frustration that they do not think they learn enough in school. The youth uttered disappointment in the methodology exercised in the classroom, and it appears that this is the aspect of the teaching that concerns the youth the most.

The youth miss the opportunity to interact with the teacher and participate in the lessons. They describe the classes as tiring, ‘a boring routine’ and with little variation. However, it is not surprising that students, some possibly a bit tired of school, perceive the classes as boring. Still, the youth kept referring to ‘teachers that don’t give classes’ and classes in which there is a ‘play’ taking place. This can indicate that the problem of ‘boring classes’ is a bit more serious than just an evaluation of an average class given by a student tired of school.

Some teachers give classes, others don’t give class. The majority don’t give class.
(Youth agent, former student, female, 18 years old)

Everybody pretend. The teachers pretend that they teach and the students pretend that they learn. Don’t exist a climate in the classroom to learn and to teach.
(Youth agent, former student, male, 19 years old)

As the quotations above demonstrate, some youth used strong words to describe the lack of teaching and learning they claim to take place in many classes. In the opinion of the youth it appears that a teacher who ‘does not give class’ do not encourage interaction with the students, is unprepared or has low teaching skills and/or little knowledge about the topic, and which constantly make use of the same methodology. One youth agent described such a class in this way:

The teacher enter the classroom, sit down on the chair, take the material, write something on the blackboard, give some exercises, the student pretend they understand and the teacher approve you.
(Youth agent, former student, male, 19 years old)

The youth agent’s description of some classes as merely being a ‘play’ in which students and teachers pretend to learn and teach, gives reason to be concerned. To which extent the students experience the classes as a banking-system, which Freire warned against as early as the 1960s, I cannot claim for sure as this would require more research of the teaching and learning processes. However, the youth’s descriptions of the teaching-learning environment in some of the classes indicate that the classroom practices in many cases are unsatisfactory and do not promote learning.

Moreover, the youth also expressed which methodology they prefer, and do not prefer, hence demonstrate consciousness towards how they learn.

4.3.1 Youth's preferences in a learning/teaching situation

Johannessen (2006) advocates for variations in classroom profiles, and the youth had several ideas and opinions about how and under which conditions teaching and learning should take place. The youth favor classes that are dynamic and with varied methodology. In particular use of dialogue and participation in class are methodologies the youth appreciate. This might indicate that the youth support Freire's (1996) idea of education as an exchange of knowledge.

Several youth highlighted the fact that they appreciate teachers that let them participate and interact in class, and who dialogue with the students.

I like history and philosophy because you can discuss the things. [The teacher's name] does this, he discusses the things with the students. Other teachers enter class, gives the lesson and don't make the students participate in class.
(Youth agent, former student, female, 18 years old)

Further, the students are also concerned with the way the teacher behaves towards them in class. A good teacher is described as a teacher who greets them with respect and meet them with an open mind, and who shows that she or he is fond of both the students and the subject. It appears that the qualities of the teacher are important to the youth, and this entails both the qualities related to how well the teacher knows and conveys the subject, and also the teacher's human qualities. It seems that these two aspects are interrelated in that the teacher's attitude to the students to some extent affects the students' perception of the subject and the teaching, and in turn this might have a positive effect on the learning process.

A good teacher makes them [the students] comfortable and at the same time make them learn. A good teacher has a certain interaction with the students; you felt good when you were in that class and you learn at the same time.
(Youth agent, former student, male, 20 years old)

This underlines the idea that it is in the learning process and in the meeting between teacher and student, that quality is created, and that to understand education quality one must understand the teaching-learning process (Nagel 2003). This view also supports the importance of the role of the teacher in the process towards achieving quality education, and underpins the notion that the way teachers operate in the classroom influence the quality of education (Leu 2005; UNESCO 2004a).

Furthermore, as the next section demonstrates, the youth attributed substantial value to relations, in particular the relation between teachers and students, as decisive for their well-being in school. Even though some of the schools were poorly equipped in terms of physical resources¹³, the youth mainly focused on the psychosocial environment in school as the most important aspect of the school reality.

4.4 The psychosocial environment in school

The psychosocial environment does not constitute ‘education quality’ in itself, but is rather one factor that contributes to quality in education (Johannessen 2006). Youth are concerned about the relations inside and outside the classroom, both between students and teachers and between students and administration. Physical resources such as the school building, teaching and learning material, the school area, computers and other equipment were never mentioned as something the students miss or wish were different. It is quite possible that they would like these things to change as well, but it appears that it is not their primary concern. I have identified three sub-themes in order to explain more explicitly what the students perceive as unsatisfactory aspects of the psychosocial environment in school.

4.4.1 The tenuous relation between students and teachers

The youth emphasized that they enjoy good relationships to some teachers, whose classes they also like. However, the youth’s description of the relation between students and teachers might indicate that the relation in general is weak. Also the relation between students and the administration appear to be fragile.

Some teachers are a little bit locked in their world. They talk to the other teachers but not with the students. They are not friends of the students. They don’t have the perception if the students have any problems. The relationship between the students and teachers is deficient.

(Youth agent, former student, male, 18 years old)

¹³ It is worth noting that there are differences between the public secondary schools in terms of resources available. However, in general the public schools suffer from lack of resources and are poorly equipped (Schwartzman 2004).

Later in the interview the youth agent brought up the student-teacher relation again, emphasizing that he wished the teachers were closer to the students. I therefore interpret this quotation as meaning that the youth agent does not necessarily want the teacher to be a friend in the sense we normally use the word, but rather that he wants the teacher to be *friendly*. It appears that the youth want the teachers to show more concern for them and the teachers to 'see' the students.

The youth in school C, the evening school, highlighted the fact that the relation between the students and the administration in their school is weak. The students claimed that there is little confidence between the students and the administration. The students even stated that the previous principal was afraid of the students. 'Everybody thinks evening school is the same as trouble', one youth agent said. Another youth claimed that she had never seen the principal and she felt as though she did not have a direction. The fact that the administration is seldom available to the students that attend evening school was also revealed in the group dialogues. Several students informed that they had never met the principal of their school.

It is implied in the youth's desire for a closer relationship between students and teachers that the youth want the teacher to treat them fairly and like adults. However, several of the youth pointed out that they feel prejudged and underestimated by the teachers, and that many teachers are being condescending in their treatment of the youth.

I felt that I was not respected as a student. Because I see my teachers, they think all students like marijuana and think we have no future. They think we have no future and no intelligence.

(Youth agent, female, former student, 19 years old)

One of the teachers I interviewed supported part of this statement when she explained why most of the teachers at the school did not want to take part in the JADE project. I assume that time is also an important reason for the teachers not to participate, but this teacher claimed that:

The other teachers do not see the point of dialogue. They think the students don't think, that they have nothing to say.

(Teacher, female)

The quantitative survey Ação Educativa carried out in the five secondary schools that participated in the JADE project reveal that a substantial portion of the students feel that the

teacher do not think very highly of them. To the question: ‘Are the teachers proud of the students?’ 43 % of the students answered rarely or never (Acção Educativa 2008).

Furthermore, the youth drew attention to another fact, namely that they do not get the opportunity to raise their voice in issues related to the school. This aspect is related to the relationship between students and teachers, but I have chosen to describe it in a separate section because so many youth pointed this out specifically.

4.4.2 The lack of opportunity to express opinions

It appears that the students have few opportunities to state their opinions about the school. According to the youth, the teachers will not listen to them and do not respond to their questions concerning issues related to the school¹⁴. Some of the youth even claimed that they are afraid of giving their opinions because they think they will be punished for it. It appears that the quality of the teaching and teachers missing from class are typical topics the students would like to question.

In JADE all the students had a chance to speak what they think, to give the voice. But in school we are obliged to accept the things the way they are. Sometimes we don't have opinions there, and the teachers don't listen to the opinions of the students.

(Youth agent, former student, male, 18 years old)

The youth agents explained that the teachers will answer questions about the subject, but not questions about the school. The student below describes what she liked the most about the group dialogue.

I liked that I could express my opinions without fear.

(Student, group dialogue participant, female, 18 years old)

The youth agent quoted below points out an outcome of the group dialogue in school B. At the same time he explains why the students are afraid to give their opinions in issues concerning the school.

¹⁴ I did not confront the teachers with this claim. The teachers who participated in the JADE project all had a good relation to the students and the youth thought highly of them; hence these teachers did not fall into the category of the teachers who did not listen to the students. Lack of time and financial resources to hire a translator made it complicated to arrange interviews with other teachers who might have fallen into this category.

In [the name of school B] the students learnt that they can talk and they won't be repressed. The teachers have an obligation to hear the students. Before the students thought that you can be expelled from school if you talk.

(Youth agent, former student, male, 18 years old)

The youth agent explained that by saying 'they learnt that they can talk' he meant to give opinions in issues related to the school and the education. This topic, the opportunity to express opinions, will be further elaborated in chapter 5 when I discuss the role of dialogue as perceived by grass root stakeholders in education. However, it appears that the education system the youth in public secondary schools experience does not allow the students to 'name their world' (Freire 1996), and express how they perceive the school reality. Only when people are given the opportunity to name their world can change take place. This is the right of everyone, also the students (Freire 1996). This could also underpin the importance of dialogue and youth participation in the JADE project.

Lastly, an important aspect of the psychosocial environment as perceived by the youth entails to feel attachment to school.

4.4.3 The weak attachment to school

It appears that the youth feel little attachment to the school, and that this is an aspect of the education they would like to change. One youth agent pointed out the need to create a stronger attachment between the students and the school in this manner:

What is missing in school is more integration between the teacher and the student, between the student and the school. The student is here, studies, and goes home and that's it. If we had more cultural projects, musical encouragement, art, culture etc the students would be more attached to the school and the students would have greater interest in learning.

