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Pathways of Hope for the Favela Youth:

A Case Study of Emancipatory Education as a Tool for Individual and Community

Transformation

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Education

by

Veriene Melo

2018

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Pathways of Hope for the Favela Youth:

A Case Study of Emancipatory Education as a Tool for Individual and Community

Transformation

by

Veriene Melo

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2018

Professor Carlos A Torres, Chair

Lacking decent educational, employment and cultural opportunities, globally, generations of young people struggle to cultivate their potential and act upon their dreams for a better future. Those living amidst poverty and violence are particularly exposed to vulnerabilities that limits their ability to escape from exclusion and move up the social ladder. Generally, youth facing marginalization are approached either as a problem to be dealt with through repressive policies or passive objects of social action, rather than subjects, rights-holders, and creators of innovative solutions to contemporary societal challenges. As we consider more inclusive and context-sensitive ways to work for and with young people, emancipatory education offers a relevant framework of theory and practice that can inform efforts to capacitate, empower, and more actively engage youth in local development processes.

Informed by the theoretical lens of critical pedagogy and employing a qualitative case study methodology, this dissertation explores the opportunities and constraints of applying

elements of a Freirean emancipatory education in non-formal youth education provisions as an instrument to promote individual and territorial transformation in communities at the margins. Drawing from qualitative and quantitative data from an entrepreneurship program supporting hundreds of youth from the favelas and peripheries of Rio de Janeiro in advancing their own actions for change, the study investigates into three central thematics concerning: the lifeworld of participants and outcomes at the individual level; project creation and community impact; and program methodology vis-a-vis the underlying dimensions of critical pedagogy and applicability lessons.

Following the systematization and linkage of theories, processes, methods and experiences, the study findings demonstrate the program's relevance to broader opportunity schemes in youth empowerment, youth-led community transformation, and a youth-centered emancipatory education, contributing to a better understanding of critical pedagogy as a platform of possibility for young people in poverty-stricken territories. Together, these practical tools for capacity building, protagonism and participation - which draw from youth's social history and knowledge - provides an illustration of how young people take part in social action, exercise their agency, and promote their cultural identities, while creating new platforms to challenge exclusion and advance practices of positive social regeneration.

The dissertation of Veriene Melo is approved.

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INTRODUCTION

Personal statement

This dissertation is born out of some fieldwork experience I had in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro starting when I was a graduate student at Stanford University, but my personal connection to issues which are at the heart of this study took root much earlier. I was born and raised in the Baixada Fluminense, one of the most impoverished and violent metropolitan peripheries of Rio de Janeiro. Life was full of challenges, but seeing family and friends around me find the strength to keep going and overcome obstacles along the way taught me an important lesson about perseverance and determination that has carried me through to where I stand today. I might not have known it yet back then, but my passion for social justice issues and my utmost belief in the transformative power of education, which would come to shape my professional future, is a direct reflection of my background and experiences growing up in a poor Latin American community at the margins of the urban promise.

My longtime pursuit of education began at the age of nineteen when I moved from Brazil to the United States in search of better opportunities. My experience as an immigrant led me to engage with and build a profound respect for the Latino community, taking an interest for their language, rich culture, and plight - a real-life connection that translated into an academic interest. Beginning my studies at a community college, I moved on to graduate with honors from the University of Colorado Denver with a Bachelor's in International Studies and Spanish, subsequently earning a Master's in Latin American Studies on a full fellowship awarded to promising students from the region. Not only am I a first-generation college student but one of a handful people in my entire extended family to have a Bachelor's degree, the first to have gone to graduate school, and now I become the

only one to have earned a doctorate.

Having the chance to dedicate four years of my life to exploring the potential of education to transform individuals and communities in neighbouring territories to where I grew up was, therefore, a special and inspiring endeavour that have come to symbolize a lot more than a step in fulfilling the requirements of a PhD degree; writing this dissertation took me through a journey into my own life trajectory. My study sensitivity - which, I believe, is one of the biggest strengths of the research - lies in my understanding of the society, culture, and population under analysis by first-hand experience and engagement with them. While going through the data sets, particularly the qualitative findings, I was oftentimes able to relate the life stories and experiences of participants with my own background and approach to education as a window of opportunity and hope in a context of limited development pathways.

The selection of the unit of analysis, theoretical framework, and research methods used in the study was the result of a natural and straightforward process. From my very first day at UCLA I knew that I wanted to analyze the Agency program from a critical pedagogy standpoint and with a focus in people's lived experiences. In fact, my enthusiasm for the inspiring work I had seen Agency carry out with young favela residents on the ground and my strong interest in the contributions of Paulo Freire to education is what inspired me to pursue a PhD in the first place. That said, drawing from strong data sets and employing the analytical rigour and ethics required of any sound scientific study, this dissertation is a platform to advocate for the advancement of participatory and empowering approaches to education that can provide youth in marginalized communities with the knowledge, skills, and tools to navigate their future and lead transformational change; initiatives which can help form more critical and active young citizens by giving them a chance to tap into their enormous potential.

Rationale

Findings effective ways to educate, employ, engage, and potentialize the urban youth[1] is perhaps one of the most critical problems our societies face today. In an unprecedented demographics scenario, close to half of the world's population is now aged 30 or less (IndexMundi, 2017; UNESCO, 2017). As greater numbers of increasingly younger labour-seeking people move from rural to impoverished informal settlements scattered around global cities, the more pressing the issue of youth development becomes. By 2030, it is estimated that as much as 60% of urban dwellers will be under the age of 18 (UN-Habitat, 2012). Unfortunately, societies exhibiting the largest number of young populations are also the ones less equipped to adequately meet their needs and demands.

Roughly 90% of the 1.8 billion global youth aged 15-24 are concentrated in less developed countries, which often fall short in providing them with adequate mechanisms for social protection and physical security (Lord, 2016; The Commonwealth, 2016). Lacking proper educational, cultural and work opportunities, globally, large numbers of youth are left to fend for themselves and their families (hence, their great participation in informal labour markets), while being denied access to platforms to cultivate their potential and realize their dreams for a better future. Exposed to extraordinary vulnerabilities and threats, they are limited in their ability to play a full role in society and move up the social ladder (OECD, 2017).

Racially and economically marginalized youth living in impoverished communities are particularly vulnerable to social exclusion and violence. The sweeping presence of drug

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[1] Although generally understood as a transitional period between childhood and adolescence as one gradually progresses to adulthood, there is a lack of international consensus on the age definition of youth. For example, the European Union uses 15-29, while the World Health Organization (WHO) works with a range of 10-29 and the African Union 15-35. Universally, for statistical consistency, the UN defines youth as 15-24 year olds, although it allows flexibility for national bodies to adopt different age ranges to better reflect their activities (The Commonwealth, 2016). For the scope of this study, "youth" is understood as those aged 15-29, which is the official policy framework used in Brazil. In any case, whenever a figure is given, the appropriate age range will also be made available. For more see UNESCO, 2016.

trafficking networks across national and regional borders continues to escalate juvenile involvement in criminal activities, feeding off the untapped human capital wasted by unresponsive, corrupt, and poorly-governed states. Globally, 43% of the homicides committed each year (around 200,000) victimize young people aged 10-29, 83% of whom are males. Critical pedagogy scholar and cultural critic, Henry Giroux, points out that anxiety over youth's nonconforming behaviors (especially low-income and minority groups) undermine a sense of communal responsibility for the welfare of other members of society, while placing the blame for one's fate on individuals solely, despite broader structure inequalities (Giroux, 2015). That is, there is a tendency to prioritize punitive policies rather than investments in the strengthening of rehabilitative practices and initiatives to address people's basic needs (Giroux, 2011).

As a result, when not being treated as objects of social action, youth facing social marginalization[2] are portrayed in public and political discourses as a problem to be dealt with through repressive approaches rather than subjects capable of becoming a fundamental part of the solution, if given the right tools. With this argument in mind, it is fundamental that educators, policymakers, activists and practitioners working to advance the youth agenda continue to advocate for the introduction of innovative and personalized ways to involve and interact with young populations in marginalized communities, and beyond. The premise is that educational platforms which are not only interested in "educating for a job" but also in "educating for life" can provide a space for young people to learn how to think critically about their place in the world and to act upon their dreams for a better future, with an increased engagement in community life and efforts for larger transformation.

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[2] Marginalization is a multi-faceted and multidimensional phenomenon covering a wide range of deficiencies impacting people in the political, economic, and social arenas. The UNESCO defines it as "a form of acute and persistent disadvantage rooted in underlying social inequalities" amongst which we may find the low-educated, girls and women, ethnic and racial minorities, rural residents, individuals living in poor households and informal settlements, the disabled, populations under violence, and others. For more see UNESCO, 2009.

Background of the study

Brazil, a Latin American powerhouse famous for its soccer and paradisiac beaches, is a country of glaring inequality. Despite efforts advanced in over more than a decade now aimed at reducing poverty through a series of social strategies and income redistribution policies,[3] the gap between the rich and the poor remains monumental. While 15,7% of Brazilians live in poverty, out of which 6,53 live in extreme poverty earning less than $1 per day (IBGE, 2013), a recent study by Oxfam found that a handful of multi-millionaires hold as much wealth as the country's 100,00 poorest people, or half of Brazil's entire population. Inequality is pervasive not only through social classes, but also through gender and race lines. According to the same study, women can expect to earn as much money as men in 2047 and blacks as much as whites in 2089 (Oxfam, 2017). The last nation in the Western Hemisphere to abolish slavery, having trafficked over 4.5 million Africans to its shores (more than North America and the Caribbean combined), Brazil's legacy of exploitation and dehumanization is still very much ingrained in its contemporary society (Park, 2013).

Not only are blacks more likely to earn less, be poor, illiterate, low-educated, reside in informal settlements and have weak political representation, but they are also disproportionately impacted by violence (IPEA, 2016; Souza, 2014). Mirroring the experience of its Latin American counterparts, Brazil's overall levels of lethal violence are amongst some of the highest. The country is home to 20 of the top 50 most dangerous cities worldwide, and although it displays a population of little over 200,000, it accounts to 10% of the total share of homicides committed globally (CCPSCJ, 2014; Roque and Abramovay, 2014). Albeit chronic and widespread, lethal violence does not affect all Brazilian citizens

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[3] The internationally acclaimed conditional cash transfer program, Bolsa Família, consolidated under Lula da Silva's presidency (2003-2011) is credited with having lifted over 40 million people out of extreme poverty. One of the strongest benchmarks of the Worker's Party (PT), more recently, the program has suffered setbacks under the presidency of Michel Temer who rose to power in mid 2016 following the impeachment of Lula's successor, Dilma Roussef.

equally. Victims can be defined by their gender, age, race, and social class. Over half of the roughly 60,000 homicides taking place in the country each year victimize youth aged 15-29, 77% of whom are black and 93.4% males.[4] This translates to the loss of seven young lives every two hours (Waiselfisz, 2015). In addition, roughly 62% of Brazil's prison population, the 4th largest in the world, is comprised of blacks and pardos (mixed-race), 55% of whom are between the ages of 18 and 29 (Ministério da Justiça e Cidadania, 2015).

In Rio de Janeiro, black young men are also more vulnerable to lethal violence. Considering 4,043 registered homicides that took place in the city in 2012, 1,418 victimized young individuals, out of whom 1,078 were black. In this former Olympic capital, the risk of being victim of a homicide for male youths is 14 times higher than for other groups, and three times higher for blacks (Waiselfisz, 2015). Most of these killings occur in peripheries and poverty-stricken communities also known as "favelas" (slums or shantytowns).[5] Notorious for their high levels of criminal violence and lack of basic infrastructure, historically, state investments in these territories has been scarce, and when policies targeting these communities do get put into action, they are mostly tied to military and police strategies for public security, the most recent one being the Pacification. However, more police presence does not translate to more security.

The iron-fisted work carried out by PMERJ (Military Police of the State of Rio de Janeiro) in favelas only add fuel to a scenario of extreme violence and high victimization. PMERJ - known as one of the most lethal police forces in the world depicted in popular

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[4] Black deaths are defined by medical-legal information from local institutes of forensics medicine. As for IBGE's (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics) official racial classification, individuals are free to self-identify what race they think they belong to within five given categories: white, black, pardo, yellow or indigenous (roughly 54% of the Brazilian population define themselves as black or pardo). And yet, a "racial rainbow" stand in between these standard categories. Brazil is considered one of the most racially diverse countries in the world, with research showing that citizens may use up to 130 names to identify difference skin tones (Darnton, 2010; IBGE, 2015).

[5] An urban phenomenon visible beyond Rio de Janeiro, 88% of Brazilian favelas are concentrated in 20 of the 36 metropolitan regions in the country, its 11,5 million inhabitants accounting for 6% of the total population (Cavallieri and Vial, 2012; IBGE, 2010).

movies such as City of God (2002) and Elite Squad (2007) - often resorts to racial profiling and extreme violence against favela dwellers, particularly the black youth. Human Rights Watch attributes 8,000 deaths to them in the last decade. In 2015 alone, 3/4 of the 645 victims of police killings in Rio were black (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

For young favela residents, a reality of social vulnerability and a routine of security instability is further aggravated by the lack of opportunities for life advancement. The NEET (not in education, employment or training) phenomenon is widespread in these communities. It's estimated that over 34% of youth and young adults aged 18-29 living in favelas impacted by the pacification security policy are NEETs, compared to the national average of 24% - although the comprehensive figures could be much higher (Abdala, 2014; Lima 2013). In addition, Rio favelas are amongst the territories with the highest rates of school evasion in the city: 10,3% of children aged 6-14 living in the five most populous favelas in Rio do not frequent school, compared to the city average of 3% (in Rocinha, the largest favela in Latin America home to 80,000 dwellers, this number is as high as 17,1%) (Telles, 2014). Further problematic, the proportion of people who never attended school in these communities is almost twice as high as in other urban areas of the city: 8,8% compared to 4,7% (Saraiva and Soares, 2013).

The fact that so many youth and young adults living in Rio favelas and historically underserved peripheries throughout the city are not engaged in a productive activity and are out of school is particularly worrisome given the prominence of drug trafficking factions in these territories. With scarce options for a quality education, low prospects for gainful employment and the possibility for future economic sustainability, and a high exposure to discrimination and exclusion, joining criminal groups may seem like an attractive option for young people, despite its palpable dangers. As a popular saying goes, "jail or the cemetery"

are the two possible fates for individuals who get caught in a spiral of crime and violence.[6]

It is within this complex context that I situate my research. The lack of investment in social safety nets in favelas and platforms to amplify the social, economic, and political participation of dwellers has resulted in generations of young people plagued by poverty, violence, and hopelessness. As part of strengthening the institutional and social policy framework to ensure inclusive development in these spaces, there is an urgency to further advance educational, cultural, and employment programs to benefit young people, and to find innovative ways to attract and keep them engaged in such efforts. Yet, this work cannot be resumed to policies for labour market inclusion with no critical substance or hard line crime prevention and correctional strategies meant to control at-risk youth and guarantee society's "peace of mind," oftentimes, offering no possibility for social rehabilitation.

Rather, this effort should be embraced as part of a larger movement for social justice committed to helping young people succeed and become subjects of their own lives, from an approach that incorporates their experiences, knowledge and social history into any process of development. Considering that education play a key role in transforming societies, with the potential of performing emancipatory functions depending on the demands of the socio-cultural and socio-political contexts in which it is implemented (Desjardins, 2015), the focus of this study is on educational practices that operate beyond the individual level to also incorporate community change.

Theoretical underpinnings

Education is widely perceived as the key to a better life. Undoubtedly, obtaining formal degrees and competencies to compete in an ever-demanding knowledge society is a

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[6] 20% of participants of a study conducted by the NGO *Observatório de Favelas* (Favela's Observatory) that sought to uncover the trajectories of youth working for drug factions in Rio died over the two-year-period when interviews were carried out. 66% of these deaths took place at the hands of the police (Souza e Silva et. al., 2013).

crucial step individuals must take to succeed in multiple life domains, also serving as a protective factor from risk behaviour (UNESCO, 2011). In our neoliberal world of today, global and market forces have played an increasingly bigger role in influencing processes of identity and value formation mainly via educational platforms (Desjardins, 2015, p. 240). A clear issue is that, as traditional schools place more energy and focus in providing training and skills intended mainly to prepare individuals for the market under "one-size fits all" curriculums, the more they detach themselves from local needs, knowledge and values. Their lack of critical content about social, economic and political contradictions makes it difficult for people to challenge the status-quo and attempt to rupture existing hegemonic arrangements (Mayo, 1995).

Hence, if education is to help uplift largely excluded populations, for it to be truly liberating, it must prepare individuals for a self-managed, self-reflective and self-active life (Giroux, 2010). Inspired by the life and work of Paulo Freire, one of the most important educators of the XX century, an emancipatory educational framework invite us to embrace spaces at the margin of the formal system as more inclusive educational sites where, due to its often more autonomous nature, liberating pedagogies and counter-hegemonic discourses and actions can flourish (Giroux, 2010; Torres, 1990). Considering disenfranchised communities across the developing world where the rates of formal education are low and a university education is still largely a commodity of the elite, non-formal education becomes an even more crucial source of knowledge and access to democratic life.

Popular education - the birthplace of Freire's pedagogical practices and a cornerstone framework in adult education[7] - is a mechanism for the political and educational empowerment of marginalized groups that entails an analysis of people's social and living

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[7] UNESCO highlighted Paulo Freire's contributions to adult education as an inspiration in the development of the Global Report of Adult Learning and Education (GRALE), a core document used in the single most important conference on adult education worldwide promoted by the UN agency (CONFITEA). For more see Gadotti and Torres, 2014.

conditions as a pathway to individual and collective consciousness raising. Conceiving education as a cultural act and a two-way process between educators and students, the model is closely linked to the demands of the community and starts from the knowledge individuals bring with them to the classroom, moving away from top-down approaches concerned with promoting modernization processes (Torres, 2013, p. 17).

As we consider more humanized and engaging approaches to working with young people in socially excluded areas, emancipatory education and its sibling framework of critical pedagogy offer us relevant foundation guiding principles of theory and practice. Exposing notions of oppression, dehumanization and existential violence as authentic and ever present, critical pedagogy strives to bring unequal social structures to light, while empowering individuals to think and act critically upon them with the aim of transforming their lives and communities. Non-formal educational practices inspired in these emancipatory concepts have the potential to help capacitate, empower, and more actively engage young people in the process of individual and social transformation, placing them at the center of the development processes.

Particularly considering low-income and low-educated youth living in marginalized communities immersed in poverty and crime, an education that open doors for a critical understanding of their situation serves as a powerful tool of collective human voices against the engines of violence and social exclusion (Lissovoy, 2010). That is, critical pedagogy can guide young people through the expansion of self-reflection and critical thinking, while helping them cultivate a sense of agency essential to understanding and acting upon their life conditions in order to change them (Freire, 1970).

Aim and overview of methods

The paramount aim of this research is to explore the opportunities and constraints of applying elements of emancipatory education within non-formal youth education

platforms to promote individual and community transformation in marginalized communities. Using a qualitative case study methodology and guided by a critical pedagogy theoretical lens, to achieve this aim, I delve into the lived experiences of a group of participants of a social-oriented entrepreneurship program attending hundreds of young people from the favelas of Rio de Janeiro and analyze its methodology and relevance vis-à-vis the underlying principles of critical pedagogy, drawing implications to the field's praxis-oriented framework. The NGO *Agência de Redes Para Juventude* (Networks for Youth Agency, hereafter referred to simply as "Agency") provides an exemplary case study of bottom-up education which engages youth in territorial development through cultural action.

By placing participants in a position of protagonism and supporting them in the advancement of their own community-based projects, the program allows young people to directly engage in transforming the environments in which they live. In addition to being provided with skills and tools for city-wide engagement, participants are introduced to a series of interactive educational instruments for project creation which draw from their experiences, knowledge and creative potential, stimulating them to reflect on their position (and that of their communities) within the larger society. Given their commitment to helping participants become agents of social change and cultivate a more critical reading of their world, Agency can help us further explore the role of non-formal education in emancipatory terms.

Aside from drawing insights and knowledge from the literature to contextualize the research globally and locally, and to investigate into the fundamental dimensions and premises of critical pedagogy theory and practice, while considering its intersection with processes of empowerment and emancipation, I rely on a combination of qualitative and quantitative data sources to develop my analysis, including interviews, observations, informational documents and survey findings. Combined, these primary and secondary data

sets provide information on over 400 young people who have taken part in the Agency program between 2011 and 2016 in addition to a dozen of educators and staff members.

My methodological orientation of choice, a qualitative case study approach, to be precise, reflects my intention to develop an in-depth description and analysis of the phenomenon in question - which cannot be separated from its social, cultural and political context - in a way that is fundamentally based on participants' lifeworld, their understandings of their experiences, and the kinds of meaning they draw from them. That is, the unit of analysis is the program, but I analyze it from the perspective of its impact on young people. This qualitative view of the world allows me to get a glimpse of the fears, challenges, ideals, hopes and dreams shaping their everyday lives. It is important to note that, as I grapple with questions of empowerment and the individual and community level, the voices and opinions of participants themselves about how empowerment manifested in their lives and territories is used as the foundation from which to develop an analysis of change (Jupp et.al., 2010).

Research questions

This study is guided by the following key overarching research question:

Considering Agency's work in Rio de Janeiro's favelas, what are the opportunities and constraints of applying elements of emancipatory education in youth provisions aimed at promoting individual and community transformation?

To more adequately explore the various aspects of the research problem, I have broken down this question into three sub-questions, each containing at least a couple additional points of inquiry that allow me to investigate the problem in more depth. Them being:

1. How do youth make sense of their lived experiences as favela residents and participants in the Agency program?

- How do participants perceive their background and childhood?

- What are participant's views regarding their educational trajectories and future educational aspirations?

- What types of skills and resources participants describe to have advanced through the Agency platform?

- How do participants perceive Agency's role in their process of personal growth?

2. What is Agency's role in promoting community development in Rio's favelas?

- How does Agency help shape participants' relationship with their communities?

- What are some of the concrete ways participants have impacted their communities?

3. What lessons can Agency teach us about applying the theory of critical pedagogy in youth education practice within marginalized communities?

- To what extent are principles and practices of critical pedagogy present in Agency's educational model?

- According to educators and relevant political actors, what aspects of Agency makes it an important youth provision in favelas and what are some of the limitations in program implementation and sustainability given the context the program in inserted in?

Scope and significance of the study

The main purpose of this study is not to evaluate or merely describe an educational program of relevance but, rather, to explore and systematize the foundational elements and principles of a methodology displaying dimensions of critical pedagogy that may be used to

inform strategies in similar contexts, contributing to an understanding of practical ways to employ emancipatory pedagogical practices directed at young people in marginalized communities. That is, my analysis of Agency is an instrument to open a much broader discussion about the need to create more critical, participatory, and social justice-oriented alternatives to youth development that foster empowerment and emancipation practices, with potential lessons for grassroots initiates and more comprehensive policymaking.

Critical pedagogy is a widespread theoretical framework reflected in a vast amount of writings and programs that continues to inspire students, academics, practitioners and important organizations all over the world; however, there are still few studies that exclusively contextualize its main principles and dimensions in relation to the work carried out by particular provisions - less so within the context of non-formal education (Aliakbari and Faraji, 2011; Gadotti and Torres, 2009; Nouri and Sajjadi, 2014). Relatively newer academic fields drawing from critical pedagogy, such as public pedagogy, have taken important steps in exploring and theorizing sites of learning beyond formal schooling. It incorporates, for example, a problematization of the impact of cultural, political, and economic power mechanisms over public processes of education taking shape in different spheres of everyday life (i.e. informal platforms, community settings, via popular culture and media discourses) and a clear call for the development of more democratic and dialogic educational structures within those spaces (Sandlin et. al., 2010; Wildermeersch, 2014).

In line with these efforts, there is a need to continue to explore provisions that embrace emancipatory education principles and approaches, particularly in out-of-school contexts, and to create clear links between theory and real world practices. My research is positioned within this theoretical breach, with the experience of the Agency program itself being presented as a form of pedagogy of non-formal education. Although the analysis is limited to a single case study nested in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro, it does provide

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important empirical evidence on how young people on the margins take part in social action, exercise their agency, and promote their cultural identities, while creating new platforms to challenge exclusion and promote positive development practices at the community and city level. As Paulo Freire urged people to "reinvent" his theory in oppose to mechanically copying his ideas and forcing them into different contexts (Gadotti, 1994), I attempt to take his philosophy beyond the context of adult literacy training and classroom settings to explore its ongoing relevance in distinct social and educational platforms.

Finally, it is important to note that my theoretical lens of choice is applied as an epistemological and ontological basis for exploring a phenomenon which may contributed to a renewed critical pedagogy for youth education, and not as an expression of a "single truth." In other words, it is not my intention to force the critical pedagogy framework upon Agency or to imply that emancipatory education alone can eliminate the predatory social and economic structures bearing down on marginalized youth, serving as an antidote to oppression and violence. What I do believe is in the framework's potential to continue strengthening our faith in the liberating power of education to change lives and communities, and its fundamental role in helping create a more just and democratic society.

Ultimately, to explore the personal experiences of participants and the impact of a provision that is helping provide new pathways of hope for young people living in poverty-stricken territories - and from an approach that stems from the potency and demands of individuals and communities - is an important step in efforts to identify and support transformative educational initiatives that are bottom-up not only on paper, but also in essence and practice. After all, as Freire believed, being able to transform praxis into action, and not just wishful thinking, is just as important as conducting action with awareness of theory and historical struggles (Freire, 1974). This study is a humble effort to keep moving the field of education forward in connecting theory, research, and practice towards greater

societal relevance.

Structure of the dissertation

This dissertation contains six chapters. Chapter 1 looks at the universe of young people in the Latin American region, Rio de Janeiro favelas and beyond, contextualizing the research from a local and global perspective; chapter 2 reviews the literature on critical pedagogy and emancipatory education, also borrowing frameworks of empowerment and emancipation from different fields and frames of reference; chapter 3 introduces the methodological orientations guiding the study and strategies for data collection and analysis; chapter 4 explores the lifeworld of favela youth and program impact at the individual level; chapter 5 investigate into youth-led action and program impact at the community level; chapter 6 analyzes educational practice vis-à-vis critical pedagogy, considering program patterns of opportunities and constraints; and finally, the conclusions highlights the study key findings, discusses program and research limitations, draw recommendations, and proposes directions for future research.

CHAPTER 1

Youth: Global and Local Perspectives

Introduction

The task of exploring the potential barriers and enabling role of emancipatory education in opening pathways for the advancement of individual and community transformation through a non-formal educational platform targeting young people requires a contextualization of population, territory, and conditions for development. The main objective of this chapter is, therefore, to examine the universe of youth not only considering the plight and promises of those living Rio de Janeiro's favelas, the group of interest in this study, but also the state of young people in the Latin American region and around the world.

Accordingly, section 1.1 focuses on global youth issues and paradigms of youth inclusion and exclusion, starting off with a discussion about contemporary challenges facing urban youth in Latin America and beyond, incorporating the central thematics of education, work, crime and violence (1.1.1); next, it considers the struggle of "finding oneself" during adolescence and explore questions of alienation in relation to identity formation (1.1.2); the section then concludes with a review of broader policy and practice frameworks in youth development from an international perspective (1.1.3).

Narrowing the lens of the analysis and expanding on the central theme of the narrative, section 1.2 provides an introduction to favelas, including an overview of historical issues of state neglect and criminality shaping life in these territories and some of the main challenges faced by dwellers (1.2.1); following is a discussion of relevant public security issues, police violence, and the ramifications of the Pacification security policy in impacted communities (1.2.2); finally, a social and demographic profile of Rio favela youth is provided along with observations about the everyday pressures they are exposed to (1.2.3).

1.1. Youth Profile, Plight, and Potentiality

1.1.1. Contemporary challenges facing the urban youth in Latin America and beyond

Latin American cities are key to Latin America's success. Today, eight out of ten people in the region live in cities, and levels of urbanization are expected to continue growing. Around 198 large cities with populations of over 200,000 each constitute *75%* of Latin American's economy, translating to a *3.7* trillion combined GDP (ten cities alone, including São Paulo, Lima, Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, Santiago, Bogotá and Monterrey, make up one third of this share) (Cadena et al., 2011; Remez, 2014). Economic growth, urbanization and industrialization generated social advancements and economic competitiveness in levels never before experienced. Nevertheless, economic concentration in selected financial districts and the rapid growth of cities despite proper investments in infrastructure, planning, and social resources also brought about enormous challenges for the region.

While it took New York City almost 150 years to grow by eight million inhabitants, major Latin American cities like Mexico and São Paulo saw an increase in their population by this number in less than 15 years (Gizewski and Homer-Dixon, 1995). Such extremely rapid rise of major global cities in this region and across the developing world is associated with the expansion of neoliberal policies and globalizations trends. The historical and economic forces which help explain the role of neoliberalism and globalization in transforming society as we know it today are as multifaceted as they are complex. In sum, an interrelated set of economic processes interacted in the advancement of rapid urbanization and exclusionary national development, particularly visible in the Global South (Almeida, 2012).

Following the cold war, the Western neoliberal capitalist model of economic development dominated the global system. The ideology was found in the basis of

institutional frameworks of privatization, deregulation, free trade and free markets with little state interference and control (Harvey, 2007). Finance and capital emerged as leading factors determining cross-country relationships, and the globalization of neoliberal market economies drove the massive movement of people towards city centers (Almeida, 2012). The process of "agglomeration" meant that a global network of financial markets, banks, corporate services and transnational corporations needed to be concentrated; thus, the rise of major core cities as ideal sites for the advancement of a global economy based on capital flows (Almeida, 2012; Sassen, 2000).

Historically, developed nations experienced an explosion in population rates and urbanization levels that corresponded to the industrial revolution; that is, industrialization occurred apace with economic progress. Contrastingly, in the developing world, rapid urbanization and population growth largely took place detached from economic and social development, leading to the proliferation of marginal urbanization (Almeida, 2012). The combination of multiple elements and processes, from land and work pressures to lack of public investments in housing and increasing inequality, resulted in the rise of "fragile cities" globally; the large concentration of people in cities lacking employment, housing, and access to basic services accelerating large-scale informal settlements.

Currently, 54% of the world's population live in urban areas, out of whom one third inhabit slums - a situation that shows no signs of being reversed anytime soon. It is estimated that, by 2030, around two billion people will experience such living conditions (Almeida, 2012; United Nations, 2014). UN-Habitat classifies slums as any housing structure that lacks one of the following five basic elements: improved water and sanitation access, tenure security, housing durability and sufficient living area (UN-Habitat, 2006). However, lack of access to basic services and inadequate housing are only some of the social limitations that the urban poor is forced cope with on a daily basis.

Barriers to educational and income-generation opportunities greatly hinder people's inclusion in society, their personal development, and quality of life in various aspects. The urban youth are particularly impacted by these adverse conditions. Worldwide, as many as 1.2 billion youth aged 15-24 face social and economic challenges, which many of them are ill-equipped to tackle (Boss, 2012; International Youth Foundation, 2012). In Latin America alone, 29.2% of the population live in poverty (175 million) and 25-30 million people may fall back into it as a result of the current economic environment (ECLAC, 2016; UNDP, 2016). Furthermore, 64% of young Latin Americans (over 100 million people) and 57% of adults live in poor or vulnerable households (OECD, 2017).

Education remains a fundamental pillar in efforts to accelerate social and economic progress. At the global level, although developing countries have made great progress in the universalization of basic education thanks to efforts by governments, civil society and the international community who have joined forces in the promotion of large-scale initiatives such as the UNESCO Education For All movement (enrolment in primary education in developing countries has reached 91% and, in 2015, 55 million youth accessed secondary education around the world, a 30% increase from 1999), as much as 121 million children and 142 million adolescents aged 15-17 are still out of school (UIS, 2016; UNESCO, 2015; UN, 2016).

Despite being more educated than their previous generation, young Latin Americans are also lacking behind in educational attainment and tend to score low in international assessments of education and competencies such as PISA - which reveals a low quality of primary/secondary education and structural barriers (Zinn, 2015). The OECD estimates that one third of Latin American youth aged 15-29, or some 43 million people, have not completed a secondary education and are out of school (in Brazil, that number is roughly 13,872 million, 28% share of this particular population). In addition, less than one-third of

older youth aged 25-29 have reached college, university or a higher level technical school, meaning they are unable to meet the increasing demands of the labour market (OECD, 2017).

Difficulty finding decent work is, thus, another major inequality that persists amongst the youth population in Latin America and beyond. In 2012, the International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates that, globally, 12,7% (73,4 mil) of youth aged 15-24 were unemployed (against the rate of 14,6% for the Latin American and the Caribbean region) - although official numbers are believed to be much higher. By 2017, the global rate is expected to reach 12,9% (14,7% in Latin America), given and taken growing regional disparities (ILO, 2012). Moreover, while unemployment rates amongst young Brazilians have decreased in the past years, they remain significant: 15,7% in 2006 compared to 12,2% in 2012.[8] In fact, unemployment rates across Latin America is more critical amongst youth populations: 11.2% compared to 3.7% for adults (OECD, 2017).

The NEET (not in employment, education or training) phenomenon is also prominent in the region. As per recent OCED estimates, one-fifth of the 163 million young people living in Latin America today (around 30 million) find themselves in this condition (76% of whom are women), which means they "are not positioned within either of the main channels of social and economic inclusion: the educational system and labour markets" (OECD, 2017, p. 26). In Brazil, Latin America's largest economy, this scenario is no different. IBGE numbers reveal that 22,5% of young Brazilians aged 15-29 are out of school and not inserted in the job market, 14% of whom are not even looking for work (IBGE, 2016).

A combination of factors including low education and household income vulnerability, increase the likelihood that young people will become NEETs (OECD, 2015). The OECD

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[8] Black youth are disproportionately impacted by labor market shortcomings in Brazil. In 2012, 2,6 million white youth were unemployed and 15% of those working received less than one minimum salary per month ($166), compared to four million unemployed blacks and 27,8% below minimum wage earners (Guimarães, 2015; IBGE, 2012).

notes that youth from poor households leave school earlier than their better-off peers, and when they find a job, it tends to be in the informal sector. They found that, at 15 years of age, 70% of vulnerable youth are in school; however, by 29, roughly three out of ten amongst them are NEETs, four work informally, two have formal jobs and the remainder are either in school or work and study (OECD, 2017, p. 17). It is important to highlight that OECD's official classification for employment used in the NEETs framework only includes paid work for at least one hour in the reference week of the survey, while in education, it accounts solely for participation in formal part-time and full-time education, excluding short-term programs and non-formal platforms (OECD, 2015).

Nonetheless, the fact that youth are not participating in the labour market in these set terms does not mean they are inactive or lack self-sufficiency. Young people are extremely resourceful and tend to find creative ways to make a living and resist employment pressures. This is illustrated in the estimated high participation of young people in the informal market (which, must be noted, can be challenging to measure). While 40% of young Latin Americans are students and 23% are employed in a formal job, one-fifth (or 43% of young workers) work informally (OECD, 2017, p. 24). As for Brazilians, in 2012, it was estimated that 38% of young people between the ages of 15 and 29 worked at the margin of the formal market (44% being blacks and 31,3% whites) (Guimarães, 2015; IBGE, 2012).

Poverty and restricted socio-economic mobility, coupled with crime exposure and the turmoil of adolescence itself, only exacerbate youth disengagement and alienation, which may lead to risky behaviour. Throughout the urban world, from Asia to Africa and Latin America, high levels of violence have deteriorated public security, hindered social and economic development strategies and intensified citizens' feeling of insecurity. The heavy presence of young people in the world of criminality (particularly males) is an issue that has been gaining increasingly more attention in the agendas of policymakers and politicians in

the developing and developed world alike. Globally, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 250,000 children and youth between the ages of 10 and 29 are victims of homicides every year; a number that represents 41% of all homicides committed worldwide (WHO, 2011).

Many of these casualties are the consequences of criminal violence and drug trafficking-related activities, which are not only accountable for the loss of thousands of human lives, but also for the weakening of society's social fabric. This scenario highlights nothing short of a health epidemic. Notably in Latin American countries, criminal violence is at the core of people's living conditions, its effects spreading to every part of the urban experience, impacting the poor - and young people - disproportionately. According to an advocacy organization based in Mexico City that conducts comprehensive studies on public security, 43 out of the 50 most dangerous cities in the world are located in Latin America (estimates are based on number of homicides per 100,000 inhabitants) (CCSPJP, 2015). The region has only 8% of the world's total population but is accountable for over 36% of the total number of homicides worldwide (Fraga, 2014).

Poverty is only one of the triggering factors leading to the high levels of crime and violence experienced in Latin America. According to Robert Muggah, leading specialist in security and development, the massive movement of people from rural to urban areas, the high levels of social and economic inequalities, high rates of youth unemployment (or underemployment), scarce educational opportunities, the wide availability of firearms, weak judicial institutions and overall weak states, corrupt governmental security forces, and a misguided war on drugs are, combined, the more prominent sources of this critical issue (Muggah and Doe, 2013).

In the region displaying the highest levels of urbanization in the developing world, where one quarter of its young population is aged 15-29 and 80% of them live in cities (a

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number that is expected to rise by 5% in 10 years), it is no surprise that the biggest perpetrators and victims of violence are young people (Caldena et al., 2011; OECD, 2017). Take Honduras, for example, a country caught in a vortex of poverty and crime where the homicide rate for young males aged 20-29 surpasses 222 per 100,0000 inhabitants, more than 200 times over the level defined by the World Health Organization as "epidemic"[9] (World Bank, 2013). As for Brazil, the high victimization of youth, particularly amongst black and poor populations, provides clear evidence to why issues of conflict, crime and violence continue to predominate young people's life experiences, perceptions, and realities.

The youth experience in Brazil, like in so many other places, is heavily marked by uncertainty about the future, but, above all, by the shadow of violence. A 2013 study conducted by Brazil's National Secretary of Youth (SNJ) revealed that 51% of young people in the country have lost someone close to them in a violent act, with the majority of respondents listing violence as the number one concern for young Brazilians today (43%), followed by career and employment (34%), health (26%), education (23%) and drugs (18%) (Guimarães, 2015; SNJ, 2013). A central argument in this discussion is that we are encountering a legitimate crisis for young people growing up all over the world who have very few resources and opportunities to carve a life path, and who find themselves trapped in a cycle of poverty and violence. As highlighted, educational and labour market disadvantage is particularly high amongst youth from minority and low socioeconomic communities, which, added to the experience of growing up in crime-rampant territories, intensifies social instability amongst this population, decreasing their chances to scape vulnerability.

Youth development initiatives must, therefore, help prepare young people to navigate

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[9] Around 63% of Honduras' population live in poverty. In 2015, 35% of homicides committed in the country took place in San Pedro Sula, deemed the most violent city in the world (World Bank, 2013).

obstacles and provide them support so they can overcome their social limitations and take part in changing their present life conditions. A way to set this process into motion is through the advancement of increased opportunities for decent work, training, and education that allows young individuals to build valuable career and life skills while earning an income. And yet, just as important, these platforms must also give them a sense of place in the world, facilitating their transitional period during adolescence and ensuring they are given a fair chance to act on their capacities and help lay the foundations for a better future.