(Youth agent, former student, male, 20 years old)

This youth agent quoted above referred to an episode when he was in school that made a huge difference to him. The school arranged a music festival and even though resources were scarce the festival made him feel more attached to the school. However, few resources make it difficult to arrange certain activities.

The coordinator of the JADE project explained that Ação Educativa is of the opinion that in order to improve the quality of education it is necessary to make the students feel a connection to the school, feel that they are *part* of something. The coordinator claimed that today most students see school as the property and responsibility of the government, and do not understand from the word ‘public’ that they as well have a share in the school. As long as the students do not think of the school as ‘theirs’, they do not feel neither responsibility nor attachment to the school. This provides a solid argument for youth participation. According to Hart (1997) can youth develop a sense of their own competence and responsibility to participate through direct participation.

I recognize that the data represented so far only consider the youth’s points of view on public secondary education in São Paulo, and hence only convey one side of the story. However, after all, the purpose of this thesis is to find out how youth perceive education quality. Yet, to bring forth some of the perspectives of the teachers seems important in this connection. The teachers’ reports on how they experience the teaching profession contribute to understanding why the teachers sometimes fail in exercising an education of quality as perceived by students.

4.5 Limitations to exercising an education of quality

The teachers I interviewed suffer a hard reality. Most of them work at two, three or four schools. Those who work at three different schools in one day start teaching the first class at 8 AM, and finish the last class at 11 PM. Their salary is low, and to earn between 600-1200 Brazilian Reais¹⁵ per month is common. This is a middle-income wage, but compared to other professions where the employees have equal education in terms of years of higher education, it is very low.

Most teachers work at two to four schools. Some work at five schools. A teacher who works at three different schools, when is she or he going to have time to read and update herself or himself? They don’t even have money to buy books. How can you expect them to be enthusiastic?

(Principal, female)

¹⁵ This equals 1800-3600 NOK.

All the adults interviewed asked the same rhetorical questions as the principal in the quote above; when do the teachers have time to update themselves? When do they have time to prepare class? How do they find energy to be enthusiastic in their teaching when they experience such a hectic school day? ‘Uma rotina cruel’, or the cruel routine, was a phrase used repeatedly to describe the hectic school day many teachers experience. The teachers run from one classroom to the next and from one school to the next. On average, each class has between 40 and 50 students. One of the teachers stated that he teaches 2000 students each week.

I teach 2000 students each weak. It’s impossible to reach out to all students. There are so many students that sometimes you don’t remember all the names. (Teacher, male)

The translator who assisted me in the interviews used to work in the public school system before she established her own translator company. She confirmed that it is quite common to teach such a massive amount of students. The translator explained that the working conditions in the public school system, along with the poor salary, were the reasons she left the job and started a new career as translator.

Moreover, many teachers experience health problems due to stress and exhaustion. To be victims of violence in school is not uncommon, and according to the teacher in school A are teachers that work in schools with extensive drug problems particularly exposed to attacks from students.

The educational reform

The Secretary of Education of the state of São Paulo (SEE) introduced a new reform for public secondary schools in São Paulo in 2008. Among some of the policies the reform introduces, was the removal of the planning days which the teachers spend preparing the school year together. At the meeting with the teachers concerning the JADE project, the new reform was debated during the break. The teachers were upset about the fact that the government had taken away their planning days.

Further, the principal at school A explained that this year the government had decided to give each public secondary school in the state of São Paulo a grade on the scale from 0 to 10, 10 being the best. School A had gotten the grade 0.16. These grades were published in the

newspapers. The schools received bonuses according to the grades. The principal was in despair:

The government did not take income of families into account. They only looked at the students' grades. Quality education has to do with the education they [the students] get in the homes. Children on the street take with the experiences from the street into the school, not the education from the home. And the youth choose the best schools.

(Principal, female)

The principal was worried that the worse grade the school got, the fewer students the school would attract, hence the level of the students would fall. And as the grades of the students directly affected the governments assessment of the quality of the school, without taking any other factors into account in this process, the school would in turn receive little financial support and even weaker students.

Furthermore, the teachers reported that their working situation is further complicated by the fact that the regulations concerning student evaluation are unclear. The teachers claim that SEE has not defined a set of rules that function as guidelines for student evaluation. The teachers have requested clarity in these matters from the SEE, but argue that SEE does not respond to their requests. The result of this is that most students pass even though they have acquired little knowledge. It appears that due to financial reasons and school reputation the school has little to gain from having students repeat classes. The new system for school evaluation which determines the economic support underpins this notion. The teachers claimed that the students are already aware of the fact that they most likely will pass even though they have not made an effort, and take advantage of it.

It seems like we are doing it for nothing. The diploma the students get are worth nothing. This also influences the teachers because it feels like the job we do doesn't matter.

(Teacher, male)

The youth agent quoted earlier who described some classes as 'plays' in which teachers pretend to teach and students pretend to learn confirms the fact that the students are aware that they can pass a subject even though they have not acquired much knowledge:

The teacher enter the classroom, sit down on the chair, take the material, write something on the blackboard, give some exercises, the student pretend they understand and the teacher approve you.

(Youth agent, former student, male, 19 years

old)

The teachers reported that it is hopeless to confront SEE with this. The teacher describes SEE as authoritarian in that the Education Secretary denies teachers, or anyone else for that matter, to participate in decision-making. Because of the authoritarian attitude of SEE the teacher claimed that he did not consider the school 'public'. It appears that the dialogue between teaches and SEE is weak. As Freire points out, dialogue cannot occur between those who deny others to speak and those whose right to speak has been denied them (Freire 1996). Also the teachers should be given an opportunity to name their world, hence their participation in the JADE project appear important.

I noticed in the quantitative survey carried out Ação Educativa in the five secondary schools that the question: 'how can the teacher contribute to improving the quality of education', had one answer alternatives that said: 'not approve students who have not acquired any knowledge' (Ação Educativa 2008). I thought this was a peculiar alternative, but in the light of this information it is understandable and it appears that this problem is substantial.

It appears that the conditions that allow teachers to be good teachers and educators are not present in the public secondary schools I visited. Being aware of the situations of the teachers makes it easier to understand the feedback from the youth. Although the poor situation of the teachers cannot be used solely as an explanation and excuse for failures among the teachers in providing the youth with an education of quality, it adds one more perspective to a complex topic.

Furthermore, it appears that the poor state of the public secondary schools has severe consequences for the youth. Not only is the poor quality a problem in itself, but it appears that the way the education system in Brazil is constructed also affect the students in public secondary school in a negative manner.

4.6 Consequences of poor public secondary education

The consequences of a poor public secondary education system and what appears to be a strong stigma connected to being from poor neighborhoods and attending public secondary school seem to be substantial.

Everyone in Brazil who is in public school says that I will not get a job, or get into university. And I remember [the teacher's name] said in the first class: Do you want to pass vestibular? And we answered: oh yes, of course. Well, my course will get you into the university.

(Youth agent, former student, female, 18 years old)

This quotation unveils the two aspects of the education system in Brazil: firstly, the stigma connected to attending public school in Brazil. The low quality of the public secondary schools is well-known, and it appears that the students are affected by the social stigma connected to their situation. Secondly, there also appears to be a notion of capitulation among many students in public secondary school. Being aware of the challenges in competing with students from private secondary schools in the vestibular, many appear to give up without even making an attempt at passing vestibular and be admitted in a public university. The teacher referred to in the quote above is aware of this notion, and when I interviewed him he explained that he purposely work the minds of the students to make them understand that it *is* possible to get into a public university even though they attend a public secondary school.

A majority of the students already know in their mind that they won't be able to pass vestibular and be accepted in the university. So they give up.

Vestibular is a big obstacle between secondary school and higher education.

(Teacher, male)

This is confirmed by all teachers I spoke with. They claim that many of the students have abandoned the idea of passing vestibular early in their secondary schooling. The survey conducted by Ação Educativa in the five secondary schools that participated in the JADE project revealed that only 25 % of the students expected secondary school to prepare them for higher education. 43 % of the students who answered the survey report that their expectations of secondary school are to be prepared for work. The rest of the students gave other expectations (Ação Educativa 2008).

According to Peters (1973) is education inseparable from judgment of value. If many of the students in public secondary schools perceive higher education as out of reach, and are

aware of the fact that the teachers most likely will pass them even though they have only acquired a minimum of knowledge, many of these students might not perceive the education in school as valuable. In the light of this one might better understand why the students do not make an effort in school.

It appears that many students do not know that they will do after secondary school. The youth confirmed that it is common to either start or continue working after secondary school, but some do not succeed in finding a job and do not know what they will do. A phrase that was repeatedly used about the students, both by teachers and youth, was ‘eles são perdido’, meaning ‘they are lost’.

I see in my friends, they are lost. They don't know what they will do in life after secondary school. I think the majority think they will start working. I see many give up. Many of the students give up.

(Youth agent, female, former student, 19 years old)

All youth I spoke with pointed out this fact: the students do not really contemplate the role of secondary school in their lives and in their future plans.

Today if you talk to the students what they are going to do [after secondary school], they don't know.

(Youth agent, female, student, 18 years old)

Another teacher demonstrated a different way of encouraging the students to study hard and making the students believe in themselves:

Some former students still call me. They are in technical school now. I tell this to my students to show them that they [the students in technical school] have achieved something, and that they as well can do something even though they are from the poor neighborhoods. I want to show that they are worth something, that they are capable.