1.1.2. On being youth: identity formation and alienation

Understanding and acknowledging the complexities involved in the process youth undertake on the path to becoming their own person is central to the formulation of development proposals that are applicable to their lifeworld. Adolescence is often regarded as a crucial period individuals must pass through in life - and it can be one of the most difficult ones. Anxieties during this phase are strongly associated with young people's struggle to create a form of existential meaning attached to a particular identity. When we consider impoverished youth living in situations of conflict, fragility and violence, facing daily exposure to various forms of social risks, going through this developmental period can prove even more challenging. In fact, as the late philosopher and sociologist Zygmunt Bauman notes, in today's society, the construction of an identity has become one's task and responsibility, or something to be "achieved" through continuous assembling and disassembling - which can be terrifying to most regardless of race, social standing, sexual orientation, gender affiliation and even age (Bauman, 2008, p. 13; Frymer, 2005, p. 9).

Drawing from different psychosocial developmental frameworks, identity formation theories help explain how humans develop distinct and unique characters, shedding light on the way such individual process - which involves both social and internal mechanisms - takes place in phases prior to a full transition to adulthood. Erik Erison's (1968) ground-breaking

contributions on the "identity versus role confusion" (the famous "identity crisis") refers to the uncertainties that adolescents experience as they explore different identities while going through physical, cognitive, and social changes. This "turning point" is essential in the formulation of a basic identity as young people are exposed to different values, goals, sexual and ideological commitments, as well as various educational, career and social pathways, and attempt to find their place amid their concrete possibilities and realities. Erikson notes that failure to successfully form "one's identity" during this phase in the psychosocial development process has serious consequences for adulthood, which can be manifested, for instance, in the inability to form a shared identity with others or instability in various aspects of life (Erikson, 1968).

Another important framework is that of "identity statuses" advanced by Canadian developmental psychologist, James Marcia (1966). Adapting Erikson's theories on identity formation to empirical research, Marcia conceptualized structural categories of development to explain the process adolescents go through as they work towards building a mature identity (Marcia, 1966). Moving beyond concepts of "identity confusion and resolution" used to describe the adolescence stage, Marcia identified two basic elements for defining progress in the process of identity formation amongst young people. In line with individuals' experiences with levels of exploration (process of examination and discovery of oneself) and commitment (the choice of an identity that consolidates the process), Marcia developed four statuses of identity namely, diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium and achievement (Berman, et al., 2001).

In short, in the "identity diffusion" phase, the adolescent feels deprived of choices and is unwilling to make any commitment; in the "identity foreclosure" status, adolescents appear willing to commit to some values or goals, although they have not yet explored a full range of options (or crisis) and tend to conform to the expectation of others; the "identity

moratorium" phase is when the crisis unleashes and adolescents explore various options and commitments, but do not yet make their choices; it isn't until the "identity achievement" phase - upon having experienced an identity crisis - that adolescents are ready to commit to a sense of identity and future path (Learning Theories, 2014). Furthermore, there are several types of self-identity components (including physical, psychological, and social elements) that impact the human experience in the process of individualization and growth during adolescence and throughout life. For example, cultural identity, national and ethnic identity, religious identity and well as gender and sexual identities, are crucial aspects in the development of one's personality and have a tremendous impact in how people chose to live their lives and engage with the world around them.

Adolescence is, thus, all about the struggle of "finding oneself" (Fridenberg, 1959), a task that has only become more difficult given that the conditions youth face while growing up turn increasingly more abstract and illogical. In a postmodern world where new communications technology and the mass media take a central stage in shaping cultural norms and simulating social realities, young people's everyday lives are filled with images and representations that deepen social fractures and shake stable foundations of meaning and identity, generating new forms of estrangement and isolation (Bauman, 2008; Frymer, 2005, p. 8-9; Kellner, 1995). Benjamin Frymer, Assistant Professor of Sociology at Sonoma State University, notes that youth identity has been commodified and sold back to young people themselves in the form of pre-selected images for public consumption, which are constant and subjected to little critical evaluation. These discourses "colonize" youth's world, saturate their consciousness, and undermine their prospects for political and social engagement (Frymer, 2005; McInnerney, 2009, p. 28).

Such manipulation of identity (Bauman, 2008) is directly linked to the "society of the spectacle," a concept that refers to the multiple images, messages, and fantasies of consumer

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society that come to govern people's everyday lives (Debord, 1994). Although present in different phases, during adolescence, this pressure is manifested in society's tendency to assign value to youth based on how closely they resemble objects of consumption (which, in turn, influences how they see their own value) - a contemporary crisis expressed in the lifeworld of young people in, for instance, the pressure to own the newest technological gadgets, frequent the most popular places, or wear expensive clothing brands (Frymer, 2004; McInnerney, 2009). As youth become outsiders in this spectacle, they encounter more difficulties developing selves with "substance, meaning and purpose," which may lead to alienation. (Frymer, 2005, p. 13).

Gaining momentum in the 1950's and 60's, the notion of alienation[10] as it relates to adolescents is generally used to refer to forms of individual or group deviance amongst young people that do not align with conventional or accepted patterns of being and acting (Frymer, 2005; Lesko, 2001). Frymer points out that such narrow view of alienation, which is mainly concerned with pinpointing atypical behaviour, minimises the vulnerabilities and risks involved in going through the adolescence phase itself, particularly considering youth from disenfranchised communities (Frymer, 2005). Although alienation can indeed be shaped by different psychological factors (feelings of powerlessness, estrangement and/or social isolation), social divides shaping the lifeworld of youth from minority and poor backgrounds play a major role in creating this form of disconnect from the world (McInnerney, 2009, p. 25). According to Rob White and Johanna Wyn (1998) who have studied the relationship between youth agency and social structure, the production of "different types of youth" is a result of the interplay between society and young people, with

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[10] It is important to note that the ramifications of alienation extend well beyond age and other characteristics of personal identity such as gender, race, ethnic affiliation and religion. In the Marxist tradition, for example, the concept focuses mostly on social classes and people's estrangement from their essence (as well as others) as they lose freedom over their own lives and destiny due to inequality. This is also true for Freire's understanding of alienation as a loss of people's humanity and the building of a false consciousness based on a feeling of inferiority, which is the manifestation of a situation of domination by the power elites (Freire, 2000).

the outcomes of unequal material circumstances being manifested in their lives in the form of social indicators such as education, income, and incarceration rates - meaning that adolescence must be understood as a social process that help shape different walks of life (White and Wyn, 1998, p. 325).

In schools - sites that play a fundamental role in the construction of individuals (Shor, 1993) - alienation involves student estrangement in various forms, from presenting disruptive and violent behaviour, to taking a passive disengagement from the learning process or dropping out of school all together (Johnson, 2005, as cited in McInnerney, 2009). These students are often viewed as disadvantaged and are believed to "lack the confidence, self-assurance, motivation, social and cultural capital to succeed," being positioned outside the larger discourse of social change (Frymer, 2005; McInnerney, 2009, p. 25). Denouncing the corporatization of education - which promotes technical-scientific training and job-readiness at the cost of values aimed at authentic education for self and social change - critical educators understand student alienation as a by-product of a "banking model of education" (discussed in depth in chapter 2) that separates pupils from their ontological vocation of actively participating in the world and transforming it (Aronowitz, 2009; Freire, 2004; Frymer, 2005; McInnerney, 2009).

That is, young people who find themselves oppressed by social, political, economic and cultural forces - and who have little choice but to follow an education that has little connection or relevance to their lives - are restricted in their capacity to develop a sense of agency and reach their full potential (McInnerney, 2009). As German political theorist and philosopher Herbert Marcuse maintained: "alienation is the constant and essential element of identity, the objective side of the subject - and not, as it is made to appear today, a disease, a psychological condition" (Marcuse, 2007, p. 53). Similarly, in the critical pedagogy tradition, the exposure to uncritical and subjugating platforms of indoctrination is inherently

tied to the process of building one's identity; thus, the importance of advancing pathways to guarantee people's subjectivity and stimulate critical thinking, self-reflection and imagination, despite social, cultural, religious, sexual, political and economic alienation (Giroux, 2010).

To Paulo Freire, in order to overcome alienation and unlock possibilities for liberation, individuals must continuously engage in critical discovery and an analysis of their beings and surroundings - a process that education has the power to facilitate (Freire, 1970). Hence, a critical understanding of alienation, which stand on the pursuit of human agency and liberation and recognizes historical forms of exclusion and violence in everyday life, is part of a larger project to transform the politics of education (Frymer, 2005; Shor, 1993, McInnerney, 2009). Particularly essential in the tumultuous stage of adolescence, processes of identity formation must walk hand in hand with the cultivation of critical consciousness if we are to raise empowered citizens with the capabilities and sensitivity needed to enact change within themselves and upon the world.

1.1.3. Unlocking the potential of young people

The deepening of critical consciousness is not only context specific, but also historical in terms of people's lived experiences, as demonstrated by young people who become mobilizers and agents of transformation, responding to the opportunities and challenges they face with bravery and resilience at different points in time. From the splurge of pro-democracy youth-led campaigns in the Middle East, to the occupy movement in the U.S. and anti-corruption demonstrations in Latin America, youth have continuously helped shape world politics, leading social and political transformation through waves of resistance demanding increased equality, representation, social justice and respect for human rights (Fominaya, 2013). At the heart of important progressive social movements worldwide (i.e.

U.S. civil rights movement, feminism struggles, LGBT and environmental justice advancements, immigration, labour, anti-slavery and anti-war movements), we find millions of energetic and active youth with hopes to change the world for themselves and future generations (Costanza-Chock, 2012).

With the exponential growth in access to mobile phones and the explosion of the new media, young people are now more interconnected and active than ever, their voices and concerns laid bare to the world. Through participation in various social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter, even those living in poor communities can now more easily organize, publicize their initiatives, denounce human rights violations and demand action from their respective states and society at large in a way that bypasses traditional participation structures and institutions (The Commonwealth, 2016). Young people also make use of new forms of media to get in touch with their own interests and needs, which has increasingly included social movement-oriented inclinations - a trend that is only expected to grow (Costanza-Chock, 2012). As interconnectivity and access to technology progresses, we enter a new age of accountability and transparency, where the social injustices, abuse and neglect suffered by particular groups and individuals around the world can no longer be so easily dismissed or hidden.

Contrary to mainstream discourses around the "typical adolescent," which tends to portray young people as disengaged, apathetic to other people's struggles and uninterested in taking part in civic engagement activities, past and contemporary history has proved that youth have a strong capacity (and will) to mobilize for change - and there are particular reasons that motivate such attitude. Studies have found that, regardless of their political orientation and specific ideologies (from extreme right or left wing to anarchical), young people take part in social movements because there is a true belief in contributing to changing the world (EU, 2015; Murer, 2011). Also, youth feel the need to act because they

are being disproportionately affected by exclusion and marginalization, facing limited quality educational opportunities, unemployment and underemployment at a higher rate than adults, lack of access to affordable housing, scarce credit, and more (Fominaya, 2013; OECD, 2017; The Commonwealth, 2016).

In addition, globally, around one-third of youth live in fragile and conflict-affected states, bearing the burden of war and violence in proportions unlike that of any other group (The Commonwealth, 2016). There are also layers of marginalization within youth populations, with exclusion being most acute amongst those holding minority status, including ethnic and indigenous people, the disabled, women, refugees, migrants, LGBTQI and the poor (Offerdahl, et.al., 2014). As a consequence of social, economic and policy barriers, as an age cohort, youth are less likely to take part in governance and decision-making processes, their inclusion being, arguably, one of the greatest challenges of our contemporary societies (OECD, 2017; The Commonwealth, 2016).

In the late 1980s, the youth thematic started to gain space in the agenda of international organizations and in the governmental groundwork of several countries around the developed and developing world (Secretaria Nacional de Juventude, 2014). In 1995, notably, the United Nations General Assembly adopted The World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY), which provided a policy framework and practical guidelines for national action and international support to improve the lives of young people worldwide in fifteen priority areas including education, employment, substance abuse, girls and young women, amongst others (Offerdahl, et.al., 2014; United Nations, 2010). Since then, youth-related issues have secured their prominence in international development discussions, becoming as high of a priority today as it has ever been (The Commonwealth, 2016).

This is evidenced in the continuous advancement of important schemes prioritizing youth development in policy and action, including the establishment of the role of the UN

Secretary-General's Envoy on youth in 2013, the creation of national authorities responsible for young people in 190 countries, the involvement of development agencies and a multitude of NGOs in youth work, as well as the promotion of various youth summits and international plans of action dedicated to this particular population, including UNDP's first Youth Strategy[11] (UNDP, 2014; The Commonwealth, 2016, p. 9). Such efforts are, however, still insufficient, not only considering the growing numbers of youth relative to the general population, but also due to the decisive impact young people have on the overall development and progress of countries worldwide (OECD, 2017).

ECLAC notes that despite its tremendous importance, the youth life stage is still "largely invisible in public policy and, when references are made to young people, they appear as the object of policies and not as rights-holders or agents of development and productive change" (ECLAC, 2016, p. 46). An example of this is found in institutional responses to youth crime and violence, which generally involve a contradictory mix of debates and measures along the lines of either preventive/remedial approaches or harsher disciplinary/punitive frameworks.[12] While academics, health specialists, NGOs, grassroots groups and activists have pushed for a humanistic focus on crime prevention through social development strategies (including employment, cultural and educational opportunities), national criminal justice systems and regulatory frameworks tend to favour investments in "get tough" policies, which translate to more severe punishments and increased ostensive policing in efforts to reduce the rates of juvenile violent crime (Wortley et al, 2008).

That is, young people facing social risk and exclusion are largely portrayed in public

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[11] The UNDP first Youth Strategy (2014-2017) engages young people as a positive force for transformational change, laying priorities in key youth-development areas (The Commonwealth, 2016).

[12] In *The Review of the Roots of Youth Violence* (2008) Researchers at the University of Toronto's Center for Criminality conducted an extensive review of government and community reports, as well as peer-reviewed academic literature uncovering thousands of programs, and identified ten common strategies for crime prevention, from arts, recreational, sports and school-based programs to aggressive policing and deterrence approaches. For more see Wortley et al., 2008.

and political discourses as a problem to be dealt with through punitive policies, rather than subjects capable of becoming a fundamental part of the solution, if given the right tools. Calling attention to the plight of inner-city and incarcerated youth in the U.S., according to Pedro Noguera, distinguished professor of education at UCLA's GSE&IS, this aggressive corrective approach illustrates an overall lack of compassion for the inner-city youth and the struggles they face, hence the need for ongoing commitment to revolutionary praxis and innovative actions (Noguera, 2007).

And that is precisely what increasingly more entities moving the youth agenda forward seek to promote. For instance, the UNESCO and development organizations such as OXFAM, emphasize the need to advance work 'for youth and by youth,' joining forces with young people to challenge the barriers that prevent them from "enjoying their rights, participating fully in society, and being an active voice in decision-making processes" (OXFAM, 2017). Being the ones who in fact experience, understand and endure everyday challenges, young people must be regarded as essential actors in helping find solutions to issues they face, and not as mere beneficiaries of the work that is carried out in their names (UNESCO, 2017). In this sense, youth development encompasses a series of strategies and actions that aim to enhance the status of young people and empower them to build on their competencies[13] and capabilities for life, enabling them to "contribute to and benefit from a politically stable, economically viable, and legally supportive environment, ensuring their full participation as active citizens in their countries" (The Commonwealth, 2016, p. 9).

This development is understood and measured in a variety of ways. Notably, 'asset-based approaches' - which recognize young people's agency in influencing development outcomes - are used in a range of international studies to survey the conditions of youth

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[13] As per the ASK educational model, competencies can be divided into three categories: what one is (attitudes; things people do naturally, their opinions and perceptions), what one can do (skills; practical competencies), and what one knows (knowledge; the mental part of competencies) (AEGGE, 2013).

around the world and the opportunities available to them as a result of the core capabilities that provide the basis for a 'good human life' (a framework built from Amartya Sen's capabilities approach, explored in chapter 2 in relation to agency).[14] Helping improve young people's realities, in this sense, is all about increasing their choices and providing them with the freedom necessary so they can fulfil their capacities from a larger pool of options[15] (expanding what they are able/capable to do) (The Commonwealth, 2016, p. 8).

Responding to the complexity and multi-dimensionality of youth inclusion and exclusion (OECD, 2017), policy in this field consist of a mix of provisions and initiatives covering nearly all aspects of life that impact young people's well-being and determine their position in society, from social development, work and education, to democratic representation, resilience-building, entrepreneurship, culture, sports, health and the environment (UNESCO, 2017; UNDP, 2014). Enhancing youth empowerment in different fronts as a mean to contribute to sustainable human development is at the core of these strategies. Recognizing that social, economic and political contexts, together with inappropriate policies, can limit young people's capabilities and their full participation in civic life, positive youth development that leads to empowerment - at the individual, organization, and community levels, which are central components in youth empowerment theory[16] - requires youth to be placed at the "heart of their own development" (Ledford, et al., 2013; The Commonwealth, 2016, p. 9).

As it will be further discussed in chapter 2, youth empowerment is a process that

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[14] Under a capabilities approach framework, in addition to an income deprivation, poverty is regarded as a capability-deprivation which restricts people's ability to take part in civic and political life, engage economically, have a higher life expectancy, and so on (The Commonwealth, 2016, p. 9).

[15] In efforts to measure the extent to which countries around the world provide effective preconditions for youth development, The Commonwealth applies a Youth Development Index (YDI) exploring indicators within five main domains: education, political participation, civic participation, employment and opportunity, and health and well-being. For more see The Commonwealth, 2016.

[16] For more on the components of youth empowerment see Ledford, et al., 2013 and Zimmerman, 2000.

encourages young people to take charge of their own futures, becoming problem-solvers, decision-makers and drivers of change in their immediate lives as well as in their larger communities (Ledford, et al., 2013). In sum, "it connects well-being with the larger social and political environment" (Zimmerman, 2000). Of particular relevance to the research carried out in this dissertation are strategies in youth development and empowerment that revolve around the promotion of effective competencies and livelihood skills (cognitive and non-cognitive) and learning platforms beyond the classroom, including arts and culture programs.

Poverty has lasting and devastating effects on life chances, health, brain and skills development. The foundations for success in adult life are laid down in early years; thus, children who are brought up in disadvantaged environments, lacking adequate support at home and in school, start behind and are likely to remain there (Kautz, et al., 2014, p. 11). Skills - which, unlike traits determined by genes, can be shaped and changed throughout life - enable people and give them capacities to function, fostering social inclusion and promoting social mobility, economic productivity and overall well-being (Kautz, et al., 2014, p. 10). The literature on skills largely concentrate on two central strands: cognitive and non-cognitive skills - the latter being a strong up and coming research field impacting policy.

Cognitive skills are the core skills the brain uses to perform activities associated with learning and problem-solving such as thinking, reading, memorizing, reasoning and focusing (NCME, 2017). These academic skills and attainments are usually measured by standardized achievement exams and IQ tests and, although they can be trained and improved, they are often associated to overall levels of intelligence (Kautz, et al., 2014). Psychologists have further distinguished between fluid intelligence (the rate in which people learn) and crystallised intelligence (acquired knowledge) in relation to cognitive skills (Kautz, et al., 2014, p. 13).

On the other hand, non-cognitive skills (also known as life skills, soft skills or socio-emotional skills) consist of attitudes, behaviours and personality traits which facilitate success in important aspects of life, such as school and the workplace, including confidence, optimism, trustworthiness, social and communication skills, amongst others (Gutman and Schoon, 2013; Public Profit, 2014). These patterns of "thought, feelings and behaviour" are developed before and throughout children's school years and continuously in the course of people's lives (García, 2014). It is important to note that multiple studies have identified the mutual relationship between cognitive and non-cognitive skills, which means that one should not be advanced apart from - or at the expense of - the other (García, 2013).

Widely used in psychology to measure non-cognitive skills (Zhou, 2016), the Big Five (standing for Openness to Experience, Consciousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism, or OCEAN) are important personality traits that help shape individual's choices and attainments. They are, however, highly heritable, their role looming large in comparison to the agency of any institution, such as schools (Whitehurst, 2016, p. 4). Nonetheless, there is a growing focus in exploring how schools can influence students' enhancement of soft skills which can be learned and improved, as opposed to trait-like attributes that carry a sense of permanence (Gutman and Schoon, 2013, p. 7; Kautz, et al., 2014, p. 13). Particularly critical to children and youth populations, as identified by Leslie Gutman and Ingrid Schoon (2013), are key non-cognitive skills of self-perception, motivation, perseverance, self-control, social competencies, resilience, coping, creativity and metacognition,[17] all of which, they note, can be cultivated through education (Gutman and Schoon, 2013; Public Profit, 2014; Zhou, 2016).

The non-cognitive skills framework is, however, not devoid of limitations. Apart from

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[17] Metacognition has to do with the process used to plan, monitor and assess one's understanding and performance. Defined at the act of "thinking about one's thinking," it incorporates a critical awareness of one's thinking and learning and oneself as a thinker and learner (Chick, n/d).

its broad categories - each following a preferred conceptualization rationality - and clear measurement problematics across developmental stages (which, in turn, creates challenges for curriculum design), there has been much criticism as to whether some of these characteristics can even be influenced by schools given that individual differences in broad patterns of behaviours (measured and then conceptualized as soft skills via surveys) are largely due to differences in genetics (Lundberg, 2017; Whitehurst, 2016; p. 5; Wilbrink, 2016). Despite the absence of a comprehensive conceptual framework that delineates multidimensional non-cognitive skills and our initial understanding of their development as an outcome of the education process (Lundberg, 2017; Whitehurst, 2016), there is growing consensus on the notion that personal qualities and attributes beyond cognitive abilities are important dimensions of human capital and, thus, need to be incorporated into educational policymaking - although the most effective and appropriate ways go about it feeds into much debate (Baker, 2013; García, 2016; Whitehurst, 2016).

As they appear to be more malleable early in life, boosting non-cognitive skills in young people may increase educational benefits in the future, having positive outcomes in their school and career trajectories while facilitating the developing of new competencies (García, 2014; Gutman and Schoon, 2013; Kautz, et al., 2014; Public Profit, 2014). A recent report from the OECD calls for a more holistic approach to advancing human potential and promoting skills which cannot be solely based on improving schools and hiking up test scores, as this narrow conceptualization of human capabilities fails to capture the important dimensions of life skills which are essential to human flourishing (Kautz, et al., 2014, p. 11). Evidence from long-term evaluations of adolescent interventions, the organization points out, suggest greater benefits from programs targeting non-cognitive skills in comparison to the outcomes from provisions centered on cognition and academic learning (Kautz, et al., 2014, p. 66). More specifically, their analysis of various interventions targeted to different

life stages also found that, when compared to the most successful early childhood and elementary school programs, the most successful adolescent remediation initiatives do not display the same level of efficiency - which highlights the importance of guaranteeing that children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, build a skill base early on that will allow them to continue learning and further engage in school and society (Kautz, et al., 2014, p. 66).[18]

In addition to in-school and after-school programs, education platforms beyond the classroom can also help enhance the soft skills of children and young people (AEGEE, 2007). Particularly prominent within the theoretical and policy scope of adult education and lifelong learning, non-formal education comprises organized educational activities taking place outside and alongside the formal system of education and training (i.e. primary and secondary schools, universities, technical schools) and generally does not lead to a certification or diploma. These programs are flexible and diverse, and due to their voluntary nature, participant individuals take an active role in the learning process (in informal education, contrastingly, the learning happens less consciously) (AEGEE, 2007). Taking place in different settings and environments, non-formal provisions may include long-distance/online learning, courses or workshops, private classes, and on-the-job training by supervisors or co-workers (Desjardins, et al., 2016; Desjardins, 2013). As a vehicle to help develop the values, skills and competencies of young people, non-formal programs are often regarded as the "most positive, efficient and attractive counterpart to a largely inefficient and unattractive system of formal education," according to AEGEE, Europe's largest interdisciplinary student organization (AEGEE, 2007, p. 11).

Furthermore, several evidence-based research found out-of-school programs and

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[18] For more on the recent literature on fostering and measuring cognitive and non-cognitive skills, see Kautz, et al., 2014.

extracurricular activities to have a positive impact on students' learning and in the enhancement of behaviour-related non-cognitive skills, directly impacting their personal and social development (Baker, 2013; Durlak and Weissberg, 2013; García, 2014). Emphasizing the importance of creating the conditions in work and education so young people can become active, critical and responsible citizens, EU youth programmes and policies, for instance, have called for further recognition of non-formal/informal learning and the building of closer ties with the formal system in efforts to establish a more holistic approach to education (EU, 2015). In their 2015 comprehensive report on youth-work and non-formal learning it is noted that, through the process of acquiring new skills in non-formal and informal learning contexts, young people can be empowered to become "entrepreneurs of their lives" (EU, 2015).[19]

Finally, programs that involve arts and culture (such as music, theatre, dance and festivals), organized sports, as well as a range of events and classes taking place in youth and community clubs, are extremely attractive to young people because they remain close to their interests and aspirations. These are also spaces where young people feel like they can make mistakes and move at their own pace, unlike in the hierarchically structured formal educational settings (AEGEE, 2007). According to the UNESCO, investing in local cultural resources (including tangible and intangible heritage as well as traditional knowledge and skills) is a fundamental tool in efforts to develop sustainable creative economies, open up opportunities to young people and strengthen identity and social cohesion (UN, 2015). To them, "culture is both an enabler and a driver of the economic, social and environmental

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[19] The Erasmus+ program (2014-2020) - an initiative under the broader EU Youth strategy which aims to boost skills and employability and to modernize youth education, training and work - provides funding opportunities for non-formal learning targeting young people, youth workers as well as youth organizations, encompassing all EU-funded activities related to formal, non-formal and informal education (EU, 2016). Its predecessor (The Youth in Action Programme), which ran from 2007-2013, had a total participation rate of 1,157,000, out of whom 23% were young people with fewer opportunities (EU, 2016). In total, EU programs supporting young people from 1989-2013 have involved over 2.5 million participants with investments of almost EUR 2 billion. The Erasmus+ program has a substantial larger budget of EUR 14.7, of which 10% is allocated to non-formal learning directed at young people (EU, 2016, p. 52).

dimensions of sustainable development" (UNESCO, 2017).

As a vector for youth development and a catalyst of young people's creative potential and energy, culture can help us find innovative ways to work with young people (UN, 2015). Amongst the efforts of various NGOs, grassroots and international organizations, foundations as well as state governments, stand a long and strong tradition of using arts and culture programs to engage young people and foster positive youth development, particularly amongst at-risk populations (UNESCO, 2016; The Skillman Foundation, 2007). For instance, the EU Youth Strategy mentioned earlier - which seeks to provide equal opportunities to young people in work and education and encourage them to actively participate in society - proposes initiatives in eight areas, one of them being creativity and culture (EU, 2017).

Researchers and practitioners have found evidence that involvement in arts and culture can contribute significantly to young people's social development and skills enhancement, exposing them to new ways of processing information and expressing their knowledge, expanding their vocabulary and critical thinking abilities, fostering important skills for personal and professional life (including discipline and teamwork), boosting confidence, as well as breaking barriers amongst cultural, racial and ethnic groups (The Skillman Foundation, 2007, p. 14). Helping promote peace and intercultural understanding by creating a space for people to come together and discover the differences and similarities amongst their cultures, stimulating curiosity and respect for diversity is, in fact, one of the pillars of Global Citizenship Education (GCE) - a concept being actively promoted by the UN in recent years also as part of their sustainable development agenda.

To put it simply, the movement seeks to help form "globally and socially conscious" citizens capable of engaging with and helping find solutions to interconnected world challenges (AEGEE, 2007; Huq, 2015; UNESCO, 2017). Carlos Torres identifies three

common objectives of GCE, them being "planet, peace, and people," which refers to: our planet being our only home, thus, we should protect it (ecopedagogy); the idea of global peace as being an intangible cultural good with immaterial value; and the core understanding that all human beings are equal (Torres, 2017). In his opinion, despite clear challenges to transforming such dream into reality (for instance, it is difficult to conceive the idea that individuals can effectively become global citizens when they do not have access to the most basic needs and barely exercise citizenship in their own countries) these global commons allow us to, at the very least, "walk the walk" towards fostering a better understanding amongst nations and ensuring social justice for all (Huq, 2015). This is also the kind of hopeful thinking that should accompany actions aimed at improving the lives of young people and their chances for a better future.

To conclude, as we reflect on the importance of the different strategies for positive youth development discussed above, from opening pathways to employment and educational opportunities, to expanding platforms to enhance cognitive and non-cognitive skills and increase engagement with arts and culture, there is little doubt that in order to construct a fairer and more equal society, we must strive to give young people - regardless of their particular social standing, race or background - a fair chance to reach their full potential and become agents of social and economic progress (OECD, 2017). Childhood marks the phase when the foundations for one's future development are set, but it is during adolescence that social inequalities may be widened or reduced; thus, without adequate investments in policies and interventions to promote the full inclusion of young people, poverty patterns, uneven life paths, and infringement of their rights are unlikely to change (ECLAC, 2016). With this general framework of youth exclusion and inclusion in mind, let us now turn our focus to the state of young people in Rio de Janeiro favelas and explore the complexities and tenacity of life in these communities.

1.2. Poverty, Violence, and Citizenship in Rio de Janeiro's Favelas

1.2.1. A history of crime, inequality, and marginalization

Those visiting Rio de Janeiro for the first time are sure to be startled by the drastic contrast between the rich and the poor. The city's unique landscape and forms of social organization provides a clear display of inequality only found in few other places in the world. In addition to featuring peripheral areas far removed from the city center where large portions of the poor population live, Rio's social topography also includes hundreds of informal urban settlements surrounding some of Latin America's richest neighbourhoods. Not surprisingly, access to public services such as health, culture and education, as well as income generation opportunities, are deeply lacking in favelas compared to more affluent parts of the city. For instance, residents of Ipanema - a traditionally wealthy neighbourhood featuring one of the most expensive square-footages in Brazil - earn an average income 11 times higher compared to residents of Rocinha, Latin America's single largest favela, located less than 10 km away (WikiRio, 2013). These are different worlds within one single city.

With roots dating back to the late nineteenth-century when free slaves and survivors of the Canudos war (the bloodiest civil war in Brazilian history) first settled in the hills of Rio de Janeiro in what is known today as *Morro da Providência*, favelas have historically developed outside the dominion of the state, who chose to abandon its residents to poverty and neglect, resulting in a widespread deprivation of their most basic needs. The systematic lack of state investment and intervention has not only furthered poverty in favelas, but also created a power vacuum that allowed criminal groups to take control of these spaces and impose their own rule of law.

During the 2016 summer Olympic games, the international media reported heavily on several robbery episodes against tourists, reinforcing the image of Rio as a "crime infested city" unsuitable for visitors. And yet, Cariocas have long been forced to coexist

with urban violence - and in a much larger scale - as part of everyday life. Particularly for the 1,4 million people who live in the over 750 favelas scattered throughout the city's metropolitan area (IBGE, 2010) and who are largely at the receiving-end of drug-related and state-led violence, living in Rio means never knowing whether you will get back home alive - as a popular saying goes. Mariluce Mariá, an artist and community leader from Complexo do Alemão, one of the most dangerous and poverty-ridden favelas in the city, talks about the routine of violence in the territory and its impact on residents:

> There are shootouts every day, many times a day. Here in Complexo we live under daily violence that destroys our bodies and our minds. We are targeted by bullets, but it isn't only the bullets that are killing our residents. We are developing psychological and chronicle sicknesses that reflect the daily stress we face (M. Mariá, personal communication, August 11, 2016).

Heavily armed criminal gangs have controlled favelas for decades, regulating the movement of illicit activities, establishing laws, and imposing their own organizational structure upon these communities as they spread fear and oppression amongst residents. With the introduction of the lucrative cocaine trade market in the early 1980's and the dispute for territorial control that came along, Rio became a bloody battlefield resulting in drug factions turning increasingly more well-armed, violent and repressive. In the 1990's, at the peak of the drug faction war, Rio de Janeiro's homicide rate reached the astronomical rate of 90 per 100,000 (Cano, 2012).

The most infamous drug faction operating in the city today, the Red Command (CV), emerged from inside the concrete walls of a maximum-security prison as political prisoners, a by-product of the Brazilian dictatorship, joined ordinary inmates in the exchange of experiences and crime tactics. The CV ferociously disputes the drug trafficking market in Rio with two other drug factions, namely Friends of Friends (ADA) and the Pure Third Command (TCP) - all which operate in close connection with the penitentiary system, a

common practice amongst criminal organizations in Brazil and Latin America.[20] The militias - which are mainly comprised of former police officers and other state agents who extort citizens at the promise of protection and services - are also in the fight for territorial dominance in Rio's favelas (Cano and Iooty, 2008).

Essentially, these criminal groups have the power to dictate where residents can and cannot go, who they can talk to, what they can say and wear (i.e. some slang words and colors are associated to specific factions and, thus, should not be adopted by residents living in territories dominated by rival groups) and even what political candidates they should vote for - a tactic successfully used by the militia to secure their political influence (Cano, 2014; Gombata, 2014). Linking support and intimidation, they often provide much-needed social services to the population of favelas and peripheries (i.e. leisure and cultural activities, medication, and even funeral costs) in return for their loyalty - or at the very least, their silence - while, concurrently, preying on tyrannical methods of dominance (although the later seems to prevail as of recent) (Cano, 2014).

Luke Dowdney - a social activist and director of the favela-based initiative *Fight for Peace* who authored two books on children and youth involvement in organized crime - calls this a system of "forced reciprocity," which is found at the intersection between supportive coercion (the supply of social services the state has failed to provide) and repressive violence (methods of retaliation for non-complicity) (Dowdney, 2003, p. 52). Ignacio Cano, criminal violence specialist and Professor at the State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ), notes that residents who are unwilling to comply with these rules can suffer severe consequences such as receiving a beating, being expelled from the community or getting killed. In a

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[20] A 2008 study carried out by Rio de Janeiro's Secretary of Treasure estimates that drug factions in the state take home approximately R$130M ($41M) per year, discounting operational and logistical costs which can reach as much as R$218M ($69M). This figure is quite modest in comparison to the estimated $64B transnational Mexican cartels make every year from the illegal drug trade to the United States (Rodrigues, 2009).

scenario where there has been a loss of communal trust and an absence of rule of law, residents are socialized to accept, and even normalize, such conditions (Cano, 2014).

Furthermore, the culture of police abuse and violence that has been historically embedded in the militarized foundation of police work in Rio only adds to the instability and insecurity of every-day life in these territories. Shootouts between the police and criminals often resemble war-like scenarios; dwellers are frequently caught in the cross fire and victimized in internal gang turf wars and police efforts to crackdown criminal activities. These tensions result in the violation of fundamental human rights and in the loss of hundreds of innocent lives every year. As has been noted, favela youth are particularly vulnerable. Not only are they more likely to find themselves at the receiving end of police violence, but they are also largely preyed on by drug factions, who have no age boundaries.

Drug traffickers are known for recruiting and arming children as young as 10, alluring them with the promise of authority, respect and financial stability (a protective tactic, given that children up to 11 years of age cannot be placed in socio-educative facilities) (Corrêa, 2017; Dowdney, 2003). A lower life expectancy is, thus, a palpable consequence of this profound exposure to crime and violence - which is largely determined by geographical and social lines. For instance, applying 2000 census data, indirect risk estimates of mortality amongst young people up to 30 years old (who survived pass the age of 15) in different administrative regions of Rio revealed that, in the wealthy neighbourhood of Lagoa, 3,1 out of 1,000 people did not reach the age of 30, while in Complexo do Alemão that number was 12,9 (Zaluar, 2011). As many favela residents would agree: "one life in the favela is not worth the same as a life in the asphalt."

According to Jailson de Souza e Silva - a community leader born and raised in Maré and Professor at Rio's Federal Fluminense University (UFF) who co-founded the NGO *Favela's Observatory* - drug trafficking alone isn't necessarily what makes those areas

dangerous for residents. Rather, the politics of representation of favela dwellers (which tends to portray them as untrustworthy and prone to crime) (Gandra, 2015) and the culture of marginalization of poor people, creates a dangerous permissiveness of violence, which put the lives of those at the margins at much greater risk. "It's ninety times easier to get killed in Maré than in Leblon, especially if you are black. There isn't democracy in favelas… they are an arena of police war," he denounces (Souza e Silva, 2014). And the larger society is quick to demand and support heavy-handed police interventions in these spaces.

The high levels of urban violence experienced by Cariocas continues to prompt feelings of fear, anxiety and frustration. Talk to anyone who lives in Rio and this person will surely complain about the rampant crime scene - and understandably so. In 2016 alone the city registered one estimated robbery every four minutes (G1, 2017). A perverse effect of this exposure, though, is that a rise in urban insecurity only feeds into the logic that criminal punishment should be placed above the protection of human rights. For instance, a recent survey carried out by the University Cândido Mendes pointed out that 35% of Cariocas (or one in three) agree with the popular phrase "a good crook is a dead crook" (which is, in fact, lower than the national average of 50%) and 22% believe in "making justice with his/her own hands" (Coelho, 2017). In Rio de Janeiro in the past couple of years, there have been several accounts of pickpocketers and robbers getting tied up and beaten by large numbers of people,[21] which is only a confirmation of such judgment.

Rio de Janeiro truly is a "parted city" (a common expression used to describe the divided socioeconomic structure it displays) filled with injustices, contradictions, misconceptions and social barriers that separate not only bodies and homes, but also ideas, attitudes, cultural forms and much diversity in ways of living, experiencing, interacting with

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[21] In a similar case that shocked the country and took place in São Luís do Maranhão, a black young man was tied to a pole by his neck and beaten to death by a mob of people.

and changing the city. Crime and violence, combined with the chronic lack of services, deep socio-economic deprivation, and the constructed negative representations that envelops these communities has, for much of its recent history, confined favelas to invisibility and intense social exclusion (Jovchelovitch and Priego-Hernández, 2015, p. 22). Jovchelovitch and Priego-Hernández (2013) refer to this phenomenon as "underground sociabilities," which they define as "subterranean forms of social life that are made invisible to mainstream society by geographical, economic, symbolic, behavioural and cultural barriers" (Jovchelovitch and Priego-Hernández, 2015, p. 21).

Janice Perlman - author of *Favela: Four Decades Living on The Edge* (2010), a detailed depiction of life in favelas based on forty years of ethnographic work and over 2,000 interviews - agrees that favelas continue to be seen and treated as highly stigmatized places of fear within a city that struggles to build its own identity and a country that is inherently unequal, having failed to provide protection to a large portion of its citizens. To her, the marginalization of the urban poor is a "myth that has evolved to reality," which takes away people's self-esteem, denies their right to personhood, and limits the development of their human potential (Perlman, 2010, p. 333).