(Teacher, female)

According to Freire (1996) will a banking-system of education ‘produce’ students who passively accept their role in society. The research of this thesis does not allow me to assess to which extent the banking-system of education is exercised in Brazilian classrooms today. However, that the teaching and learning in many cases is insufficient appear to be evident. One might also question to which extent the public secondary education succeeds in preparing the student for their future careers, either within higher education or work. According to Freire (1974) was conscientization the aim of education. Considered the vast

differences between poor and rich in the Brazilian society it appears vital that the education system stimulates people of low socio-economic status to fight against the unequal distribution system. Nevertheless, it appears that many of the poorest people are 'manipulated' into a state of not thinking; the opposite of obtaining and possessing a critical consciousness (Freire 1974).

4.7 Chapter summary

The students want to learn in school and they have conscious opinions about how they learn and how they would like the classes to be. Moreover, good psychosocial environment appear to be what the students consider another important characteristic of quality. The youth are most concerned with relations between students and the teachers and administration, and the relation between the students and the school itself. The youth want to be heard and be fairly treated, and they want to feel attachment to school.

Furthermore, it might seem like the poor conditions in public schools and structures in the education system hinder students from the public education system from advancing to higher education. The problem appears to be two-folded. Firstly, the strong private education sector constitute a threat to the students from the poorer public education system, in that the prospective for the latter of entering public universities, which are free and prestigious, seems out of reach as they are not able to compete with students from private schools in the entrance exam, vestibular. The general notion seem to be that 'everyone' is aware of the vast differences between the private and public education systems in Brazil and that only the students who went to private primary and secondary schools will pass vestibular and enter university. This awareness appears to generate stigmatization for the students that have to follow public secondary school.

Secondly, the fact that the education system is constructed in this manner, that the secondary school grades are neglected and to pass an entrance exam is required in the process of entering university, appear to have a negative impact on students from public schools. The students do not have to make an effort in school because the grades they receive when graduating is worthless; it does not count in the further process to enter university. Many students consider themselves without a chance in the competition with the students that attended private schools, and if they already are of the opinion that vestibular is not for them,

and the grades from secondary school do not matter, why would they bother to make an effort in secondary school? The ambiguity in student evaluation contributes to the fact that teachers pass most students, and the students are already aware of this, further contributing to lack of interest in secondary school.

It is relevant to ask in this connection: would a change in system, so that the final grades from secondary school counted in the application to universities? Would the students then have worked harder, knowing that their grades in fact mattered? Today the students know that the grades they achieve are worthless in the process of entering university. And as pointed out in the introduction, the vestibular does not measure academic knowledge, but focuses on memorizing a set of facts (World Bank 2002). The problem is further complicated by the offers of *cursinhos*, courses which specialize in preparing students for the vestibular. These courses are often expensive, hence few youth from poor neighbourhoods can afford to pay for them. Students from wealthy families are again in a stronger position to get into the public universities than students of low-income background.

There are also differences in the quality of the public schools and the newly launched policies by SEE give reason to worry that these differences will increase. SEE rewards to schools with the best performing students financially. The schools that already experience poor conditions run the risk of experiencing further deterioration as the 'best' schools will receive more financial support from SEE and in turn attract 'better' students. In this manner the differences between the schools might expand. It appears that the state of São Paulo is exercising policies that maintain and possibly worsen the vast differences between rich and poor Brazilians. Furthermore, it appears that SEE does not invite teachers to dialogue in central topics concerning school policies. The result of this is confusion in basic regulations for student behavior and evaluation. It is hard to see how a school can function well without clarity in these matters. A valid question to ask in this regard is: can youth participation and dialogue contribute to increasing the quality of education in public secondary schools in São Paulo? Does the JADE project succeed in reaching SEE and hence bring forth the voices of teachers, parents and students? The next two chapters look into this topic. First I discuss the benefits of youth participation in education quality.

5. Benefits of youth participation in education quality

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the benefits of youth participation in education quality. As described in the literature review is the literature on this topic scarce. This fact stresses the importance of giving more attention to this subject, and it is hoped that this thesis can contribute with significant information on the benefits of youth participation in an educational project. The chapter culminates in a discussion on limitations to youth participation in an educational project, and advice to Ação Educativa in their future youth projects in education.

Ação Educativa has substantial experience with youth participation. One of the organization's principles is to always involve youth in projects concerning youth. Two assumptions are implied in this principle. Firstly, youth are key stakeholders in education and are best positioned to advocate for what youth want and need. The second assumption implies that youth are *capable* of giving opinions about school and education, demonstrating faith in youth and their potential. These principles are in concordance with Freire who claims that in the effort to find solutions to a problem, an approach that finds solutions with the people, rather than imposing solutions on them, is preferable (Freire 1974). Since the unequal income distribution systems and the equally inequitable education system are closely connected and have caused tremendous discrepancies between the members of the Brazilian population (Di Pierro 2000), a fight for a more just education system can be seen as an important component of the poor part of the population's liberation process. Freire (1996) underlines the importance of ensuring that the oppressed participate in the liberation process. Youth are key stakeholders in education; hence their participation in the liberation process is vital.

Moreover, in order to attain praxis, Freire (1996) points out that it is necessary to demonstrate faith in the oppressed, and their ability to reflect and think logically. Without trust between the oppressed and those involved in the fight for their liberation, the attempt to establish dialogue, reflection and communication will fail. This underlines the importance of

viewing youth as citizens that are capable of contributing in changing policies that directly affect them in their daily lives. Also, youth's participation and contribution in the educational debate should be considered self-evident and not a privilege that is granted them, as the right to name the world to and engage in praxis to change it is the right of everyone (Freire 1974).

The JADE project is initiated by adults but youth contribute substantially in decision-making. The JADE project therefore belongs to the category of youth participation at the sixth step of Hart's ladder of participation (Hart 1997). According to Hart (1997) is there a natural tendency of excluding certain groups from decision-making, the young being one these groups, and consequently should adult-initiated projects strive to involve these groups in order to challenge the most politically powerful age group in society (those over 25 years of age). In this manner then JADE project appears important.

I want to emphasize that the JADE project was not constructed with the intention of attempting to improve quality in education through youth participation. Rather, youth participation follows as a natural consequence of the organization's principle on engaging youth in issues concerning youth. Therefore, the analysis of youth participation does not constitute an 'evaluation' of the project in this respect, but merely looks into the possibilities of how youth participation can contribute to education quality.

Below follows the main findings of benefits of youth participation in education quality. I have identified three main areas in which youth participation has contributed to increased education quality for the youth agents and/or other youth.

5.2 Personal enrichment

A substantial amount of the youth agent described the JADE project as a 'great personal experience'. Several youth agents claimed that they had been shy and introvert earlier but had gained self confidence from participating in the project. That they had grown from the experience was confirmed by the youth agents themselves, the staff at Ação Educativa, and the teachers. The youth agents referred in particular to both meetings with the teachers in advance of the realization of the project, and the group dialogues as experiences they were proud to handle. The fact that adults, whether it was teachers, principals or parents, *listened*

to them, and that they, the youth, were in charge of the situation was something that seemed to have made an impression on them.

I used to be very shy. JADE gave me the opportunity to talk to other students, to be the leading man. I was dealing with adults, teachers, directors. And imagine! I was there as a student, and I was dialoguing with teachers and adults that are higher than me. Imagine!

(Youth agent, male, former student, 19 years old)

I interpret 'higher than me' as meaning people that have higher status than him.

Furthermore, participation of all youth agents in discussions was central elements in the educational course. The methodology of the course strongly emphasized the capability to argue for one's opinion, but also the ability to listen and pay respect to what the other participants had to say. Several youth agents pointed to the fact that they had learnt how to form an opinion and participate in a discussion.

'I learnt to discuss better. I learnt how to take my points of view and organize my discussion.'

(Youth agent, female, former student, 19 years old)

The way you think changed. You think with more clarity. Other people's point of view... You learn to consider them.

(Youth agent, female, student, 18 years old)

The youth agents expressed great enthusiasm for the educational course and the JADE project in general. The educational course involved discussion and dialogue, and the youth were given the opportunity to express their opinions and also to practice the skill of listening and giving respect to what other people say. It appears that the youth appreciated the methodology of the educational course, and that this methodology in fact involves many of the factors the youth feel are lacking in the teaching in school.

However, the youth agents that were still students at the time of the project period have been able to benefit directly from the JADE experience in their role as students, and it appears that youth participation in fact has led to improved quality in education for these youth. Improved skills and personal development as a result of the project participation has enhanced their performance in school. The teachers reported that the youth agents became more active in class, even the ones that used to be very shy participated more in class.

Those who participated in JADE became more engaged. We note down everyday who participates in class and we registered a change in those who participated in JADE.

(Teacher, male)

Furthermore, some of the youth agents reported that they now, after having participated in the JADE project, wanted a professional career within education. Two of the youth agents claimed in the evaluation meeting that they wanted to study pedagogy and that this desire had emerged as a concrete result of the project participation¹⁶. One of the youth agents was already studying literature in the university and wanted to start working in his former school when he finished his education. He pointed out that the JADE experience was valuable to him because it has given him a broader view of what the situations in the schools are today and in this respect has served as a practical teacher experience.

5.3 Awareness and engagement

Not only did the participation in the JADE project make the youth agents more active and capable of discussing better in class. It appears that two changes, which stretch beyond merely increased participation in class, took place in the youth agents. Firstly, it seems that the youth became aware of the importance of education and that education is *their* responsibility and opportunity. Secondly, it appears that the youth have transformed awareness into engagement in education. One of the youth agents said:

When I participated in JADE I became aware of the responsibility I have for my education. Education is my responsibility! Education is valuable!