And yet, despite living face to face with poverty, violence, discrimination and state indifference, as Perlman's account reveals, favela residents continue to find the strength and resilience to keep moving forward, learning to cope with the fears and struggles of their daily lives while holing tight to the joy, hopes and dreams that allow them to believe in a better tomorrow. And this resistance is manifested both at the individual and community levels. Using their lived experiences as fuel to their activism and mobilizing local resources, favela actors and collectives have helped create positive practices of social regeneration through bottom-up responses to poverty, violence, social exclusion and marginalization (Jovchelovitch and Priego-Hernández, 2015).

Along with the expansion and solidification of various residential, cultural and social movements in the last two decades, the work advanced by important organizations from the civil society and NGOs such as Afro Reggae, Observatório de Favelas, Redes da Maré, Viva Rio and CUFA, to name just a few, have been crucial in helping construct a new image of favelas, one that defies portrayals of precariousness, deficiency and absence, while introducing a paradigm of potency, creativity and capacity (Redes da Maré, 2010; Sousa e Silva, 2014). As they fight for social justice, development and representation, these organizations help rewrite the relationship between favelas and the asphalt, reinforcing their position as integral parts of Rio's economy and socio-cultural life (Jovchelovitch and Priego-Hernández, 2015, p. 22). Highlighting the life force that is characteristic of those spaces and its people despite all hardship, Perlman notes: "favelas are not the shadow side of the city; rather, the city is the shadow side of the favelas" (Perlman, 2010, p. 24).

1.2.2. The militarization of public security

Since the re-democratization of Brazil in the 1980s, the country's public security framework has been dominated by the ideas of combat and public service. On the one hand, the main responsibility of the police is to combat "internalized enemies" and occupy hostile territories that, supposedly, nurture criminals. At the same time, public security is conceived as a public service to be provided to all citizens equally (Neto, 2007). One of the results of this "forced marriage" of two very dissimilar lines of operational approach is the provision of security to some parts of the population at the cost of others and the criminalization of the poor. According to Claudio Souza Neto, Professor of Constitutional Law at the Federal Fluminense University (UFF), the ambiguity of the 1988 article of the Federal Constitution on public security allows for the justification of both democratic and authoritarian lines of police work (Neto, 2007). This logic may help explain why Brazil's police is considered one

of the deadliest in the world, killing an average of eight people per day [22] (Forum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2015).

The military state police force of Rio de Janeiro (PMERJ), home to the BOPE battalion depicted in the movie "Elite Squad" (2007), is at the top of those statistics, a result of their historical repressive approach and continuous militarized actions in Rio's most impoverished communities. In attempts to institutionalize police killings, between 1995 and 1998, Rio's state government offered a monetary "bravery award" to officers involved in confrontation leading to the death of a suspect, which, unsurprisingly, only increased police lethal violence and brutality (Cano, 1997). The by-product of an entrenched "war mentality," in the past ten years, PMERJ killed 8,000 people, three-quarters of whom were black men. In 2015, the total number of police killings (645 people) represents one-fifth of all homicides committed in Rio de Janeiro that year (Buttery and Boeri, 2016; Human Rights Watch, 2016).

Systematic police killings in Rio's favelas and peripheries have been condemned widely by international human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, the later who has referred to police officers acting in these territories as "trigger-happy" (Amnesty International, 2015). To make matters worse, legal accountability for human rights violations committed by the police is rarely enforced (Amnesty International estimates that only 20% of police killings in Rio are properly investigated), which highlights the urgency to transform judicial institutions in the country into more efficient - and less lenient - bodies (Amnesty International, 2015). Incontestably, Rio police is directly engaged in fomenting the incidence and perpetration of lethal violence, but they also suffer from high levels of victimization, which, to a certain degree, fails to

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[22] For comparative purposes, a citizen run database estimates that law enforcement officials in the United States killed over 1,000 people in 2014, while in Brazil this number was three times higher (Syrmopoulos, 2014).

generate sympathy from more liberal segments of society.

The risk of getting killed in combat, and especially off-duty, is very high for police officers acting in some of the city's most dangerous territories and has become an inherent part of their daily lives. A local newspaper estimates that in 2015 alone, on average, 2,5 police officers were shot every day in Rio de Janeiro (Justiça ao Minuto, 2015). As a police officer who considers leaving PMERJ for fear of getting killed explains: "I want to quit the police because it is a service that asks for the constant denial of your life. I don't want to turn into a statistic" (Anonymous, personal communication, July 24 2014). And the statistics are indeed appalling. Between 1998 and 2016, Rio's Institute of Public Security (ISP) sets at 2,461 the number of PMERJ police officers killed in the city (Barbosa, 2016). When it comes to claiming lives, Rio de Janeiro's urban war does not pick sides.

In late 2008, the Secretary of Public Security of Rio de Janeiro (SESEG), with support from Brazil's federal government, introduced an ambitious security policy that sought to retake control of favelas traditionally dominated by criminal groups, and ultimately, promote a safer environment to residents of the city. The Pacification consists of an initial publicly announced occupation by military and special police forces and the subsequent implementation of fixed police units inside territories named UPPs (Pacifying Police Units), which are mostly made up of newly trained police officers (over 9,500 in total) exposed to notions of proximity policing. However limited, the Pacification also includes a pillar that promotes selected initiatives alongside private and public organizations to advance social and cultural development in favelas. Currently, there are 38 UPP units in Rio reaching over 264 territories (Governo do Rio de Janeiro, n/d).

The program, which is recognized as one of the most important public security policies ever implemented in Latin America, has profoundly impacted the city, reshaping traditional strategies to combat urban violence and improving thousands of lives. In the past few years,

a great number of academic and policy studies exploring the program's strengths and limitations have been carried out. Notably, a multi-year study conducted by Professor Beatriz Magaloni (2015) from Stanford University (a project I took part in as a research assistant) reveals that, although the overall number of homicides did not decrease in 'pacified' communities, police killings did experience a reduction.

According to the statistical model employed - which was based on a variety of quasi-experimental empirical design strategies that leveraged the introduction of the UPPs in favelas compared to similar territories not covered by the policy - police killings would have been 60% higher without the UPP intervention. That is, in every month the UPPs acted in these communities, there were roughly 29 fewer police killings for every 100,000 inhabitants per year (Magaloni, et.al, 2015, p. 6). These results were made possible, in large part, due to the introduction of the *targets system*, which enhanced the monitoring of criminal activities and monetarily rewarded police battalions for reducing the number of lethal casualties in their particular precincts. Robbert Muggah, research director at the Igarapé Institute, notes:

> "The strategy to alter the police success indicators is one of the main secrets of the Pacification… although it did not resolve the underlying dysfunctions of the police, which demands structural change, it was, for a period, the most efficient policing program in Rio's history" (Muggah and Balestra, 2017).

When the Pacification was first introduced, there was an inevitable feeling of hope that tangible change was coming for Rio's favelas. This was the first major public security initiative of its proposed scope and reach - strengthened by political will - that made a serious attempt to integrate and bring security to the generally abandoned Rio's poorest communities (Rodrigues, 2014). In spite of its significant accomplishments, almost nine years into the program, and the Pacification is far from being fully consolidated, and less so, accepted by the general population, especially those most impacted by it. In fact, the program seems to be reaching its breaking point. Criminal statistics provide us with an alarming

illustration of this potential downfall. Violent deaths in Pacified communities saw an increase of 55,3% in the first semester of 2015, compared to the same period in 2014 (Cardoso, 2015).

Police killings are also on the rise, with figures verging levels prior to the Pacification, and so is police casualty. In 2007, 1,330 police killings took place in Rio, a number that dropped steadily until 2013; in 2014, killings started to surge once again, reaching 920 in 2016 (Rouvenat and Rodrigues, 2017). As for police deaths, the number of police officers killed in Rio up to July 2017 (88) already surpasses the total figure for 2016 (*77*) (G1, 2017). Moreover, although favela residents enjoyed a period of relative peace during the first years of program implementation, shootouts are once again becoming commonplace, resulting in citizen casualties and a routine of terror. Particularly since 2014, there have been an upsurge in cases of UPP units getting attacked and police officers being ambushed by criminals while performing patrol activities.

Communities that had very few or no shootouts at all since their pacification and were considered success stories such as Vidigal, Providência and Santa Marta have experienced armed confrontations in broad daylight (Santa Marta, the inaugural UPP unit, was set fire to in March 2017) (Jornal do Brasil, 2017). The scenario is even more chaotic in already challenging territories. As I write this chapter, the police has just finalized a mega operation involving 6,000 officers and 5,000 soldiers in seven favelas of Rio's North Zone, including the 'pacified' communities of Complexo do Alemão and Jacarézinho, which resulted in 39 arrests and almost 30,000 students out of school (UOL, 2017).

The reasons behind this instability are varied. In addition to a clear attempt by drug traffickers to take back the territories they lost and destabilize the police - getting increasingly more aggressive and cheeky, as officers often say - Rio's strenuous financial situation meant large cuts in public security (32% in 2015), hitting the Pacification at its heart. Funding shortages impacted salaries, bonuses as well as a series of logistical and

operational arrangements, causing a program standstill. Furthermore, increased accounts of police brutality have led to waning public support. Amongst so many others, cases such as the killing of bricklayer Amarildo de Souza, who was tortured by a group of UPP officers in the Rocinha favela back in 2013, and the fatal shooting of 10-year old Eduardo de Jesus during a police operation in Complexo do Alemão in 2015, have stretched the policy to an even more delicate point.

The persistent tensions in the relationship between community members and the police continues to strain any real possibility for change. Stop and frisk actions by police officers are common, so is racial stigmatization, abuse of power and disrespect towards residents. Many favela dwellers view the police and army occupations (as in the case of Maré) as a strategy to control the community and promote a superficial improvement in the city's overall levels of security, particularly the wealthier areas, at the expense of their freedom and rights. After all, it is extremely hard to undo perceptions and experiences based on mistrust and fear that were constructed over the course of decades. Magaloni (2015) finds that some of the main limitations of the reform relates, precisely, to the history of poor interactions between residents and the police in these communities (Magaloni, et al., 2015).

Perhaps the "Achilles' heel" of the Pacification is the belief that the police alone can restore a broken social fabric. Earlier promises to bring in social and economic investments to pacified communities have left much to be desired, disappointing thousands of residents who believed that, for the first time, the state would help fulfill some of their long-standing socio-economic deprivations. As the years went by, the police kept coming, but not much else did. A 2016 survey carried out by the Center for the Study of Security and Citizenship (CESec) revealed that 82% of residents of pacified communities want other services beyond policing (Cândida e Araújo, 2017). And this limitation is not exclusive of the Pacification policy.

A common criticism against the state traditional approach to any kind of development work in favelas maintains that these communities are always seen as "police cases." That is, regardless of what different needs favelas may have as individual territories, the state's first response is always to invest in more policing and "public security." It's a one size fits all method that speaks volumes to how the government perceives favela dwellers. Does Rocinha need more schools? Just send in more soldiers and that should take care of the problem. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has categorized the main threats to human security that people may experience in different contexts of their lives. These threats include economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political securities (United Nations, 2001).

In the context of informal urban settlements and low-income communities where the lack of basic needs and access to fundamental rights are so closely intertwined with crime and violence, is it ever possible to deliver sustainable personal and community security through public interventions if we fail to simultaneously address other forms of security? As Jailson Sousa e Silva notes: "there needs to be mobility, but not the right to come and go solely. The creation of a new paradigm requires much more. Mobility is also economic, educational and work-related" (Sousa e Silva, 2014). That is, security cannot be imposed, it must be constructed alongside those who need it the most. Police officers should rely less on their guns and, instead, arm themselves with a deep understanding of human experiences and needs. At the end of the day, if the sources of violence are not addressed, there is not silver bullet that can bring about peace.

1.2.3. An overall picture of the favela youth

Violence is just one amongst numerous challenges favela dwellers face in their everyday lives. As noted earlier, limited educational and employment opportunities are commonplace, and so is the struggle for cultural affirmation - conditions which tend to hit

young people particularly hard. In addition, poverty continues to prevail in many households, narrowing down people's chances to secure a better future. In the discussion that follows, I use data from a four-year (2013-2016) study carried out by the Institute Pereira Passos (IPP) and the Tim Institute - which, in total, surveyed 17,405 favela youth aged 14-24 from forty 'pacified' Rio favelas - to examine the characteristics of primarily young favela residents and to explore some of the hopes and concerns that shape their lifeworld and future outlook.

Favelas Cariocas are relatively young in comparison to the rest of city. It is estimated that 19% of the population living in these communities scattered around Rio de Janeiro are aged 15-24, over half of whom are black (52,5%), while for the rest of the city that figure is 15,4% (IBGE, 2010). The percentage of favela youth living in conditions of poverty and/or under financial pressure is significant. Close to one quarter (24,1%) of survey respondents live in poor households and 10,6% in extremely poor ones; 34,5% share their homes with more than five people (87% with more than three people but less than five) and almost 20% of those between the ages of 18 and 24 are financially responsible for their households. As for family structure, the survey revealed that a little over a quarter of favela youth have been raised by their mothers (a rate of 24,6% for whites and 28,5% for blacks) and 42% had a father who was not present in their upbringing. In addition, 17% are parents themselves, a phenomenon that tends to impact young girls more prominently: 20,7% reported having children compared to a 13,9% rate for boys (the percentage of those who had their first child before the age of 20 is 50% and 80% for boys and girls, respectively) (IPP, 2017).

When it comes to education, a fundamental tool in the fight against inequality and the gateway to decent life opportunities, although favela youth have largely been able to overcome generational barriers and attain higher educational levels compared to their parents (amongst those aged 15-17 whose parents or guardians did not complete elementary

school, 68,4% have already done so, while for those aged 18 and older that number is 78%), there are still considerable challenges in educational progress and completion amongst this group, particularly in the transition between primary and secondary education (IPP, 2017). Roughly 65% of all youth surveyed are currently studying: 87,7% amongst those aged 14-17 and 40,7% considering youth aged 18-24.

The large majority (close to 90%) attend public schools[23] or universities - although the percentage of those aged 18 and older who have reached higher education is low (7,8%) and varies greatly by favela. In the community Parque Oswaldo Cruz, for instance, almost 19% of youth in this age range either enrolled in or completed university, while in Morro dos Prazeres that figure is lower than 1%. Yet, half of all youth surveyed claimed they dream of attending university in the future. Perhaps one of the most critical issues impacting their educational experience, the survey revealed that almost half of favela youth experience an age-grade distortion of more than two years, which is at least 20% higher than the average found in the municipality of Rio de Janeiro. This distortion escalates amongst youth who should have already completed secondary education: while 90,9% of survey participants aged 18 and older attended school at least up to the 7th grade, only 50,6% reached the last year of high school (IPP, 2017).

As it is the case nationally and throughout the Latin American region, unemployment

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[23] Less than one third of surveyed youth who frequent public schools evaluate the education they receive well (IPP, 2017). It is important to note that, with almost 77,5% of all students in primary and secondary education attending public schools, inequality is a prominent characteristic of the Brazilian educational system (OECD, 2010). Those with less money are confined to poorly-maintained and low-performing schools while the middle and upper classes can afford enrolling their kids in private schools. The quality of public education shifts drastically when we consider higher education, which also impacts access to poorest segments of the population. Students graduating from private schools are largely more prepared to take the required entrance examinations to one of the 304 prestigious and highly competitive public universities in the country, while students graduating from public schools struggle to make the cut. Despite recent policies to increase the presence of students from public schools in public universities (quotas system), there is still a prominent disparity on acceptance rates for the two groups. For example, in 2013, in the state of São Paulo, where 85% of high school graduates carry out their studies in public schools, only 28,5% of college students at USP (University of São Paulo) - the top public university in Brazil and one of the best in Latin America - originated from public schools (Saldaña, 2013).

and underemployment are characteristic of the youth population living in favelas. There is a shortage of work opportunities (particularly formal employment) for relatively unexperienced and/or first-time job seekers, which has only been aggravated by the recent economic crisis Brazil has experienced. Despite dealing with imperfect data (the survey was conducted in different communities every year, plus, the work situation of young people tends to be extremely volatile), since the beginning of the study, the survey points to an increase in the proportion of favela youth who are economically active, from 31,5% in 2013 to almost 50% in 2016. Yet, when compared to the overall unemployment rate for young people in the municipality of Rio de Janeiro the results are less favorable: from 2013 to 2016, the mean unemployment rate amongst favela youth aged 14-24 surveyed for the study is set to 29% against 15% considering the entire municipality. Out of those who reported being economically active in the four years the survey was conducted, 44% had a formal job, although the formal employment rate suffered an 11% decreasing variation between 2013 and 2016 (IPP, 2017).

It is important to note that black favela youth are especially vulnerable to employment instability. In addition to having a greater presence in the informal job sector in relation to whites (the percentage of young people formally employed was 38% and 35% for blacks and whites, respectively), they are more likely to be out of work, displaying a mean unemployment rate of 38% compared to 35% for whites, a ratio which remained inferior across all survey years. Finally, the proportion of youth who were neither working, studying or looking for employment when they answered the survey (a variation of the NEET category, known as "nem-nem-nem" in Portuguese) oscillated between 14% and 11% between 2013 and 2016 (mean of 13%), being more prominent amongst older youth: 18% of respondents aged 18-24 were nem-nem-nem, while for those aged 14-17 that figure was 8,5% (IPP, 2017).

These results demonstrate that a large portion of young favela residents are engaged in productive activities and have a busy daily routine. For instance, amongst those who have a job, half work full-time (for those aged 18 or less, the medium weekly workload is around 20-25 hours) and 80% spend at least one hour each way commuting to and from the workplace. Other activities young people take part in frequently during the week/weekends include sleeping, studying, watching TV, hanging out with friends and surfing the internet (in 2013, roughly 89% of survey-takers claimed to use the internet; in 2016, that figure was almost universal amongst this population, reaching 99%).

When it comes to enjoying their free time, although only one third of respondents practiced physical activities in the three months prior to the survey, a significant portion of youth reported frequenting leisure spaces such as the mall (66%), movie theatre (50%), concerts and parties (42%), funk parties (40%) and the beach (36%). Funk parties are a particularly popular activity amongst favela youth due to its genuine cultural significance, having emerged and developed inside these territories, as well as for representing, essentially, the only form of entertainment available to the masses in favelas (IPP, 2017).

Starting in 2015, the IPP survey incorporated questions about consumption of licit/illicit drugs and sexual life,[24] which help us further understand the behavioural universe of these adolescents. The young teenage years appear as the phase when the majority of favela youth either try or begin consuming both licit and illicit drugs: amongst 70% of respondents who reported having drank alcohol, 61% did so for the first time between the ages of 13 and 15, while amongst the roughly 33% who have used drugs, 58% were first exposed to these substances between the ages of 14 and 16 (amongst the illicit drugs most used, marijuana takes the lead with over 23%, followed by inhalants, or volatile solvents,

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[24] Given that survey respondents normally feel reluctant to provide sensitive information about their lives, the sample for these questions comprise a population significant smaller compared to the rest of the study: 3,965 youth from 15 different communities.

with 22%). Despite a high rate of alcohol usage and a relatively expressive exposure to drugs, only 21,7% of survey-takers reported being smokers (or having at least tried cigarettes), amongst whom 31,9% have the habit of smoking every day. As for their sexual life, *73,3% of* respondents already had sex (roughly 91% and 53% amongst those aged 18-24 and 14-17, respectively) and only 59,5% reported using a condom in their last sexual intercourse while 24% opted for contraception only - which reveals a gap in safe sex practices (IPP, 2017).

From 2014 onwards, the study also included the central thematic of violence, surveying into young people's perceptions about the level of security in their communities. The results show a high exposure to mind-boggling situations where shootouts, stray bullets, robberies and physical aggression are regular occurrences. Although the survey was applied through the course of three years (meaning that answers reflect the security levels experienced by respondents at that particular point in time), it is clear that violence is an intrinsic part of everyday life in favelas, confirming earlier conclusions. In 2014, the average of survey-takers who consider their communities violent is 71,2%, a figure that increased to roughly *77%* in 2015 and 92% in 2016 (IPP, 2017). Such results, we may say, align with the aggravation of the public security scenario in the city and the gradual decline in the overall levels of security experienced in communities impacted by the Pacification policy.

In fact, considering the favela youth population, the Pacification introduced more than just a shift in the organizational structure of communities and a forced proximity to a state actor that most of them grew up learning to fear; it also meant an intensification of young people's struggle for cultural affirmation. Notably, a resolution implemented in 2007 and rolled out along with the Pacification policy (Resolution 013), gave UPP commanders and officers the power to make decisions over the social and cultural affairs of favelas, from controlling private gatherings and parties in people's homes, to vetoing traditional music and sports events held in local public spaces in benefit of the larger community. Funk parties, a

central form of cultural expression in favelas, as noted, were particularly impacted by the resolution, being essentially banned from these communities at one point. "They gave it with one hand, and took away with the other," as residents would say (Smadja, 2013).

Back in 2014, it was announced that the resolution 013 would be substituted by a blander version (Resolution 014) aimed at regulating, rather than banning, cultural events in favelas.[25] Nonetheless, there have been numerous accounts of UPP officers determining whether events can or cannot take place according solely to their own discretion and/or making it nearly impossible for organizers to get all the necessary paperwork together. This attempt to dictate the cultural life of residents has only exacerbated police-youth conflict and animosity towards the corporation, adding more fuel to an already chaotic relationship. And this bias against funk isn't exclusive of the police.

Despite a 2009 regulation officially naming funk as part of Rio de Janeiro's cultural heritage (in addition, funk has broken boundaries, becoming popular in other states as well as internationally), the music genre is still very much condemned (and even hated) by a large portion of the population (Smadja, 2013). The fact that Brazil's Federal Senate Commission for Human Rights and Participatory Legislation (CDH) is currently debating a proposal to criminalize funk is a clear example of this hostility (Senado Notícias, 2017). All in all, young favelas dwellers are not only restricted in their socio-economic conditions, mobility and access to public security, but also in their cultural rights, freedom of association and expression, their lifeworld discriminated and obscured in relation to the mainstream society.

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[25] It is important to note that, like with any other social event, some level of supervision is indeed necessary given that some funk parties can be extremely noisy, tumultuous, and may serve as grounds for drug use, trafficking and other illicit activities. However, these issues by no means justify the truculence and prejudice with which the police approach these events and the people who attend them, which differs from the treatment party-goers in other parts of the city receive.

Conclusion

Insights from this chapter provide us with base information and perspectives on young people at a global and local scale, aimed at contextualizing and facilitating the analysis of youth empowerment from a framework of emancipatory education. Taking a more general approach to the discussion with insights from Latin America and worldwide, the first segment of the chapter explores youth problematics, but not without also considering paradigms of inclusion and positive development. As examined, contemporary challenges facing the urban youth in the developing world revolve around the dynamics of poverty, restricted educational and work opportunities, as well as crime and violence.

Mainly residing in fast-growing informal settlements, globally, over one billion young people are exposed to social and economic vulnerabilities they are ill-equipped to tackle. With one-third of its youth population out of school despite not having a high school diploma in addition to one-fifth not engaged in employment, education or training (NEETs), Latin America has denied a large share of its young citizens access to its main channels of social inclusion. Criminal violence, a core aspect of the region's experience, only reduces the already limited chances of low-income and minority youth in particular to escape the vortex of poverty, violence, and marginalization. Hence, the need to invest in strategies to help young people develop their capacities and lay the foundations for a better future is enormous.

Drawing from different identity formation theories, the second thematic addresses the turbulent process young people must go through as they attempt to build their identities and find themselves while experiencing important physical, cognitive, emotional and social changes. Exposed to a "society of the spectacle," in which their individual value has been obscured by demands and messages from the consumer society, youth face barriers to finding substance, meaning and purpose, which may lead to alienation from themselves and

the world. Having access to platforms that stimulate subjectivity, critical thinking, self-reflection and imagination is therefore even more crucial in this stage of life as young people set the stage for their future beings.

Although generally portrayed as disengaged and apathetic to issues around them, widespread social, economic and policy barriers to youth inclusion have increasingly motivated young people all over the world to mobilize for change, using various online and offline platforms to lead social justice campaigns, raise their voices, and demand their participation in decision-making processes. A review of international policy and practice frameworks in youth development reveals that, despite the insufficiency of schemes to address their multi-dimensional plight, starting in the 1980s, international and local actors began to prioritize the youth life stage, the thematic, for instance, becoming a cornerstone of the United Nation's work. Youth-oriented provisions which seek to develop the values, skills and competencies of young people are diverse and cover nearly every aspect of their lives, from school, to work and the community experience.

As illustrated in the literature, provisions tend to be carried out either "for" youth, them being dealt with as mere objects of social action, or "alongside" young people under an assets-based approach that places them at the center of productive change. The strands of youth empowerment and development that prioritize investments in soft skills, arts and culture - provisions which are mainly advanced through non-formal educational platforms - are important tools in creating conditions, counterpart to the formal system of education, for young people to become active, responsible and critical citizens, and to develop the skills necessary to succeed in an increasingly demanding and interconnected knowledge society.

Redirecting the focus of the discussion to Rio de Janeiro's favelas in the second part of the chapter, the analysis of the literature reveals a social fabric systematically weakened by poverty, neglect and violence. In addition to lacking access to adequate basic needs

services, dwellers have historically suffered from state-led and criminal violence, being forced to accept coercive norms of sociability and face police militarization. A culture of marginalization of the poor has only deepened divisive beliefs and structures which restrain these territories to invisibility and social exclusion.

Favela residents are, however, resilient and resourceful, creating and engaging in bottom-up efforts for positive social regeneration. The state approach to these communities has been mainly confrontational, marked by repressive policies and a high prevalence of police use of lethal force. Rio de Janeiro has long lived in an "urban war," which has claimed the lives of thousands of young favela residents, but also of young cops. The large-scale Pacification security policy attempted to regenerate this violent history and help rewrite the police-community relationship, but the state focus in reclaiming territories by force with little intention of tackling the root causes of violence has contributed to jeopardizing the strategy. In Rio favelas, social development has been reduced to public security and public security has been reduced to a militarized police.

Notably, this militarization has only intensified young people's struggle for cultural affirmation as funk parties, one of their main forms of cultural expression, have been controlled (or vetoed altogether) by the police, exacerbating tensions. With respect to their sociodemographic characteristics, the social conditions and lifeworld of young favela residents are, unsurprisingly, enveloped in daily hardship and structural barriers that undermine social and economic mobility. A significant proportion of them live in poverty or under financial pressure, were raised in single-parent families, are responsible for their households, have difficulties transition from primary to secondary school as well as accessing university, and are unemployed or work informally. They are also restricted in their right to come and go safely, the majority considering their communities violent and having been exposed to high levels of violent incidents.

CHAPTER 2

The Promise of Emancipatory Education

Introduction

Having reflected on the plight of young people in Brazil and across the world, and assessed the importance of investing in strategies for positive youth development to promote their full inclusion in society, the theoretical synthesis presented in this chapter is an attempt to gather, organize, criticize and connect relevant narratives for my own analysis of emancipatory education and its potential to galvanize individual and community transformation. Section 2.1 is dedicated to the theory and praxis of critical pedagogy, and starts with an introduction to the framework, its origins, and the philosophers behind its progress and influence (2.1.1); following is an investigation of the theoretical foundations and fields that have inspired the framework, as well as the premises, concepts and beliefs which are central to its philosophy (2.1.2); finally, the leading objectives motivating the critical pedagogy strategy and some of its most prominent dimensions used to guide practice are presented (2.1.3).

The chapter continues with a section focused on exploring the practical possibilities of realizing individual and community transformation through the framework of emancipatory education (2.2). Questions of power, agency, and opportunity structures are tackled first (2.2.1), laying the necessary foundation for a discussion on the concepts and processes of empowerment and emancipation from the perspective of different fields and theoretical orientations (2.2.2). The chapter concludes with a debate on the contrasts, linkages, and intersections of empowerment and emancipation frameworks, particularly from a critical pedagogy standpoint, and also explores the limitations and opportunities of a Freirean emancipatory education in its stand as a pedagogy of possibility (2.2.3).

2.1. The theory and praxis of critical pedagogy

2.1.1. Roots and development

Having originated essentially from the contributions of Paulo Freire, considered one of the most influential critical educators of the 21st century, critical pedagogy is a philosophy of education and set of practices that place elements of critical theory and praxis (informed action upon the world) at the heart of its guiding framework (Gadotti and Torres, 2009). Recognizing education as a crucial instrument of struggle for social change and rejecting fixed methods perpetuated by traditional top-bottom approaches, Freire understood pedagogy as a non-neutral political and moral practice which main function is to provide individuals with the knowledge, skills, and social relations necessary to expand their critical understanding of the world and participatory citizenship as part of a larger movement for democratic change (Giroux, 2010). Central to Freire's radical pedagogy is the assertion that oppression - manifested in deep-rooted and ongoing social, political, economic, and cultural relations of domination and exploitation - exists, but so do possibilities for emancipation and societal transformation.

The roots of critical pedagogy can be traced back to Paulo Freire's early literacy work[26] with sugar cane peasants in the impoverished region of Angicos, Northeast of Brazil, in what would become known in Latin America as "popular education." The movement incorporated educational practices taking place outside the formal system of education via non-formal and informal platforms (churches, community and cultural centers, libraries, etc.) advancing initiatives in adult literacy training and citizenship education in a context of struggle for social change (Keesing-Styles, 2004; Tarlau, 2014). Emerging under a very specific set of social conditions within the Brazilian and Latin American experience of the early 1960's,

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[26] In this initial experience, over 300 illiterate sugar cane workers were taught how to read and write in only forty-five days using Freire's literacy method (Gadotti and Torres, 2009; Tarlau, 2014).

popular education connected, directly and unapologetically, with social movements and their cries for social transformation (Tarlau, 2014, p. 371). Rebecca Tarlau explains that although American scholars have essentially deflected their work from the popular education tradition that characterizes the critical pedagogy framework, within the Latin American context, the field is still recognized as a legitimate progressive force that continues to inspire organized social change efforts (Tarlau, 2014).

Notably, Brazil's Landless Worker's Movement (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra - MST)[27] - one of the largest organized social movements in Latin America whose 2,500 land occupations have guaranteed settlement rights to 370,000 families in little over two decades (Friends of the MST, 2015) - has openly adapted Freire's pedagogical tools in its educational practices for children, youth, and adults, helping bring a "socially-conscious and transformative-oriented" education to thousands of landless workers, their families, as well as unemployed groups of people, some belonging to largely excluded segments of society (Martins, 2005). Essentially, Freire advances an education that is born out of the struggle for social justice (the denounce of a perverse reality) and that stimulates the continuous fight for representation and "conscience of the necessity to learn" in the production and re-production of knowledge (Schwendler, 2001).

Apart from the field of education, which has relied extensively on Freire's writings to advance social justice and policy-oriented scholarly work in different focus areas (i.e. teacher education, higher education, bilingual and bicultural education, multiculturalism and citizenship education, adult education, critical media literacy), critical pedagogy has inspired scholars and drawled out contributions from a variety of academic fields such as

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[27] The MST has established over 1,800 schools throughout its settlements, out of which 1,100 are recognized by state educational and cultural authorities. They also provide literacy training to over 30,000 adults every year. In 2010, they received the medal "Paulo Freire" given by the Ministry of Education for their continuous commitment to the education of youth and adults (EJA). At the official inauguration of their EJA activities in 1991 in a settlement in Bagé, Rio Grande do Sul, Freire himself was present, showing his unconditional support for the activities (Martins, 2005; Vermelho Portal, 2010).

community development and activism, social work, feminist theory, theology, philosophy, sociology, international development and public health, to name a few from a long list of adherents (Mayo, 1995; McLaren, 2009; McLaren, 1999). According to Peter Mayo, resorting to Freire's ideas seems to have become a 'de rigueur' for professionals and educators engaged in confronting structural and systemic oppression as part of the process of imagining a world which 'should and can be' (Mayo, 1995, p. 364).

Particularly since the 1980's and the diffusion of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) in North America, critical pedagogy gained prominence in the region thanks to the work of a group of internationally-acclaimed scholars and educators including Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren, Douglas Kellner, Stanley Aronowitz, Antonia Darder, Michael Apple, Carlos Torres, and bell hooks, amongst others. These critical educators have written extensively on the topic and helped shape its current theoretical and practical applications from a wide range of perspectives (Peters, 2005). Freire's critical education had a major impact not only in the academic and theoretical spheres extending beyond the developing world, but also in practical terms (Giroux, 2010, McInnerney, 2009). His work was the driving force behind the development of the Brazilian national literacy campaign for youth and adults of the early 1960's (EJA), also inspiring literacy campaigns in several Latin American and African countries such as Cuba, Nicaragua, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau (Blackburn, 2000; Mayo, 1995).

Not surprisingly, Freire's trajectory was marked by opposition as his progressive teachings and practices did not sit well with the political interests of a socially and economically turbulent - and increasingly undemocratic - Latin America. A couple of decades after the onset of some of the most important formative years of his life as a philosopher and pedagogue, Freire came face to face with the authoritarianism of a dictatorship regime and paid the real costs of intellectual oppression (Gadotti and Torres,

2009; Giroux, 2010). Brazil's military coup of 1964 would have him exiled for sixteen years, a period that he used to further develop his theoretical framework in closer connection with international struggles and inspired by advancements in liberation philosophies in academia and church circles (Gadotti and Torres, 2009; Tarlau, 2014).

Freire's radical combination of theoretical grounds and exposure to different realities is believed to have been precisely what enriched his message, turning him into an icon of critical pedagogy (Gadotti and Torres, 2009, Torres, 2014). Upon Freire's return to Brazil in 1980, he became involved in the establishment of the Worker's Party (PT) and supervised its literacy program for adults in the state of São Paulo. In 1988, he became Secretary of Education in the same state and was able to extend his educational practices and theories to the public school sphere (Gadotti and Torres, 2009; Tarlau, 2014; Torres, 2014). Paulo Freire died in 1997 and was declared "patron of Brazilian education" by former President Dilma Rouseff in 2012.

His ideas and contributions are, however, more alive than ever as we continue daring to dream of living in a more just world. As pointed out by Henry Giroux, Carlos Torres, and Moacir Gadotti - engaged intellectuals who worked closely with Freire in life and dedicated much of their scholarly efforts to advancing his theory - what makes critical pedagogy still relevant today is the ongoing struggle for social transformation towards a more democratic and equal society, and the attempt to find alternative approaches to mainstream education paradigms that are successful in providing grounds for those at the margins to reach their full potential as individuals, citizens, social subjects and agents of change (Gadotti and Torres, 2009; Giroux, 2010; Holliday, 2010).

2.1.2. Theoretical foundations and guiding premises

As for the theoretical foundations of critical pedagogy, Freire derived much of his critical social theory of education from the critical theory school of thought established in

the late 1920's by the Frankfurt School jointly with the father of the New-Left, Herbert Marcuse, whose critique of advanced industrial society and technological rationality was culminated in the book *One-Dimensional Man* (1964) (Peters, 2005). In short, this group of theoreticians renounced a closed approach to the social sciences and advocated for a view of social theorizing that gave emphasis to the tensions, contradictions, and imbalances endemic to our society regarding relations of power and privilege (McLaren, 2009; Sudersan, 1998). The Frankfurt School was the first to take on a systematized and scientifically rigorous exploration of the potential of Marxist historical materialism, although the social disillusionment caused by World War II and the rise of Nazi Germany drifted the focus from the Marxist tradition (Raymond and Torres, 2002, p. 2; Sudersan, 1998).

The German philosopher Jurgen Habermas - one of the most important figures in social theory who belonged to the second generation of the Frankfurt School - is responsible for having reconstructed and revitalized the theory, connecting it to other theoretical frameworks and developing a distinctive body of thought, namely critical social theory, that deviated from Marxism's key notion of 'production' and supplanted that with 'language' (theory of communicative action) (Raymond and Torres, 2002; Sudersan, 1998). Raymond Morrow and Carlos Torres have explored in-depth the differences and affinities[28] between Freire and Habermas, pointing out that - although not considered an educational theorist per se - Habermas has made important contributions to education and the field of critical pedagogy as a form of critical theory (Raymond and Torres, 2002).

Additional range of fields/theories Freire borrowed from to develop his approach to education from a philosophical stance include phenomenology, existentialism, Christian and Marxist humanism, as well as the works of Pierre Bourdieu, Antonio Gramsci, Georg Hegel,

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[28] For more on Habermas tradition and its connection to Freire's work and the framework of critical pedagogy, see Raymond and Torres, 2002.

and the Birmingham school of cultural studies, amongst others (Baffour, 2014; Blackburn, 2000; Frymer, 2005). The Marxist and Neo-Marxist philosophies were thus fundamental to Freire's work as he was concerned with issues of alienation, existential and social oppression, presenting education as a pre-condition for full citizenship (Frymer, 2005).

A key insight from this tradition maintains that the structure of capitalist societies are exploitative in essence and intervene in people's capacity to reach their ontological vocation, as Freire would put it, of becoming more fully human by turning subjects into objects in all aspects of social life (Blackburn, 2000; Frymer, 2005). From a Marxist understanding of the nature of humanity that views humans as "beings who exist within a particular historical context, along with its economic, social, political and cultural norms, structures and institutions" (Freire, 1972, p. 30), to Freire, men may be essentially free in theory, but society excludes the poor and marginalized from realizing that freedom. Simply put, those at the bottom of the social ladder have little choice when it comes to recognizing, selecting, and taking on different courses of action towards greater life success (Blackburn, 2000).

In critical pedagogy, the concepts of **hegemony** and **ideology** are used to examine education as a vehicle for socialization and cultural programming; a channel through which individuals are 'acculturated' into mainstream beliefs and values (Baffour, 2014). In this regard, hegemony is understood as the exercise of domination of one culture over subordinate ones, a process that is maintained through social structures, forms, and practices produced in specific sites (church, schools, media, etc.), while ideology - as it refers to the production and representation of ideas, values, and beliefs as they are lived out and made sense of by groups and individuals - serve as the backbone of the hegemonic process (Baffour, 2014; McLaren, 2009). The central issue here, as Peter McLaren points out, is that ideology may exercise a negative function when connected to forms of domination in a context of unbalanced and unequal institutional power relations (McLaren, 2009). That is,

those who do not scribe to the dominant ideology and do not share the same beliefs and values of the 'majority' are disadvantaged, which contributes to the perpetuation of the status-quo and relations of inequality (Baffour, 2014; McLaren, 2009).

Borrowing from Marx's conception of thought as being socially determined (that is, people's consciousness are shaped by their social being and not by their consciousness itself) and ideology being thought which denies this determination, critical pedagogy maintains that the real motives behind people's constraints can be unknown to them, or their perceptions of their situation might be impaired - which greatly limits their capacity to describe the reality of their own oppression (Biesta, 2010; Galloway, 2012). To Freire, individuals who are submersed in oppressive conditions and are denied their right to exercise their human capacities fully suffer from a form of '**existential violence**' (Fyrmer, 2005). The hegemonic forces operating upon peoples' consciousness have the power to shape their realities and subjectivities, a process that can produce 'domesticating' results (Mayo, 1995). Freire refers to this 'myth' or 'false translation of reality' as '**false consciousness**,' which acts as a constraining mechanism for keeping people in positions (or boundary situations) pre-determined by their social standing and/or background (i.e. education, religion, forms of socialization).