(Youth agent, female, student, 18 years old)

A central objective of the JADE project was to find out what youth expect from secondary school, and what they consider worth-while to learn in connection to their future plans. It appears that working with this topic has stimulated awareness on the role and importance of education in the youth agents.

Furthermore, knowledge from the educational course, in particular the education laws and rights, has made the youth agents start to claim their rights in school. ‘We have rights we

¹⁶ Perhaps even more youth agents wanted to work within the area of education but this is not information I possess.

never knew about', one youth agent uttered. The youth agents mentioned ProUni¹⁷, important information about ENEM, and the right to a teacher in every class, as examples of laws and rights they appreciated to learn about. However, the youth are only able to benefit from this knowledge when they make use of it and turn theory into practice, and it appears that they have done so. The teachers noticed a change in the youth's behavior:

Their view on education changed. The shy students started to participate more, both inside and outside the classroom. They learnt that they have rights, and they started to participate in the student council. They got a new political view on the school, and they became interested in educational policies.

(Teacher, male)

The same teachers stated that the most valuable aspect of the JADE project is that the students become familiar with education laws and rights.

Another teacher also reported that the youth agents became more engaged in education and claim their rights:

The opportunity for them [the students] to talk is limited. But they have started to go to the principal now to talk, for instance about missing teachers. They are questioning things like 'why don't we have class?' It is a small group but it is a group.

(Teacher, female)

In one of the other five secondary schools similar actions took place. One of the youth agents explained that his sister, who did not participate in the JADE project herself but that had learnt about education laws and rights through him, had participated in a 'student strike' together with students that participated in the group dialogues in school B. The students had protested against the poor quality in school, in particular because many teachers were missing from class.

¹⁷ ProUni is short for Universidade para todos (university for everyone), a governmental initiative that gives scholarships to students of low socioeconomic background.

The students fought in the school to protest. They went to school but they didn't participate in the classes. It's a big thing. I never imagined that the students would take the idea, the notion of the JADE project. The theory [of the group dialogues] about education and the three ways are just simple things. But the students took the notion, the principal idea; the students understood that they can do something about the situation [in school].

(Youth agent, former student, male, 19 years old)

When I asked the youth agent to describe more in detail how the students fought for their rights in school he explained:

In [name of school B], the students organized a meeting with politicians. My sister participated in the reunion. I don't know exactly what happened. It was the students' initiative, the students was behind it, not the school or the teachers. I know that one problem is that many teachers don't come to class, that many teachers are missing from their classes. This is a big problem and they talk about this, what is happening. And the school said that money is the problem, that there is little money. So the students try to discover why there is little money and the students themselves discover that it's because the politicians cut of a little. So the students were the ones to find out what happened.¹⁸

(Youth agent, male, former student, 19 years old)

By way of analyzing the engagement of the students I look to Freire (1974) who claims that the first step in order to intervene in reality is to identify the society's themes and tasks. This can be done through a critical education that helps people to help themselves by awakening their critical awareness, and in this respect experience conscientization. This is the only way they can advocate for development and change in important matters regarding their life (Freire 1996). Further, how the people act in regard to the themes and tasks demonstrates to a large degree whether the people are Subjects in the world or only objects.

It appears that the JADE project has altered the youth's perception of the role and value of education in their lives, and their own responsibility in this respect. In this manner one may argue that the JADE project has brought conscientization to the youth. It seems like the youth have identified one important theme; the importance of education in their future and the how the poor conditions in public secondary schools affect their education. Moreover, by fighting for their rights and taking actions to change the situation they demonstrate that they approach the themes and tasks as Subjects in their own lives and agents of their own

¹⁸Unfortunately I was not able to talk to the youth agent's sister or the administration in this school to get more insight into the students' participation and what had actually happened with the finances.

recovery. This also demonstrates that the youth have become transitive, meaning that their capability to respond to important questions that influence their lives has increased. People in a transitive state replace disengagement with total engagement (Freire 1974), something the youth clearly have done.

Also, it appears that true dialogue, or praxis, has taken place. Activism is averted as reflection, developed either in the work as youth agents or as participants at the group dialogue day, has preceded the action. Similarly, pure verbalism is avoided in that reflection is followed by action (Freire 1996).

However, it appears that not only the youth agents and the students that participated in the group dialogues have become transitive and exercise dialogue and participation. It might seem like students who have not participated in the JADE project in any way also benefit from the project. This is due to one important aspect of youth participation in an educational project; youth's ability to mobilize other youth.

5.4 Mobilization of youth

Several of the youth agents I interviewed expressed regret that they did not possess some of the knowledge they learnt through the JADE project when they were still in secondary school. The project coordinator confirms that many of the youth agents have expressed this desire in the evaluation of the project, claiming that if they had still been students they would have been able to take advantage of secondary school a lot more. In particular the laws and rights of education, and also a stronger awareness towards the importance of education were brought up as knowledge the youth agents wish they had possessed earlier. One of the youth agents who participated in JADE in her final year of secondary school, and therefore left school right after the project was finished said:

I see that the youth agents that are still in secondary school become leaders. They have some information about education and they fight for their rights, they say 'go, fight for this, it's a right we have'. And I did this when I was in secondary school; I spoke with my friends and other people about the JADE experience. But then I left the secondary school and I am in university now and everything is different so I can't have this experience now; to say to my friends 'this is wrong, this is really wrong, let's change this'.

(Youth agent, former student, female, 19 years old)

I asked the youth agent what she meant by saying that they became leaders. She explained that they did not become formal leaders, but that they were in position to mobilize other students to participate in educational issues because of the knowledge they possess.

During the evaluation meeting the youth agents who were still in secondary school explained that one of the things they liked about the project was the possibility to pass on the knowledge they had acquired through the educational course to other students.

Because I am still in school I can pass on all the knowledge I have learnt to other students.

(Youth agent, student, female, 18 years old)

In the focus group at school C, one of the students I spoke to confirmed this:

I didn't participate in JADE but my sister did and she told me a lot of things. I learnt a lot from her participation! She gave me a lot of information about education, about the laws and what we can do after secondary school.

(Student, female, 18 years old)

The youth agent mentioned earlier whose sister joined the students in school B's fight for their educational rights, explained that his sister had planned to drop out of secondary school because she did not see the purpose of education. However, after he had talked to her about education and the possibilities she had after secondary school if she only finished school, she changed her mind. The sister also enrolled in another educational project by Ação Educativa. In the interview the youth agent explained that via his sister he possesses knowledge about youth participation as a result of the JADE project in his former school.

And the students now talk. I see in [school B] that the students are more active, they talk with the teachers, with the administration. I have connections in this school because my sister goes there. They learnt this; they have learnt that they can talk. I see it in my sister. They learnt that they can talk. Because we [the youth agents] are students, like they are, they see this.

(Youth agent, male, former student, 19 years old)

I asked what the youth agent meant by 'having learnt that they can talk' and he specified that the students had learnt that they can speak out their mind and claim their rights. The quotation shows that the youth agents function as role models to the other students, when the youth agents say that the students see that they are students, just like them, i.e. if they (the youth agents) can fight for their rights, so can they. Furthermore, several youth agents emphasized that it was a great benefit that they, as students or former students, knew the

students' situation. The youth agents understood the students and could relate to what they were saying when various problems and challenges in school came up during the discussions.

Moreover, the youth agents and teachers reported that the students that participated in the group dialogues asked about the project after the group dialogue day was over. One youth agent said:

Something that surprised me the most is that some of them [the students] came to me and asked 'what am I supposed to do to be one of you? I want to be in the JADE project too. Because in my school there are happening many things that I don't want to happen. And I want to change the school'.

(Youth agent, former student, male, 18 years old)

All the youth agents pointed out that many students who attended the group dialogue asked the youth agents when the project would return to their school, and expressed desire to be youth agents themselves. The teachers confirmed that students asked them when the JADE project would return. This can indicate that the students are concerned with their education and the situation in school, but have few opportunities to express their thoughts and views on this, let alone change them. This implies further that the youth *want* to change things if only given the opportunity. However, only when the students are given the opportunity to name the world can change take place (Freire 1996), it appears that this opportunity is seldom given students in school.

One of the reasons for involving youth is to increase the credibility among the students at the five secondary schools. By showing that this is not only adults trying to reach out to youth, but that youth are involved as well, Ação Educativa and the youth agents hoped to get more students to answer the survey and participate in the group dialogues. The youth agents and the teachers reported that many of the secondary school students who participated in the group dialogues were friends of the youth agents. Even though other students who did not know the youth agents participated as well, it appears that youth participation mobilized more students participate in the group dialogues.

Apparently there are several benefits of youth participation in an educational project. However, it appears that on the whole relatively few youth benefit from the project. In this respect I have some recommendations for future educational projects involving youth.

5.5 Limitations to youth participation in education quality

The JADE project has been a valuable experience first and foremost to the 15-20 youth agents who participated. Taken the substantial use of time and resources into account, relatively few youth have benefited extensively from the project. It could be debated in this connection whether it is sensible to spend a substantial amount of money and resources on few youth.

However, the benefits of youth participation appear to be substantial and the principle of involving youth in projects concerning youth should be defended. Nevertheless, I am of the opinion that all youth agents should have been in the first or second year of secondary school at the time of the project. Ação Educativa's reasons for educating youth agents that had already finished school or were in their final year of secondary school were many. Maturity, the ability to watch the students and the school from a distance, and the feeling of responsibility or desire to 'help' their former school, were important reasons. These are valid motives, however, the youth agents that were still in secondary school at the time of the project period have been able to benefit directly from the JADE experience in their position as students, and it appears that these youth agents are able to mobilize other students as well.