As these particular functions or roles within society are internalized, individuals move farther away from becoming their 'true self' and adopt the image of the oppressor (Fritze, n/d). As Freire warned, whenever education does not perform a liberating function, the oppressor wants to become the oppressed. Further to this, as the oppressed internalizes the values of the oppressor as well as the myths about themselves and their position in society, they fall deep into what Freire calls a '**culture of silence**,' a stance from which they remain passive and do not question the nature of their oppression, while their knowledge and life experiences are ignored, devalued and inferiorized (Fritze, n/d; Mayo 1995). Hence, the

importance of recognizing emancipatory education from its multi-level liberatory capacity, meaning that through it, the oppressed can free not only themselves but also the oppressor living inside their own consciousness and out in their social world.

Schools help shape people's understanding of the world around them and their place in it (Shor, 1993). Given such fundamental role in the construction of society and - perhaps even more paramount - in the construction of critical individuals, the critical pedagogy tradition rejects the promotion and operationalization of education as a private good, which tends to predominate public good notions. Fundamentally, formal schooling in all stages operate for the purpose of building a qualified labour force to ensure the competitiveness and productivity of nations in a world that is increasingly interconnected and interdependent. The clear issue with this corporate model of education is that it privileges technical-scientific training and job-readiness over educational values aimed at authentic education for self and social change (Aronowitz, 2008; Freire, 2004; McInnerney, 2009).

Calling it a "bare pedagogy," Henry Giroux explains that this approach is stripped of critical elements for teaching and learning, limiting the evolvement of informed citizens capable of making decisions to impact their lives and communities. As he puts it, this method "prioritizes training over teaching for the pursuit of the imagination, critical thinking, and the teaching of freedom and social responsibility" (Giroux, 2010). In this context, traditional schools become sites for reproducing the status-quo, demanding obedience and acceptance, restricting spaces for inquiry and silencing student voice, while reinforcing patterns of disaffection and alienation (McInnerney, 2009). For young people, this translates to an educational trajectory filled with struggles of adaptation, motivation and engagement. According to Peter McInnerney:

> "Schools become complicit in the objectification of young people when learning is unconnected to their lives and aspirations, when they have little to say in the choice of curriculum topics or how they might investigate them, when their teachers fail to engage the in a critical reading of their lives

This suppression of student's self-reflection and subjectivity leads to **alienation** (McInnerney, 2009). As discussed earlier, in the critical pedagogy literature, alienation refers to the numerous forms of separation that prevent individuals from realizing their historically conditioned potential; that is, from engaging actively with the world and helping transform it (Frymer, 2005). A Freirean-oriented standpoint to this discussion - which is situated upon notions of subjectivity, human agency and liberation, and that factors in historical forms of alienation and violence in every-day life - understands youth alienation as part of a larger project to transform the politics of education (Frymer, 2005; McInnerney, 2009; Shor, 1993). That is, to critical pedagogues, when approached as sites of cultural politics, schools can provide a space of contestation of class, culture, knowledge and domination within society, encouraging participation and empowerment (Baffour, 2014, p. 11). Central to this argument is the belief that education can help people break free from the dehumanizing social structures and conditions that make them succumb to a sense of fatalism and lose sight of their individual transformative capacities (McInnerney, 2009).

Thus, in a Hegelian understanding of class-driven oppression with dehumanization being a fundamental attribute of society (the being-with), in order for revolutionary transformation to take place and for people to become emancipated and regain their 'selves,' they need to become aware of how power operate and shape different aspects of their lives, and engage, at the same time, in '**cultural action for freedom**,' a process in which individuals reflect critically about their social positions or 'boundary situations' and take action to rupture oppressive conditions and change their reality (Biesta, 2010; Fritze, n/d; Frymer, 2005; Galloway, 2012). Freire believed that in order for individuals to be human in a meaningful way they must be full subjects, described as "conscious social actors with the ability, the desire and opportunity to take part in social and political life" (Frymer, 2005, p.

4; McInnerney, 2009; Shor, 1993).

Understanding the role of culture and power in relation to knowledge production and the schooling process from a critical pedagogy standpoint is central to advancing the discussion on emancipatory education. Critical theorists view knowledge as non-neutral, being historically and socially situated in specific interests and agreements made between individuals and groups who share particular social relations such as gender, race, and economic status. Meaning that "knowledge is a social construction deeply rooted in a nexus of power relations" (McLaren, 2009, pp, 63). Drawing from Pierre Bordieau's understanding of **social capital**, which refers to the general background, knowledge, disposition and skills that are passed from one generation to the next (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1997, p.10), critical educators seek to understand how schools - via structural practices such as curriculum and teaching procedures - are implicated in the process of intergenerational reproduction of social class, namely **social reproduction,** which plays a role in keeping low-class students in positions of subordination and limiting their ability to move up the social ladder (for example, students from working class families becoming working class adults) (Baffour, 2014). What we understand as '**culture**' is key to this debate.

As Peter McLaren notes, cultural questions can help us understand who holds power and how that power is reproduced and manifested in social relations linking education to the society at large. That is, the ability of individuals to express their culture is directly tied to the power they possess and are able to exercise in the social order (McLaren, 2009, p. 65). Considering that our society attributes a very 'bourgeois' meaning to culture, particular kinds of culture, almost exclusively those ascribed to the dominant classes, are legitimized while others are viewed as inferior (Baffour, 2014; McLaren, 2009). For instance, students from low-income background inherit different forms of cultural capital from their families, but schools tend to only value forms of capital deriving from the upper and middle classes.

Whenever culture functions on class-based differences in regards to social class and cultural capital it serves to reproduce inequality (Baffour, 2014).

Contrary to this view, Freire believed that everyone possesses and takes part in making culture. His anthropological notion of culture proposes that "culture is the actions and results of human in society, the way people interact in their communities, and the addition people make to the world they find. Culture is what ordinary people do everyday, how they behave, speak, relate, and make things" (Shor, 1993, p. 29). Accordingly, critical pedagogy calls for the advancement of pedagogical practices in schools that encourage students to use their culture identity to voice their lived experiences and challenge dominant representations impacting their daily lives, as they work on the path towards reaching formal educational needs (Wishart and Lashua, 2006). The goal is to help students move beyond marginalisation and subordination, while inviting them to join the struggle over cultural affirmation and representation (Baffour, 2014; McLaren, 2009, p. 68).

These ideas are strongly connected to the contributions of American education reformist, activist and psychologist, John Dewey (1859-1952), one of the most influential education philosophers of the past century who made important theoretical advancements on the evolution of schooling and the need to reconstruct formal educational pathways to improve society and the human experience. In *Education and Democracy: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (1916) Dewey explores key concepts of education and practices essential in fostering a democratic society and strengthening platforms with the power to open up possibilities for continuous individual growth and transformation.

For Dewey, without learning how to read the world around them and understanding how the education received can help transform different realities, individuals are left with "empty" intellectual skills that - although useful for the advancement of quantifiable life outcomes and for the development of the broader society - do not necessarily help promote

"socially-oriented" frames of mind (Dewey, 1916). Hence, education must strive to balance individual freedom and social stability to ultimately promote social change, development, and democracy.

Fundamentally, the critical pedagogy tradition strongly emphasizes the **political nature of education** (which, in its duality, can be used to empower or disempower people, but also preserve domains in between) and its intimate connection to different ideologies shaped by power, politics, history and culture (Darder, 1991). Approaching education from a critical theory lens, thus, means recognizing the dialectical nature of education from distinct, but equally present, perspectives of domination and liberation (McLaren, 2009). In line with this dual-purpose notion, while schools and other learning platforms may act as sites for indoctrination and socialization upholding the social reproduction interests of dominant classes, they can also operate as emancipatory spaces for promoting individual and community transformation motivated by large-scale social change aspirations (Baffour, 2014; McLaren, 2009).

In all, educational platforms are seen as crucial sites for struggle; a view that differs from more radical proposals such that of philosopher Ivan Illich, whose critique of education in modern societies culminated in the book *Deschooling Society* (1971) advances the theory that schools act solely as sites for reproducing class relations, calling for the reinvention and de-institutionalization of learning as a mean to de-institutionalize society (Illich, 1971). Although also highly critical of traditional educational methods that promote instrumentalized knowledge based purely on market needs, critical pedagogues believe in the possibility of providing individuals with the skills necessary to attain academic credentials and succeed in formal schooling without excluding a critical exposure to societal and political contradictions which can become a basis for active citizenship (Baffour, 2014).

Their proposal is as follows: while schools are primarily interested in promoting

technical knowledge (which can be measured and quantified, serving as a student controlling mechanism) and practical knowledge (learning that can help students shape their daily actions in the world), critical pedagogy focuses in emancipatory knowledge, whose goal is to balance the tension between technical and practical teaching approaches, while unveiling relations of power and privilege that distort social relationships with an eye towards student engagement for transformation and collective action (McLaren, 2009, p. 64). In this regard, critical pedagogy holds that educational spaces have the potential to become platforms for hope and change, helping students find themselves in the pedagogical process and providing them with enabling tools so they can take part in the transformation of their lives, culture, and society, in a process of deepening and strengthening participatory democracy (Darder, 1991).

2.1.3. Leading objectives and foundational practices

As has been discussed, within the critical pedagogy tradition, education plays a defining role in enacting the engagement of popular groups and individuals with forms of knowing and learning that can help them recreate the way they see themselves and understand the world, in direct opposition to educational schemes that perpetuate patterns of domestication and oppression through a 'banking model of education' - a concept-like metaphor which will be explained later on. According to Peter McLaren, education is truly transformative when it is reconstructed as a human encounter, allowing for the creation of a space outside the logic of domination. That is, as per the premises of critical pedagogy, an ethical educational space can only be constructed alongside a conscious and open negation of processes of oppression and exploitation (McLaren, 2000, as cited in Lissovoy, 2010).

Critical pedagogy incorporates Marx's critique of alienation as commodification, but the field takes a step further to explore alienation in social spaces beyond the borders of labor and production (family, media and culture platforms, educational institutions)

(Frymer, 2005). Unlike the traditional Marxist focus on building a 'liberated static society,' Freire's main concern had to do with the processes individuals undertake to reach greater humanization in a dialogue with society, and amongst themselves, while engaging in collective conscientization (Blackburn, 2000). Such an understanding of oppression and liberation offer us the opportunity to envision societal transformation through education. In light of this prospect, a Freirean critical pedagogy advances a praxis and critically oriented education acting as the main force by which uneven power distributions and processes may be challenged and improved based on a more socially just basis.

At the heart of this tradition lies the assertion that a fundamental and meaningful transformation in social relations is only possible through the integration of historically marginalized groups into the core of society, with individuals acting as independent and self-conscious agents able to critically analyze the conditions of their oppression and recognize the forces that surround their environment and hinder their possibilities for growth (Noguera, 2007; Tarlau, 2014). "The struggle begins with men's recognition that they have been destroyed," Freire notes (Freire, 1972, as cited in Frymer, 2005). To him it is only when individuals are regarded - and able to recognize themselves - as subjects in the process of constructing knowledge that we can talk about dignity, ethics, respect and autonomy for all (Fonseca, 2015). Thus, one of his greatest contributions lies in the humanization of the educational process towards the pursuit of justice, critical knowledge and societal transformation (Shor, 1993). Freire affirms:

> Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world (Freire, 1970, p. 34).

The overarching objective of critical pedagogy is to advance a social justice education groundwork that is relevant to political and social challenges, particularly issues affecting

marginalized communities and peoples, inside and outside the classroom, in formal, non-formal and informal educational settings (Gur-Ze'ev, 2005; Shor, 1992). By stimulating individuals to take part in the transformation of knowledge - and not merely in the uncritical and passive consumption of it - critical pedagogy broaden possibilities for agency, action, and social change to flourish in spaces that have been historically repressed and contained by mechanisms of domination and unjust social relations (Giroux, 2011, McInnerney, 2009).

As Peter Mayo highlights, Freire's work is much more than just a method; it is a political force that applies to the most distinct settings and places where social transformation is needed. From the causes of revolutionary movements seeking change in social relations inside industrialized societies, to the struggles of Latin American farmers to build a sustainable living, and the fight against marginalization of residents in ghettos across Europe and North America and the favelas of Rio de Janeiro, a Freirean lens for transformation is relevant to help address the pressing challenges that emerge whenever and wherever we find 'third-worlds inside first-worlds' scenarios (Mayo, 1995, p. 377-378).

What this reference frame means for critical pedagogues in what relates to educational theory and practice is that teaching and learning are human experiences with profound social consequences (Shor, 1993). That is, education and schooling can help us develop grounds for the critique of society and its shortcomings, while encouraging the use of instruments that value and promote student's knowledge, needs, voices and worldviews, connecting schools to the social context in which they are embedded (Malabari and Faraji, 2011; Tarlau, 2014). Thus, critical pedagogy can be defined as "a way of thinking about, negotiating and transforming the relationship among classroom teaching, the production of knowledge, the institutional structures of the school, and the social and material relations of the wider community, society and nation state" (McLaren, 1999, p. 51).

In summary, advancing education from a critical pedagogy perspective is about

helping create conditions for students to live self-determined and self-managed lives, renewing and reinventing their realities as active participants of society (Giroux, 2010; McLaren, 2009; Tarlau, 2014). As maintained by Stanley Aronowitz, to live a self-managed life, individuals must pursuit three goals, namely 1) self-reflection (understand one's place in the world, socially, politically and psychologically), 2) an awareness of oppression (understand the forces that shape their consciousness and subjectivity), and 3) tools to build a new life (power to transform themselves and impact their surroundings) (Aronowitz, 2009; Giroux, 2010). In the discussion that follows, I will explore selected practical and theoretical dimensions of critical pedagogy which attempt to enact some of these larger goals for individual and community transformation through education.

Particularly within the past couple of decades, there has been a proliferation of studies developing upon and drawing from Freire's work and the theoretical framework of critical pedagogy from a variety of fields, both research and practice oriented. For instance, a simple search of the educational literature via ERIC (Education Resources Information Center) from 1998 to 2017 returns 4,172 articles for the keyword 'critical pedagogy' and 376 for 'Paulo Freire.' For the same time period, a search via WorldCat - the world's largest library catalog connected to the collections of over 72,000 libraries around the world bringing together works from all sorts of fields - generates, amongst articles and books, 59,364 and 13,070 results for critical pedagogy and Paulo Freire, respectively.

Given the massive amount of literature available, I do not attempt to critically review or incorporate the bulk of critical pedagogy's complex concepts and nuanced interpretations in this dissertation; instead, I chose to focus on specific practical elements of Freire's pedagogy I believe are relevant to analyzing Agency's approach to youth education and exploring participant experience inside the program from an emancipatory education lens. Those include: 1) problem-posing education as counter to the traditional banking model, 2)

dialogic learning between teacher and students that stimulate emancipatory efforts, 3) a negotiated curriculum that is relevant to student's realities and help uncover the 'hidden curriculum, 4) an expansion of critical consciousness for self and social reflection, 5) the concept of praxis as central to the educational process, 6) cultural action for freedom as a mechanism for social agency, and 7) affection and love guiding educational endeavours.

1) The **'banking model of education**,' one of the most widely recognized concepts introduced by Freire, is a metaphor used to represent education in its "oppressive" form, speaking to the lack of engaging learning exchange and critical practices in our contemporary schools. The main critique behind it holds that students are often regarded as 'empty containers' and ignorant individuals who should passively wait to have teachers and professors - regarded as the holders of knowledge - to 'deposit' pre-determined information into them (Freire, 1970). Through a fixed method of receiving, memorizing, and repeating information, this approach requires students to learn a pre-determined set of skills perceived as valuable as a by-product of education, instead of encouraging them to develop themselves as learners as they engage in the educational process (Van der Merwe and Albert, 2009).

As it overshadows student's subjectivity, banking education fails to recognize (and work with) the rich experiences, knowledge and realities individuals bring with them to the educational space; it inhibits their engagement with the process of creating information, solving problems, and reflecting on practice - necessary steps to developing a form of critical consciousness that comes from intervening in reality as makers and transformers of the world (Blackburn, 2000; Van der Merwe and Albert, 2009). To Freire, many educational programs fail precisely because they impose content that has been designed in accordance with the personal understandings of reality of whomever holds the decision-making power (i.e. stakeholders, schools, organizations), without considering the situation and lifeworld of the very individuals such initiatives are supposed to benefit - a method that transform

learners into mere objects of program's actions (Freire, 1970, p. 66).

In direct contrast to this model, Freire advocates for a self-reflective education that cultivates knowledge based on people's lived experiences and realities. The so-called '**problem-posing education**' emphasizes the need for teachers and students to co-create knowledge through listening, dialogue and action, while students experiment with the "making of reality," recognizing, understanding and working to transform the different systems of oppression that act upon their world. Only this way, they will be able to create new situations and transform their lives while deeply engaging in the process of consciousness raising (Freire, 1970).

In more practical terms, problem-posing requires students to critically analyze their current situations; that is, the 'whys, hows, and whos' that shape and influence their lives and surroundings (Fritze, n/d; Shor, 1993). The process involves 1) describing the content of the discussion to be initiated, 2) defining the problem, 3) personalizing it, 4) creating a debate around it, and finally, 5) identifying alternatives to solving it (Aliakbari and Faraji, 2011; Kaliban, 1999).

2) A problem-posing educational approach that rejects a banking model of knowledge creation and encourage students to become 'active investigators of society' is inherently connected to critical pedagogy's notion of **dialogic learning** (McInnerney, 2009). Based on the notion that individuals both are created by and help create the social universe they are inserted it (McLaren, 2009), a critical dialogue involves a series of dialectic activities (i.e. questioning, responding, sharing experiences and perspectives, adapting, suggesting) that allow students to deeply analyze the contradictions in the social structures they live under and to draw connections with their lives and that of those around them (McLaren, 2009; Van der Merwe and Albert, 2009).

Such educational practice holds that students are active and conscious agents

capable of knowing and transforming their realities as they gain a critical distance on their condition (Frymer, 2005; Shor, 1993). Freire refers to this process as an "epistemological relationship to reality," meaning that individuals become critical examiners of their experiences and actively engage in questioning and interpreting their lives and educational trajectory, rather than just walking through them passively and uncritically (Shor, 1993). Dialogue is then understood as "the encounter between men, mediated by the word, in order to mediate the world" (Freire, 1970, pp, 88).

The critical educator plays a crucial role in dialogic learning, working collaboratively with students in a non-authoritarian way to reflect on and solve problems about the nature of their social realities, while engaging in genuine dialogue with them - which is guided by a profound respect for the knowledge students bring to the table as well as the nature of social interaction and collaboration such process entails (Barroso, 2002; Frymer, 2005; Lissovoy, 2010; Nouri and Sajjadi, 2014). Working with students inside the classroom and in their communities, Freirean educators attempt to discover the "ideas, words, conditions and habits that are central to their everyday life experiences" (Shor, 1993, p. 31).

These '**generative themes**' - the familiar words, experiences, situations, and relationships that are central to people's lives - are thus representative of the most important issues impacting students and their communities and are used to codify the world in such a way to instigate a dialogue that is central to emancipatory efforts (Galloway, 2012; Shor, 1993). The fundamental principles of dialogic learning involve 1) a respect for student's linguistics, voices, identities and values, 2) a co-creation of knowledge between teacher and students, 3) the use of generative themes or words from the physical and social world that allow students to gain a new understanding of reality (to access hidden codes), and finally, 4) the use of dialogue and reflective practices that foment social action and a reconstruction of reality (Aliakbari and Faraji, 2011; Degener, 2001; Galloway, 2012).