5.6 Chapter summary

All youth agents appear to have benefited greatly from participating in the JADE project. However, the youth agents that were still students at the time of the project period have been able to benefit directly from the JADE experience in their role as students, and it appears that youth participation in fact has led to improved quality in education for these youth in several manners. Improved skills and personal development as a result of the project participation has enhanced their performance in school.

Nevertheless, the awareness of the significance of education that has grown stronger in these youth appears to be one of the most important benefits of the JADE project in terms of contributing to education quality. The youth appear to have changed their view on education, and in this respect their motivation for school and engagement in education has increased. The youth have become familiar with the education laws and rights and turns this knowledge into practice by claiming their rights in school. This is of particular importance for these

youth, who experience an unjust education system that in fact appear to hinder their future study opportunities. It appears that the educational course and the JADE project has achieved what Freire considered the ultimate aim of education: conscientization, entailing that the youth acquire insight into important matters in their lives, in this case the importance of education, and act against oppressive elements, in this case a poor education system that does not provide the students with an education of quality.

Furthermore, as Freire point out, for the people that experience oppression is an education that makes people capable of reflecting upon themselves and their role in society, and leave the people with an increased capacity for *choice* to act upon their situation, a prerequisite for a successful transition from naïve transitivity to critical transitivity (Freire 1974). I claim that the educational course and the JADE project constitute such an education course. The students from neighbourhoods of low-income status are victims of an unjust society. The poor situation in secondary school and the lack of future study opportunities deteriorate their situation. It is essential for these youth to acknowledge the possibilities that emerge from valuation of education.

Above all, the JADE project demonstrates that youth are capable of discussing education, and of making efforts to improve the situation in school. This finding supports Checkoway and Richards-Schuster's argument that if young people are given the chance they are *willing* and *able* to participate (Checkoway and Richards-Schuster 2006). It is society's responsibility to start viewing youth as competent citizens, and Ação Educativa should be rewarded for taking this responsibility.

Lastly I want to point out that not only is it important that the youth realize the importance of education, learn about education laws and rights, and turn reflection into action by fighting for their rights in school. That the youth acquire an understanding of the connection between the unjust education system and the vast inequalities between rich and poor in the Brazilian society, and that the construction of the education system is to the poor part of the population's detriment, should also be given emphasis to in the educational program and the JADE project. Only when the youth realize that a change in system is required to put an end to the inequalities in the Brazilian society can they join the fight for an equal education system and end oppression.

It appears that the JADE project contribute to improved quality in education for the students in several manners. Moreover, also dialogue is a central component in the JADE project. Teachers, parents and students are among the stakeholders that debated the role of secondary education. How do these grass root stakeholders perceive the role of dialogue in an educational project? And furthermore, can dialogue contribute to increased quality in education in as well? The next chapter discusses these questions.

6. The role of dialogue in education quality

6.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at the benefits of dialogue as perceived by students, parents and teachers. I will first look at what the grass root stakeholders in education consider to be the most important roles of dialogue, and then I discuss if and/or how dialogue can contribute to education quality. Finally I discuss limitations to dialogue in education quality and bring forth recommendations for Ação Educativa's future projects.

6.2 The role of dialogue as perceived by youth

Due to the difficulties described in the methodology chapter of interviewing students that were not youth agents, I was only able to interview two students who participated in the group dialogues. Moreover, also the youth agents and the teachers contributed with information concerning the students' reactions to the participation in the group dialogue.

6.2.1 Opportunity to express themselves

When asked how the students perceived the group dialogue they explained that they appreciated the opportunity to express their opinions.

This was great with the dialogue: they asked us, what is education to you?
They wanted our point of view.

(Student, female, group dialogue participant, 18 years old)

The fact that the students were eager to discuss education seems evident. Everyone I spoke with; youth agents, teachers and the staff at Ação Educativa, emphasized that the students had appreciated the chance to discuss education and give their views and opinions. One of the youth agents pointed this out in the interview:

What the JADE project taught me the most is that youth want to talk about education. The idea that youth don't just want to make trouble but actually discuss education, needs more attention.

(Youth agent, student, female, 18 years old)

In the group dialogue there was a moment when we were discussing that I heard someone say, ‘this is the first time that someone listened to me, listened to what *I* have to say in school’. It was a student.

(Teacher, male)

According to youth agents and teachers commented many students on the fact that the group dialogue was the first occasion in their entire time in school that anyone had asked *them* about their opinions about school and education.

What did the students express?

When the students got the chance to speak about how they want secondary school to be, a lot of information was produced. One of the most concrete outcomes of the dialogue was the students’ wish for career guidance. The students want information about future job and education possibilities. It appears that many of the students finish secondary school without knowing what they want to, or can, do next. Ação Educativa therefore planned a career guidance day in all five secondary schools as a continuation of the JADE project. I will return to the second phase of the JADE project later in this chapter.

Moreover, the group dialogue also revealed various aspects of the school reality, for instance that many of the students in the evening school had never met the principal. It might not be difficult to understand that the students do not feel attachment or obligation to school if they don’t even feel that they have a leader who cares about them.

The students have limited opportunities to express their opinions about school, and the teachers experience a hectic school day with little time to give attention to, and follow up, the students. For this reason did both students and teachers call out for a reorganization of the entire school day, and a separate class each week in which some students can discuss subjects related to school together with the teachers.

6.2.2 Opportunity for increased understanding of one another

One of the students pointed out that the group dialogue had made her achieve greater understanding for the situation of the teachers.

Before the dialogue I complained a lot about the school administration and the teachers. But in the group dialogue I understood that it is not like that. The teachers want to teach! But there are many things that limit them in their teaching, for instance limited resources.

(Student, group dialogue participant, female, 18 years old)

Furthermore, the dialogue also contributed to revealing different perceptions among students and teachers. One youth agent reported that:

The interesting thing is that teachers say one thing, and the students say another thing. You can see the difference between what they say. The students say that teachers are further away from them, the teachers say that they are not only teaching the subject, but they are doing a job as a friend of the students. They are trying to be more than a teacher. The teachers think they are being more than a teacher. And the students say the contrary.

(Youth agent, former student, male, 18 years old)

By ‘further away’ the youth agent refers to the closeness between the students and the teachers. ‘Further away’ means that the students do not feel that the teachers are close to them and care about them. The youth agent reported that this fact had been revealed in all the three schools he had participated in¹⁹.

This shows that the dialogue can be a place for creating greater understanding and tolerance if only love, humbleness, hope and faith, are present. Without the presence of these elements dialogue cannot take place (Freire 1996).

6.3 The role of dialogue as perceived by parents/guardians

I interviewed one mother who had a daughter in school, and one sister who were guardian for her brother. It turned out that they did not remember that they had participated in the project. The sister explained that it had been a tough year and that she could not remember having participated in the project. At the time of the interview the group dialogue had taken place nearly one year ago. After a while she said that she remembered the group dialogue and that it had been nice to talk to the other participants. More than this she did not

¹⁹ Not all youth agents visited all five secondary schools. Most of the youth agents were in charge of the group dialogues in two or three schools.

remember. The other parent could not remember having participated in the project either. Due to limited resources to spend on translator services I decided not to interview more parents, but to prioritize teachers and students. Originally, I had scheduled an interview with one other parent. He cancelled twice, and because I ran out of time and was not able to conduct the interview. This parent seemed eager to discuss the project participation and I want to point out that the two parents/guardians I interviewed might not provide a proper notion of the parents' perception of, and participation in, the JADE project.

6.4 The role of dialogue as perceived by teachers

Two of the teachers I interview were eager to discuss the project, while the two others were more interested in talking about education in general and their school reality. Three of the teachers were positive towards the project while the fourth teacher expressed disappointment in the project. The teachers that found the project worthwhile reported several benefits of dialogue.

6.4.1 Opportunity to practice the skill of listening

The teachers reported that the group dialogue had been an interesting and valuable lesson in practicing the skill of listening, and one of the teachers recognized 'to listen' as the most important role of the dialogue. Two of the teachers claimed that they had changed the methodology as a result of the participation in the group dialogues. They were now more attentive towards the students, and gave the students more time to express themselves in class. However, one of the teachers who reported that he now gave the students more time to express themselves in class did not demonstrate great listening skills in the interview process. I interviewed him together with two youth, and while the youth hardly got the chance to state their opinions, the teacher talked eagerly during most parts of the interview. I had to interrupt the teacher and cut him off several times in order to let the youth speak as well. I did not observe in any of his classes (the students had vacation the week I visited this school) so I cannot claim that he does not listen better to the students while in class. His behavior during the interview made me a bit skeptic though.

6.4.2 Opportunity to exchange ideas and learn from one another

The teachers also pointed out dialogue as an opportunity to learn from one another and exchange ideas. It appears that the teachers learnt from other teachers as well as from the students. Many of the teachers said that they consider education an 'exchange' hence the dialogue is central, both inside and outside the classroom. In other words, many of the teachers are inspired by Freire's view on learning and teaching. They maintained that it had been valuable to get to know the students' perceptions of various aspects of the school day. Moreover, the teachers reported that they appreciated the opportunity to meet engaged teachers from other schools, and to learn how other teachers confront the challenges in school as they all experience the same problems. The teachers that participate in this project constitute a little group. They are few in numbers, they are engaged and they are willing to sacrifice their limited spare time on voluntary work. Mostly it was only one or two teachers from each school who participated in the JADE project.

One of the teachers reported that he in particular had liked to learn about education rights through his participation in the JADE project, and that he now talked to the students about them.

The students do not believe in higher education. When they finished basic education and secondary school they do not know what comes next. What I do is dialogue with them about what comes next; 'you are here in secondary school now, let us talk about what happens afterwards'. I talk to them about ENEM, vestibular and about the different laws. The students do not know these laws. They come to the end of secondary school and they know nothing about the laws, their rights or what they are going to do afterwards.

(Teacher, male)

This appears to be an important outcome of the JADE project. If the teachers pass on to the students the knowledge they have acquired through the project, for instance on education laws and rights, this can be a valuable source of information for the students and possibly support them in the attempt to try to pass vestibular and be accepted in university. The teacher and the youth agents carry out the same action in the meeting with students: they pass on important information to other students. This information, and possibly the motivation and inspiration it gives the students, is crucial for these students because of the way the education system is constructed, and the poor state of the public education system.

6.4.3 Opportunity for increased understanding of one another

The teachers reported that the group dialogue gave them the opportunity to see that the students have the will and the capability to discuss education. Another teacher said that he was impressed with all the interesting contributions from the students in the discussion.

When the students get the opportunity to express themselves they know how to do it. There were some rebellious students in the group dialogue, but when they started talking... Wow! They noticed that they were not only rebellious, but that they had also something to tell, something to offer. The project shows that what is lacking in school is not students with ideas and opinions, but the opportunity for students to express themselves.

(Teacher, female)

Moreover, some of the other staff at the school, in one case the canteen personnel, could report that many students are for instance concerned because they have money problems. The students are struggling to find a job and worry about this. Due to poor economy some students lack money to buy food. This will affect their ability to learn and their behavior in class. Even though the teacher cannot help the students directly, it can give the teachers greater understanding for the students' behavior and perhaps make the teachers show more concern for the students.

6.5 How does dialouge contribute to education quality?

On a micro level, dialogue might contribute to education quality in that it creates a better learning environment for the students. The psychosocial environment in school is important to the students, and dialogue allows students and teacher to increase the tolerance and understanding for one another. The JADE project shows that the students do not lack ideas and opinions, as some teachers allegedly claim, but on the contrary; they lack the opportunity to express these opinions. From the group dialogue emerged the need for a similar opportunity to express and exchange ideas in school.

In which ways dialogue can contribute to education quality on a macro level, in terms of influencing education policies, has been more difficult to identify within this project. As explained in the introduction was one of the objectives of the project to develop recommendations for public secondary school based on the results from the quantitative survey and the group dialogues, and I interpreted this as meaning that Ação Educativa

wanted to influence and change education policies. This would be a way of truly giving voice to the students in education planning and decision-making. However, as the next section demonstrates I was slightly confused as to how Ação Educativa intended to make use of the recommendations generated from the JADE project.

6.6 Limitations to dialogue in education quality

The project contributes to improved education quality in several ways. However, there are limitations to the project that raises the question to which extent the project can contribute to increased education quality in the long run.

6.6.1 Ambiguous long-term planning

Since the presentation of the project stated that the general object was to ‘compose guidelines for public secondary education’ I expected that the organization had a plan for how the recommendations based on the information generated from the group dialogues and the survey would be used to change the policies, for instance through a link to the macro system and the Education Secretary (SEE). However, it appears that the project’s link to the macro system, the Education Secretary of the state of São Paulo (SEE) is weak. Lack of connection to the macro-system will set limitations to what educational projects such as JADE can achieve in terms of influencing and changing existing policies. As Ginsburg and Gorostiaga (2003) point out is the only form of true dialogue collective research and praxis, which involves joint construction of theory and research as well as policy and practice with all stakeholders in education, from community stakeholders to theorists/researchers and policy makers/practitioners.

In the group which formed recommendations for public secondary school based on information from the quantitative survey and the group dialogue, a representative from the SEE was present. However, this appears to be the only link to the macro system the organization has in this project. Nevertheless, the fact that Ação Educativa struggles to establish a link to the macro system can be explained by the fact that SEE denies community stakeholders to engage in the educational debate, a claim which has already been supported by the teachers, and in this respect point in the direction that SEE has a privatized

conception of democracy (Sehr cited in Ginsburg and Gorostiaga 2003). Consequently the weakness lies with SEE and not Ação Educativa.

Yet, during my stay in São Paulo I struggled to achieve an understanding of what Ação Educativa intended to do with the recommendations and what the ultimate objective of the project was. In fact I missed a long-term plan for the project. The coordinator of the project referred to the career guidance day as their next step in the process and it seemed that the intention was not to change the education policies in the state of São Paulo as I originally thought. After my return to Norway I corresponded with Ação Educativa via email and posed questions that had arose after I started the analysis. I questioned how the recommendations from the group dialogues would be used, and the coordinator now explained that the objective of the project was not to change the educational policies because this is a very difficult process as the SEE is highly demanding to cooperate with. She pointed out that Ação Educativa did not want to work for 'career guidance' as a separate subject in the curriculum, but that they hoped that the teachers would incorporate information about future job and work opportunities for the students in the teaching. The fact that Ação Educativa finds a way including results from the group dialogues and the quantitative survey in the teaching in school should be acknowledged. Moreover, this initiative constitutes true dialogue; reflection and action. New knowledge is produced through dialogue, but it does not remain verbalism as this knowledge is put into action. The action is not activism as thorough reflection precedes the action (Freire 1974). Also, the initiative is rooted in the youth's perception of what they consider worth-while knowledge.

Furthermore, the coordinator answered that the recommendations would be elaborated in the National Secretariat for Youth where Ação Educativa is represented. At the same time, the coordinator explained, is Ação Educativa part of a network of NGOs which were present at an international seminar about secondary education organized by UNICEF in Buenos Aires. Further, the coordinator conveyed that the same group of NGOs would meet with the Minister of Education in Brazil to discuss the construction of a national agenda for secondary education in Brazil. Apparently, the organization has potential, ambition and connections to contribute to improving the public education system. Moreover, it seems like Ação Educativa is an organization that develops projects a long the way; the road is made while walking it, so to speak. This does not necessarily constitute a negative thing. However, when a long-term plan is missing it might be difficult to the Norwegian partner organizations

to keep an overview of the projects and keep track of the organization's progress and results – be it the desire of the partner organizations. Also, Ação Educativa might suffer from poor long-term planning as obstacles and inefficiencies might occur, for instance when the resources are limited.

6.6.2 Limited resources

The career guidance day, which was one specific outcome of the group dialogues, was supposed to be the second phase of the JADE project. However, due to limited resources the organization did not know whether it would be possible to realize this day or not. This confused me as I thought the financial support from OD/NCA was going to last from 2006 to 2010. Right before I left São Paulo the coordinator of the project got the news that the German organization Kinder Not Hilfe (KNH) wanted to support the continuation of the JADE project. This organization has supported Ação Educativa for several years. However, KNH cut the financial support slightly and Ação Educativa received only 75 % of the resources the organization had calculated with. The project therefore had to be changed to adjust to the resources available. One might ask in this regard, what would have happened if KNH had not decided to support the continuation of the project?

At the time of my departure Ação Educativa had no specific plans to educate new youth agents. I questioned this fact as it seemed peculiar to spend substantial resources on developing an educational program for youth and only realize it once. However, in recent conversations with the representative from NCA I received the pleasant news that Ação Educativa plans to educate 20 new youth agents in the coming year.

It is my last recommendation for Ação Educativa that the organization elaborates a long-term plan for the project that includes the ultimate objectives of the project, the methods for achieving these objectives and a financial plan.

The final limitation to dialogue in education quality discusses the project's foundations in schools. However, I argue that this limitation should be considered a challenge rather than an argument against the project.

6.6.3 Weak foundation in schools

It appears that it is difficult to recruit participants to a project like this, in particular teachers and staff from the administration. Teachers and the youth agents in two of the schools also reported that they had experienced slight difficulties in recruiting participants to the group dialogue. The teachers' busy schedules make them skeptical towards spending time on voluntary work. Several of the meetings were held on Saturdays. It was mostly one or two teachers from each school who participated in the project. Also principals had difficulties finding time to participate. In some schools the principals were not interested in participating in the project, and only gave the teachers permission to participate as long as they did not spend any of their working hours in school on the project. The one principal I met had participated in one meeting early in the project period, but had to drop out of the project due to lack of time. She did not have much to say about the project except that she thought the youth agents had contributed positively in school and she was sad to see them leave the school so soon.

Not only did few teachers choose to participate in the project, but those who participated experienced little support both from other teachers and the school administration. One of the teachers who participated explained to me that it is important to have the principal on 'their' side in issues like this.

I missed a stronger participation from the principal and administration. What the principal says matters, has an impact on the teachers. It would be positive if the project belonged to the school in a greater sense, not only that it was the project of [name of teacher] and [name of teacher]. All colleagues from the other schools experience this. Only one principal participated fully in the project.

(Teacher, female)

It turns out that the project struggles to achieve a solid foundation within the schools. Moreover, one of the teachers expressed great disappointment in the project, and claimed that his school had decided not to participate in the project any longer. The teacher stated that the efforts the project demanded did not correspond to the results the project achieved. I emailed the teacher to achieve a better understanding of why he perceived the project as disappointing and not worth-while. I did not receive an answer from him.

Yet, the JADE project appears to be important in numerous ways, and a weak connection to the schools should not be considered an argument the project but rather a challenge one should try to find creative solutions to.

6.7 Chapter summary

There appears to be several benefits of dialogue in education quality. Dialogue provides an opportunity for the youth themselves to ‘name the world’, rather than having it named for them, which is essential in the struggle for liberation (Freire 1996). The JADE project also provides the students with an opportunity to express what they consider worth-while knowledge, and in this connection the youth have expressed several suggestions as to how the education system can be improved.

According to Freire (1996) is love both the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself. Without love for the people and the world, dialogue cannot take place. Humbleness and faith in humankind are also prerequisites for true dialogue (Freire 1996). It appears that these factors have been present in the group dialogues. Tolerance and understanding between students and teachers have prospered, and the dialogue has made teachers and students realize that they are all victims of a poor education system that fails in providing an education of quality for the students.

Praxis has emerged out of the project as Ação Educativa plan to follow up the first phase of the project with a career guidance day. However, if the organization aims to change existing policies, a stronger connection to the macro system is required. In the case of São Paulo it appears that this connection is difficult to establish as the Secretary of Education does not seem to welcome community stakeholders in the educational debate.

Also, it appears that Ação Educativa struggles to achieve connection to the schools as well. However, I argue that this does not constitute an argument against the organization’s efforts. Rather, the organization’s initiatives appear important and should be continued. Nevertheless, I do recommend Ação Educativa to look to other NGO’s that have achieved results in secondary education, and the organization should strive to find ways of establishing a more solid foundation in the schools. Further, a long term plan for the project appears to be vital.

I now turn to the closing chapter of this thesis which discusses the main findings of the research.

7. Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This final chapter discusses the main findings of the research and discuss the implications of these findings. I also address gaps and limitations to the research, as well as pointing out future areas of research that have emerged out of this study.

7.2 Summary of main findings

This research has shown that youth are highly concerned with learning, or the lack of learning, in school. Moreover, the youth have strong preferences in terms of how they want the teaching-learning situation to be. The youth are also highly concerned about the psychosocial environment in school. It appears that this is quality education to the youth: to learn in an environment that is stimulating, with varied methodology, with teachers that listen to them, respect them and support them – also in matters do not relate strictly to the subjects.

However, it appears that there is little sense in discussing quality in education without considering the factors that prevent quality from taking place. Motivation for school can be stimulated through awareness of the purpose of education, and this notion appears to be vital if quality education is to take place. The JADE project has demonstrated that youth participation has led to awareness on the value of education in the youth agents. Moreover, the fact that the youth agents have acquired knowledge about their education rights through the educational course has stimulated the youth to fight for their rights in school. The youth agents have also inspired other students to claim their rights in school. I argue that these effects of youth participation are vital for the students in public secondary schools in São Paulo both because of the way the education system is constructed, but also because of the threat from the strong private education system. These two factors are closely linked together in that the structure of the education system would not have constituted such an obstacle to the public school students' future university opportunities as it does today, had it

not been for the strong private education system. Teachers and students call out for a change of system and claim that the system itself hinders the students from public schools to attain public universities. Many students from public school fail, or do not even try to pass, vestibular, knowing that they most likely cannot compete with students from private schools. Also, stigmatization connected to attending public schools lead many students to think that higher education is not for them. Naturally, other reasons such as family background might influence this perception.

Would the students have worked harder, knowing that their grades from secondary school actually mattered in the application to universities? As pointed out in the first chapter does not vestibular measure academic knowledge (World Bank 2002), and by eradicating vestibular one would ascertain that the students are not be tested in knowledge they have not learnt in school. In addition, many students from high-income backgrounds can afford to pay for expensive courses that are designed with the only purpose of preparing the students for vestibular.

The human rights declaration states that higher education should be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. Is higher education equally accessible to all students in Brazil today? I argue that the answer to this question is debateable.

However, it must be acknowledged that Brazil works in order to improve the quality of education in public schools, and history has shown that to promote increase in quantity and quality at the same time can be challenging. Often the natural process entails that the quantity comes first and quality follows after. Nevertheless, how can we know whether the education system only needs time to improve the quality of education, or if the poor quality is the result of a system that is not capable of facilitating improvements or, or even worse: a system that does not want to change, and hence the quality will remain poor? The case of Brazil might be different from other countries which have experienced a substantial increase in students' enrolment because Brazil has a strong private education system. The longer it takes to improve the quality of the public education system, the longer the vast differences between poor and rich will continue to grow due to the strong private education system. The students that attend private education will continue to dominate the public, prestigious and free universities, and in turn ensure good jobs and a high income. As Schwartzman (2004) point out is expenditure in education strongly biased towards higher education. In this

manner the government subsidizes higher education for the students of high-income background.

Today there are not enough places in public universities to hold all students from both private and public school, and the students from private school receive little competition from the students from public schools. This is naturally only speculations but one might be tempted to ask; how strong are the interests in protecting the education privileges of the rich part of the population? As shown in the introduction chapter, Brazil has a long history of considering education a privilege of the rich part of the population. Is this notion still present in the Brazilian society?

It appears that the teachers that participated in the JADE project have one important characteristic in common: they have all understood the obstacles in the education system, and the importance of making the students understand that they have opportunities and options. Whether it is to convince them that they can pass vestibular, educate them about education rights or give the students examples of other students from the poor neighbourhood that have become something – these are all ways of promoting understanding among the students from poor neighbourhoods that also they can achieve something. These teachers are fighting for their students, for their liberation. One of the teachers defined quality in education in this way: quality education is to open the eyes of the students and make them realize all the opportunities and possibilities they have. This definition of quality education appears to be particularly proper for the students in public secondary school in the state of São Paulo.

However, as Freire (1974) pointed out, the students must identify the themes and tasks themselves, only in this manner can they fight for their own liberation and become agents of their own recovery. It appears that the JADE project has brought conscientization to the youth. One can hope that these youth enter the educational debate and advocate a change in the system so that a more just education system can emerge.

Feedback from teachers and NGOs, represented by Ação Educativa, gives reason to worry that the SEE does not even make simple efforts in increasing the quality of education. It appears that the state of São Paulo has a privatized conception of democracy (Sehr cited in:

Ginsburg and Gorostiaga 2004) and that there is a communication gap between policy makers and the other stakeholders in education²⁰. SEE appear to neglect the voices of NGOs or teachers, and several of SEE's new policies give reason to worry. It seems that the government has not responded to the teachers demand for clarity concerning basic regulations that must be in place in every well-functioning school, such as regulations for student evaluation. Moreover, eradicating the teachers' planning days can hardly be considered wise move in increasing the quality of education. If education quality is exercised in the classroom, factors that facilitate a good learning environment must be prioritized. It is hard to see that SEE works to improve the situation of the teachers and subsequently the learning environment in school. Furthermore, the new grade system that awards the schools with the highest achieving students can at worse contribute to an even more considerable gap between the rich and poor part of the population.

7.3 Gaps and limitations to the research

I realize that in terms of method I could have taken time to observe the practice in class as this would have provided me with a better understanding of the teaching-learning environment the students prefer and do not prefer. Furthermore, I realize that it would have been a benefit to the research had I been able to interview representatives from the SEE. I also acknowledge that I cannot claim anything in regard to the practice of democracy by SEE. The research only point to indications that SEE might not exercise a public notion of democracy, and in fact hinder improvement of the quality of education, but does not investigate further to which extent democracy in education is exercised in the state of São Paulo.

This research does not consider the efforts by SEE to attract more students of low-income backgrounds to universities. These efforts might contribute to increasing the number of students of low-income background in universities; however, a change in the system is essential if higher education is to be equally accessible to all on the basis of merits. Further,

²⁰ I realize that I have not considered the policy makers communication with theorist. Time prevented me from looking into this. However, Ação Educativa has cooperated with researcher and academics from the University of São Paulo and in this respect can Ação Educativa be said to represent theorists as well.

the research does not look into SEE's perception of education quality and the efforts made by SEE to improve the quality of education, for instance the new reform for secondary education. Also, this thesis does not investigate the relation between researchers/theorists and policy makers.

7.4 Future research areas

Several interesting areas of future research have emerged out of this research. In particular democracy in education in the state of São Paulo is one research is that should be given attention in future studies. Youth participation in education has received little attention among researchers. This study has demonstrated that this topic constitutes a highly interesting area of research, and more research on this topic should be welcomed.

7.5 Implications for policy and practice

The findings of this research indicate that more resources need to be spent in education, both in secondary education and in higher education. More resources should be directed towards teacher salaries so that teachers are not forced to hold several jobs at one time. It is also essential to contemplate how the school day and the learning in class can improve, and the system needs to change in several manners. For instance, should student democracy in school be encouraged? Opportunities for students to express opinions in school should be facilitated, for instance in terms of one class each week set aside to this. Clarity concerning student evaluation should be self-evident for every education system. Apparently it is not so in the state of São Paulo. Also, to eradicate the teachers planning day does not appear to contribute to a better learning environment and education quality, and should be brought back in school.

Furthermore, the education system as it is constructed today favours students from private schools and of high-income background. Vestibular should be abandoned and a system that values the grades the students attain in their final year in secondary school should be introduced. Furthermore, no one should have to attain secondary school at night time. The students that attend classes at night are almost solely of low-income background. One can only imagine how this affects the learning of the students that are forced to study at night

time after having, most likely, been working all day. Hopefully, Ação Educativa and the JADE project can serve as a start for a constructive debate on how the public secondary education in the state of São Paulo can improve.

Appendix A

Interview guide: Youth agents

1. What do you think were the most positive aspects of participating in the project?
2. What did you learn from participating in the project?
3. Can you tell me about the experience from the group dialogues?
4. What did you learn from the group dialogues?
5. How did the students that participated in the group dialogues react to the dialogue?
6. Was there anything you learnt from the JADE experience that surprised you?
7. If anything, what was negative about the experience?
8. Could anything have been done differently?
9. Do you think this project is important to participate in? Why/why not?
10. If yes, important to whom?
11. Would you recommend other students and schools to participate in similar projects?
Why/why not?
12. Have you changed in any way after you participated in the project?
13. How do you think one can mobilize more youths to engage in the educational debate?
14. In general, how did you experience secondary school?
15. What did you like about being a student in secondary school?
16. Are there things you did not like about secondary school?
17. Is there anything you would have liked to change about your education and the school day? If yes, what?
18. Is there anything you missed in your education/school reality?
19. What is a good teacher to you?
20. What kind of classes or teaching did you like?

Appendix B

Interview guide: Teachers

1. What do you think about being part of the JADE project?
2. What do you think were the most positive aspects of the project?
3. What did you learn from participating in the project?
4. How did you experience the group dialogues?
5. What did you learn from the group dialogues?
6. If anything, what was negative about the experience?
7. Could anything have been done differently?
8. After having participated in the group dialogues: have you changed in any way?
9. Have you noticed any changes in the students that participated in the JADE project?
If yes, what kind of changes?
10. Do you think it is important to participate in this project? Why/why not?
11. If yes, important to whom?
12. Would you recommend other students and schools to participate in similar projects?
Why/why not?
13. What is it like to be a teacher in a public secondary school in São Paulo?
14. Is there anything you would like to change about your situation? If yes, what?

References

- Acção Educativa. 2007. *Who We Are*. São Paulo. (retrieved from: http://www.acaoeducativa.org.br/portal/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=12&Itemid=172) [Accessed: 25.11.2008]
- Acção Educativa. 2008. *Olhares para o ensino médio. Relatório*. São Paulo.
- Ansell, Nicola. 2005. *Children, Youth and Development*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Batista Araújo e Oliveira, João. 2004. Expansion and Inequality in Brazilian Education. In Brock, Colin and Schwartzman, Simon (Eds) *The Challenges of Education in Brazil*. Oxford: Symposium Books.
- Blom, Andreas, Holm-Nielsen, Lauritz and Verner, Dorte. 2001. *Education, Earnings, and Inequality in Brazil, 1982-1998. Implications for Education Policy. Policy Research Working Paper 2686*. Washington D.C.: World Bank.
- Breidlid, Anders. 2004. Sustainable Development, Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Education in South Africa. *Journal of Teacher Education and Training*, Vol. 4, pp 1-16.
- Brock-Utne, Birgit. 2000. *Whose Education for All? The Recolonization of the African Mind*. New York: Falmer Press.
- Bryman, Alan. 2004. *Social Research Methods. 2nd ed.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Câmara, Jacira, Cândido, Gomes and Capanem, Clélia F. 2000. Brazil: Undercoming Five Centuries of Undereducation. In: Majorek, Czeslaw, Mazurek, Kas and Winter, Margret A (Eds) *Education in a Global Society. A Comparative Perspective*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Cammarota, Julio, Ginwright, Shawn and Noguera, Pedra (Eds) *Beyond Resistance! Youth Activism and Community Change. New Democratic Possibilities for Practice and Policy for America's Youth*. New York: Routledge.
- Checkoway, Barry and Richards-Schuster, Katie. 2006. Youth Participation for Educational Reform in Low-Income Communities of Color. In: Cammarota, Julio, Ginwright, Shawn and Noguera, Pedra (Eds) *Beyond Resistance! Youth Activism and Community Change. New*

Democratic Possibilities for Practice and Policy for America's Youth. New York: Routledge.

Coombs, Philip H. 1968. *The World Educational Crisis. A Systems Analysis*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Coombs, Philip H. 1969. Time for a change of strategy. In: Beeby, C.E. (Ed) *Qualitative aspects of educational planning*. Unesco: International Institute for Educational Planning. Paris.

Di Pierro, María Clara. 2000. Public Policy and Adult Education for Women in Brazil. In: Cortina, Regina and Stromquist, Nelly P. (Eds) *Distant Alliances. Promoting Education for Girls and Women in Latin America*. New York: RoutledgeFalmer.

Durham, Eunice R. 2004. Higher Education in Brazil: public and private. In: Brock, Colin and Schwartzman, Simon (Eds) *The Challenges of Education in Brazil*. United Kingdom: Oxford. Symposium Books.

Fossum, Paul R. and Kubow, Patricia K. 2003. Teacher Peripheralization in Comparative Education: Causes, Consequences, and Some Responses. In: Ginsburg, Mark B. and Gorostiaga, Jorge M. (eds) *Limitations and Possibilities of Dialogue among Researchers, Policy Makers, and Practitioners*. New York: RoutledgeFalmer.

Freire, Paulo. 1974. *Education for Critical Consciousness*. New York: Seabury Press

Freire, Paulo. 1996. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. London: Penguin.

Ginsburg, Mark B. and Gorostiaga, Jorge M. 2003. Dialogue about Educational Research, Policy, and Practice: To What Extent Is it Possible and Who Should be Involved? In: Ginsburg, Mark B. and Gorostiaga, Jorge M. (eds) *Limitations and Possibilities of Dialogue among Researchers, Policy Makers, and Practitioners*. New York. RoutledgeFalmer.

Gómes de Souza, Luis A. and Ribeiro, Lucía. 1976. *Youth participation in the development process: a case study in Panama*. Paris: The Unesco Press.

-
- Guimarães de Castro, Maria Helena & Tiezzi, Sergio. 2004. The Reform of Secondary Education and the Implementation of ENEM in Brazil. In: Brock, Colin and Schwartzman, Simon (Eds) *The Challenges of Education in Brazil*. Oxford: Symposium Books.
- Hart, Roger A. 1997. *Children's Participation. The theory and practice of involving young citizens in community development and environmental care*. London: Earthscan Publications Limited.
- Hausman, Fay and Haar, Jerry. 1978. *Education in Brazil*. Connecticut: Hamden.
- Johannessen, Eva Marion. 2006. *Basic Education – also a question of quality*. Save the Children Norway. (Retrieved from: www.reddbarna.no/default.asp?HMFILE=54214) [Accessed 01.10.2008].
- Kvale, Steinar. 1996. *InterViews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Marshall, Catherine and Gretchen B. Rossman. 1995. *Designing Qualitative Research. Second Edition*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.
- Marshall, Catherine and Gretchen B. Rossman. 2006. *Designing Qualitative Research. Fourth Edition*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Nagel, Tove. 2003. *What is quality of education and why is it important for development?* Keynote speech. International Conference on Quality of Education. Oslo. (Retrieved from www.reddbarna.no/default.asp?HMFILE=47574) [Accessed: 01.12.2008].
- Norwegian Church Aid. 2008. *Hvem er vi?* (Retrieved from: <http://www.kirkensnodhjelp.no/no/Om-Kirkens-Nodhjelp/Om-Kirkens-Nodhjelp/>) [Accessed: 25.01.2009].
- O'Cadiz, Maria del Pilar, Torres, Carlos Alberto and Wong, Pia L. 1998. *Education and Democracy. Paulo Freire, Social Movements, and Educational Reform in São Paulo*. Oxford: Westview Press.
- Operation Dayswork. 2008. *What is Operation Dayswork?* (Retrieved from: <http://www.od.no/Artikler/964.html>) [Accessed: 25.01.2009].

Patton, Michael Quinn. 1980. *Qualitative Evaluation Methods*. Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, Inc.

Peters, R. S. 1973. *The Concept of Education*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.

Schwartzman, Simon. 2004. The Challenges of Education in Brazil. In Brock, Colin and Schwartzman, Simon (Eds) *The Challenges of Education in Brazil*. Oxford: Symposium Books.

Silverman, David. 2005. *Doing Qualitative Research. A Practical Handbook. Second Edition*. London: Sage Publications, Inc.

Soares, Francisco. 2004. Quality and Equity in Brazilian Basic Education: facts and possibilities. In: Brock, Colin and Schwartzman, Simon (Eds) *The Challenges of Education in Brazil*. Oxford: Symposium Books.

UN. 1948. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948*. New York.

UNESCO. 2000. *The Dakar Framework for Action*. Paris.

UNESCO. 2004[a]. *Education for All: The Quality Imperative. EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005*. Paris: UNESCO.

UNESCO. 2004[b]. *Empowering youth through national policies*. Paris. (Retrieved from: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001345/134502e.pdf>) [Accessed: 01.02.2009]

UNESCO. 2008. *Brazil Country Case. Country Profile prepared for the Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2008*. (Retrieved from: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001555/155530e.pdf>) [Accessed: 25.01.2009]

UNICEF. 1989. *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. New York.

UNICEF. 2000. *Defining Quality in Education*. Working paper series. New York. (Retrieved from: www.unicef.org/girlseducation/files/QualityEducation.PDF) [Accessed: 01.03.2009]

Wehmeier, Sally (Ed.). 2000. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wishart, Craig G. and DeStefano, Joseph. 2003. Reinventing Research for Educational Reform: Advocacy Research and the Promotion of Participation. In: Ginsburg, Mark B. and Gorostiaga, Jorge M. (Eds) *Limitations and Possibilities of Dialogue among Researchers, Policy Makers, and Practitioners*. New York: RoutledgeFalmer.

Wong, Pia L. and Balestino, Ramon. 2001. Prioritizing the education of marginalized young people in Brazil: a collaborative approach. *Journal of Education Policy*, 16:6, pp 597-618.

World Bank. 2002. *Higher Education in Brazil. Challenges and Options. A World Bank Country Study*. Washington, D.C.

World Bank. 2004. *Inequality and Economic Development in Brazil. A World Bank Country Study*. Washington D.C.