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While critical dialogue requires teachers to 'unveil objective reality' to students, it is important to note that what drives emancipation in this process is not the act of transmitting 'correct knowledge' in a banking model approach, but the act of engaging in critical dialogue itself and the continuous reading of the world by way of reading the word. That is, "dialogue is the diver in the trajectory to emancipation as dialogue is essential to the dialect between reflection and action that constitutes praxis" (Galloway, 2012, p. 173).

3) As discussed earlier, culture and power play a central role in the production and advancement of different forms of knowledge inside traditional classrooms, with students from more affluent backgrounds, who display more valued forms of cultural capital, being over-benefited compared to those from marginalized and/or minority groups. In this sense, schools' '**hidden curriculum**' serve to affirm and benefit the worldview, values, and dreams of some students, while placing others in subordinate positions, thus functioning as an unintended outcome of the schooling process (McLaren, 2009). In addition, a hidden curriculum is believed to serve the purpose of an elite-driven 'education for domination' that is used as grounds for the reproduction of ideological discourses to keep people in positions of subordination (Nouri and Sajjadi, 2014).

As a counteract, what critical pedagogy then proposes is a form of '**negotiated curriculum**' that arise out of the needs, concrete life situations and experiences of students, with the goal of challenging them to find solutions to the issues they face and take a step towards transformative action to affect their social, political and economic realities (Giroux and McLaren, 1992; Nouri and Sajjadi, 2014). As a form of '**culture politics**,' the purpose of a negotiated curriculum is to explore popular culture (in its everyday formal and informal practices) and investigate how historical patterns of power inform such cultures and help shape individual subjectivity and identity (Nouri and Sajjadi, 2014). As Henry Giroux notes, through this process, "students learn to critically appropriate knowledge outside their

immediate experience in order to broaden their understanding of themselves, the world and the possibilities for transforming the taken-for-granted assumptions about the way we live" (McLaren, 2009, p. *77*).

4) The concept of '**conscientização**' - a deepening of the coming of consciousness in relation to a critical understanding of the world and sources of oppression - is perhaps Paulo Freire's most significant and well-known contribution. Through this process, individuals learn to perceive social, political and economic contradictions that shape their lives, while engaging in action-oriented work to transform oppressive social conditions (Barroso, 2002; Blackburn, 2000; Freire, 1970; Mayo, 1995). As a form of emancipatory education, conscientização is promoted through a dialectic education that, as noted earlier, explores the everyday concerns of students and encourages them to make connections to broader social and political issues (McInnerney, 2009).

This requires students to go beyond learning information that is passed on to them via a banking model, but to deeply engage with and question the kinds of ideas and relationships that are viewed as 'common,' in addition to challenging assumptions about their own reality (for example, challenging the myths around boundary situations, or the positions they can or should assume in society) (Thompson, 2000; Van der Merwe and Albert, 2009). For example, illiterate people - a central focus of Freire's emancipatory educational theory and practice - might not have the necessary confidence to reflect upon the world around them and identify actions to take to improve their situations, running the risk of coming to accept them as permanent. They might be unaware that the unjust structures and mechanisms bearing down of them have helped determine their situation (of poverty, illiteracy, oppression, etc.), and that they can take part in changing them (Blackburn, 2000, p. *7*).

That is, by engaging in critical thinking, individuals may become involved in making

things happens as social beings rather than being a mere object waiting for things to happen to them (Thompson, 2000). As Giroux points out, "Freire understood critical thinking as a tool to help foster self-determination and civic engagement, offering the possibility to envision a future that does not reproduce the inequalities of the present" (Giroux, 2010). In his theory, Freire distinguishes between three stages of consciousness, namely 1) magical consciousness (individuals adapt passively to their condition and accept them as "fate," not seeing that their oppression is tied to larger contradictions within society), 2) naive consciousness (individuals recognize oppressive conditions but do not yet connect it to power relations, seeing their problems as "coincidences"), and 3) critical consciousness (individuals look at their situation vis-a-vis structural societal problems, recognizing the impact of inequality in their lives) (Aliakbari and Faraji, 2011; Freire, 1970; Fritze, n/d).

Although it allows us to explore how people's consciousness are shaped by the way people act upon the world, and vice versa, it is important to highlight that Freire's framework of conscientização is a source of much criticism, one of them being that individuals who might appear fatalistic or powerless under his scheme (falling under a "magical consciousness" stage) resist in ways that transcend his understanding of power relations, which is based on a clear-cut distinction between those who are oppressed and those who oppress (Blackburn, 2000). In fact, Freire stopped using the concept conscientização only a few years after the publication of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as he felt it had been loosely taken and stripped of its actual significance, particularly in the U.S. (Barroso, 2002; Mayo, 1995). I explore this discussion as well as other critiques of critical pedagogy in more depth in section 4.2.3.

As for how I understand the concept and adopt it in this study, conscientização does not start from an assumption that people are not conscious and need an outside intervention in order to become critical beings; rather, it is a tool to help facilitate the process individuals

go through while learning how to see themselves and the world around them from a more critical perspective. I also do not believe that a rise in critical consciousness alone leads to action that will improve people's life conditions, given that having access to basic grounds and support for development are essential to promote tangible on-the-ground change. And yet, without experimenting with expanding their critical consciousness individuals might not even know the need to act, or know the path to walk towards this direction. In this sense, an emancipatory education is the first step in enacting change (Aliakbari and Faraji, 2011).

Critical pedagogy thus maintains that, by exercizing critical thinking, people at the margins can become active citizens who engage in informed participation in social and political life in pursuit of a more equal and just society (Thompson, 2000). As Carlos Torres puts is: "in its most radical version, the specificity of conscientization resides in the development of critical consciousness as class knowledge and practice… it appears as part of the 'subjective conditions' of the process of social transformation" (Torres, 1990). That is, conscientização is a process through which people get to know themselves and understand their power to effect change in their lives and society at large (Mayo, 1995).

5) Following human's ongoing quest for greater humanization, the process of conscientização - which brings about a change in the perception of one's reality and the expansion of awareness - is then followed by community transformation through what Freire calls "**praxis**," or informed action. The concept refers to the exercise of reflecting and acting upon the world so as to change it; action then leads to further reflection, both moving back and forth, in a dialectical path in pursuit of liberation (Blackburn, 2000; McInnerney, 2009; Thompson, 2000). Merging theory and practice, praxis seeks to encourage and prepare individuals to engage in the construction of more democratic platforms for social and cultural development and increased citizenry; the goal is to make a connection between experience, understanding and social action (Frymer, 2005; Thompson, 2000).

Critical pedagogues are particularly interested in praxis that is guided by 'phronesis,' which refers to the willingness to act truly and morally. That is, "knowledge must be connected to a higher struggle to eliminate oppression and inequality and promote social justice" (McLaren, 2009, p. 74). Praxis for social change, thus, is an engagement with meaning that circulates, is acted upon, then revised, translating to political understanding, sense-making of one's reality and will formation, with the purpose of dismantling oppression and transforming society's culture of domination (McLaren, 1999; Peters, 2005). In summary, praxis refers to the integration of reflection and action, practice and theory, thinking and doing" (Fritze, n/d, p. 5).

Freire believe that, in order to be emancipatory, education must be entrenched in praxis, encouraging and sustaining it continuously (Galloway, 2012). He also placed utmost importance in dialogue which occurs within the context of praxis and that is advanced by educational practices that are inherently social and that might orient us towards social justice (Aliakbari and Faraji, 2011; Galloway, 2012). He believed theory to be secondary and important solely when adopted in service of purposeful action and a greater objective of societal transformation (Barroso, 2002).

In line with a problem-posing framework rooted in dialogic learning that encourage students to analyze the societal context of their problems and their own role in working through them (Jennings et.al., 2006), critical praxis - as advanced through culturally relevant pedagogical approaches - involves a five-stage process: 1) the identification of a problem, 2) an analysis of the problem, 3) the creation of a plan of action to address the problem, 4) the implementation of this plan of action, and finally, 5) an evaluation of the actions carried out (Baffour, 2014, p. 31). Such process place students as actors and contributors as they develop problem-solving skills while engaging in a cycle of critical reflection on the issues that impact their communities and daily lives, helping bridge the gap

between theory and transformative action.

6) As understood within the critical pedagogy framework, a banking model of education that serves the purpose of domestication instead of liberation lead students to conform to the mainstream culture and slowly unlearn their own culture, thus, moving further away from themselves and their communities (Mayo, 1995, p. 366). This serves to facilitate a process Freire calls '**cultural invasion**' through which people become objects of the educational process, adapting to whatever content is imposed upon them instead of taking part in the creation of knowledge as subjects capable of becoming agents of social change (Mayo, 1995).

As noted by Carlos Torres, it is within this context that culture can serve as a mechanism to help students develop a sense of agency. That is, cultural action pushes against the power-controlling elite, constituting a means through which the oppressed can acquire consciousness of themselves as a political force (Mayo, 1995; Torres, 1982). Accordingly, the alternative Freire proposes to counter the cultural invasion model is connected to a form of '**cultural action for freedom**' that allows people to increase their awareness of social contradictions while using their own culture to liberate themselves from oppression and domination (Fritze, n/d; Mayo, 1995).

Freire, as well as many of his adherents, support the view that this form of education is mostly effective within non-formal platforms and the work developed by social movements, as they offer the autonomy that allows for pedagogy as an exercise of freedom to flourish. Due to its greater flexibility, non-formal education characterized by praxis and a public rejection of counter-hegemonic discourses are more likely than formal schooling to produce transformative action (Mayo, 1995; Torres, 1990). Nonetheless, arguing that one should have "a foot within and another outside the system" (Mayo, 1995, p. 366), Freire highlights that formal schools can also become vehicles for cultural action for freedom.

For example, the critical pedagogy and cultural studies traditions allow us to explore how young people use popular cultural representations in schools to construct and express the meaningfulness of their lives and identities (Giroux, 2001, as cited in Wishart and Lashua, 2006). In this sense, efforts to engage with popular culture creatively as a central pedagogical tool in schools must be situated within the cultural identity students adopt from their experiences and urban communities, giving young people the sense that they have a saying in constructing their own representation (Wishart and Lashua, 2006).

7) Freire advocated for a type of education capable of inspiring the broadest development of human virtues (Shor, 1993). At the heart of his emancipatory pedagogy lies affirmative feelings of affection, courage, tolerance, faith, trust, hope and respect for humanity, or a '**pedagogy of love'** (Darder, 2002; Mayo, 2004; Nouri and Sajjadi, 2014). To him, education is a process of humanization through which teachers and students come together by means of a shared commitment to breaking down the social and institutional forces that limits their capacity to become more fully human (Lissovoy, 2010). This increased humanization requires '**genuine dialogue**,' which, in Freire's understanding, can only be reached when love is involved. That is, he understood the dimension of love for humanity and a sense of solidarity for the creation of a more socially just world as prerequisites to a dialogue and creative exchange that leads to liberation (Blackburn, 2000; Galloway, 2012; Mayo, 2004).

The educator is thus central in this process and must engage with teaching as an act of love, which is based on a deep commitment to entering a relationship of solidarity with students (Darder, 2002). The element of courage is, of course, key to this pedagogical approach as progressive teachers encounter countless struggles in their attempt to advance work that connects to larger social struggles within the limitations of traditional educational institutions (Mayo, 2004). Considering its focus on connecting people through affection, Freire's pedagogy of love guide us towards a more humanized approach to teaching and

learning as we dare reinvent education moved by hopes for social justice and equality.

2.2. Realizing individual and community transformation through emancipatory education

2.2.1. A discussion on power, agency and opportunity structures

Before we can explore processes of empowerment and emancipation in relation to education and the critical pedagogy framework, it is imperative that we enter a discussion about power and its implications to individual and societal transformation.[29] This debate, some argue, has been overlooked considerably in the field of education in comparison to other disciplines of fundamental societal interest (Inglis, 1997). Still, understanding different social theories of power, how it is manifested, and what consequences it bears in the educational process is crucial to analyzing the cultural practice of education in our modern world and to improving its practice (Archibald and Wilson, 2006, p. 25).

Power pre-exist us, being located within different rules, discourses and practices that are adopted and transformed, again and again, by individuals (Inglis, 1997, p. 3). Aligned with notions put forward by Foucault, Giddens and Bourdieu, power can be defined as a "complex social force that exists in an imbricated network of overlapping, shifting, and contested relationships, which both constitute and are constituted by social structures" (Archibald and Wilson, 2006, p. 26). Tom Inglis explains that, within the context of everyday life, power may be characterized as an "acquisition." That is, individuals or organizations are considered powerful when they possess the means and resources to take the actions they want despite resistance from others (Inglis, 1997, p. 11; Weber as cited in Inglis, 1997). But power, he adds, is more than just about individuals being able to do what they want according to their wish; it also restrains and limits "what others do, say, think,

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[29] Please note that Tom Inglis' comprehensive article "Empowerment and Emancipation" (1997) was used as the central theoretical source for much of this section and the ideas explored in it.

and perceive" (Inglis, 1997, p. 11). Here, it is important that I briefly expand on different understandings of power put forward by some important scholars that have helped problematize the concept.

Apart from power in the physical and military sense, Bourdieu's capital framework, for instance, advances the theory that individuals exercise power in society via different forms of capital, economic being the most effective one (wealthy people clearly have more means to pursuit actions in line with their interests). Political capital (getting to rule over other people), social capital (having influential connections and networks) as well as cultural capital (enjoying respect and prestige connected to particular moral and knowledge foundations) are also fundamental power display avenues (Bordieu and Passeron, 1997; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992 as cited in Inglis, 1997, p. 11). In this sense, a person's ability to exercise power is directly connected to his/her access to different forms of capital, which few have in abundance and many have none; thus, the struggle individuals face lies precisely in seeking to obtain these forms of capital and maintain them (Inglis, 1997, p. 11).

As for Foucault, power is best understood in terms of discourses and practices which operate in and through individuals in constant flux and negotiation (Foucault, 1998; Inglis, 1997). Challenging the "power equals domination" conceptualization (Archibald and Wilson, 2006), Foucault, notably, rejected the notion that power is something that can be possessed (like a property) or something that is immovable; rather, he saw power everywhere, circulating between and within us like an "electric field," materialized and disseminated in discourse, scientific knowledge and "regimes of truth" - which are defined and reinforced by influential societal institutions such as schools and the media (Foucault, 1991; Inglis, 1997, p. 3). To him, power constitutes "what is known, said, taken for granted and regarded as truth" - meaning that truth does not exist without power (Foucault 1980, as cited in in Inglis, 1997, p. 4).

This notion that "power produces reality" points to a rethinking of power beyond negative terms, highlighting its productive and positive force in society as a tool in the "battle of truth," helping raise people's relative capacities to know and shape boundaries that enable and constraint possibilities for action (Foucault, 1991; Gaventa, 2003; Hayward, 1998). Taking a distinctive approach from a Foucauldian understanding of power and the nature of truth (as Inglis inquires, how do we recognize true statements about power if power itself dictates what is considered truth?) (Inglis, 1997, p. 3), Habermas considered of a realm of truth to exist beyond power, which is "central to authentic human being, communication, and voluntary social order" (Habermas, 1987; Inglis, 1997, p. 3). Similar to Freire, guided by the ambition of helping build a more just world through dialogue, he believed in the possibility of shattering the colonizing effects of power through rational communication oriented towards making visible the discourses and practices impacting individuals, families and communities, with emancipatory education acting as the main vehicle in this process (Habermas, 1987; Inglis, 1997).

Considering our search for practical possibilities for empowerment through education, theories of power offer us important interpretive models to guide critical analysis of social structures that shape individual and collective action (Issac, 1978, as cited in Archibald and Wilson, 2006, p. 26). In the field of critical pedagogy, specifically, the inquiry revolves around questions of how power operates through the "production, distribution and consumption of knowledge within particular institutional contexts and seeks to constitute students as informed subjects and social agents" (Giroux, 2010). If, like Foucoult, we agree that power manifest itself in discourses, narratives and "regimes of truth," then it can be critically analyzed and confronted through an education that encourages people to keep questioning the nature of their realities, to debate, engage and open themselves to new perspectives and possibilities (Giroux, 2010; Inglis, 1997).

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In attempts to problematize the fundamental position of power in relation to social structure and human agency - a task that, impulsed mainly by Foucault, has been taken up extensively by contemporary social and political theorists - I would like to introduce Steven Lukes and Clarissa Hayward's dialogue on this theme with a focus on Lukes' "three-dimensional analysis of power". Congruent with the notion that relatively powerless individuals (or what Lukes calls, "subjects of power") are the key matter of interest in the study of power given that "what they can do and what they can be is significantly limited by social constrains that might be otherwise" (Hayward and Lukes, 2008, p. 17), the main debate lies in the different understandings regarding "sources" of power.

Lukes advances the view that specific agents - individuals or collective - are responsible for placing significant social constraint on the freedom of others (power of the powerful), so human agents act within and upon structures which limits or enables their power. On the other hand, Hayward subscribes to the notion that inegalitarian social structures that limits and constrains human action and freedom (which are not necessarily caused by specific "bad" actors and are amenable to change) are also sources of power (power without the powerful) (Hayward and Lukes, 2008). Although Lukes' broad agent-centered view of power - which places blame on actors for inflicting upon people's freedom - overlooks important questions of social constraints and structural phenomenons, Hayward's understanding of power in structural terms shift focus from identifying powerful agents whose decision impact other people's lives and holding them accountable for what they do and fail to do (Hayward and Lukes, 2008, p. 14, p. 17).

On these contrasting premises, if we consider, under a zero-sum understanding of a relational nature of power relationships, that in order for some individuals to become more empowered others must let go of part of their power, then Lukes' three-dimensional analysis of power provide us with a suitable direction of thought (Crowther, 2013). Under Lukes'

radical framework, power is understood as having three facets: 1) the first involves decision-making which is the capacity of individuals and groups to achieve favourable outcomes for themselves, so it has to do with behaviour in making decisions under a scenario of conflict; 2) the second concerns non-decision-making power, which takes place when individuals or groups, consciously or unconsciously, ignore the interests of subordinate groups, creating or reinforcing barriers for them when shaping an agenda; and finally, 3) the third dimension of power, which is where Lukes' most important contribution lies, relates to ideological power and the capacity of powerful actors to shape people's attitudes and expectations in a way that makes them act willingly against their most basic interests, accepting systematic inequalities as natural or inevitable - which directly connects to Freire's concept of "false consciousness" (Crowther, 2013, pp. 2-3; Layder, 1985; Little, 2010; Lukes, 1974).

To put it simply, these dimensions of power may be translated in terms of "power over others," "power over others which is dominating," and "power over others that influences people's desires, beliefs, judgments in ways that work against their interests" (Hayward and Lukes, 2008, p. 6; Lukes, 1974). Thereby, under Lukes' three-dimensional approach, power involves a situation when A exercises power over B by prevailing over B in the first and second dimensions of power in addition to preventing B from realizing and articulating his/her interests through the third dimension (Layder, 1985; Little, 2010).

As maintained by Derek Layder, such focus on discussing power from a perspective of the exercise of power in itself (which entails a concrete relationship between two or more actors) implies that power is solely a function of the behaviour of these actors and it undermines prior relations of domination and subordination. This means that Lukes' problematization of power and action is clearly tied to agency (in particular, agency that offers the possibility of acting differently) but, as mentioned earlier, his approach rejects any real notion of power as a structural phenomenon indirectly related to agency (Layder, 1985).

This consideration is important as it help us bridge the debate on power in relation to human agency and opportunity structures.

We can think of agency as a series of small victories ordinary people make against power daily; it is what allows individuals to survive inside systems of oppression and domination, findings ways to act within the structural constraints that condition and dehumanize them (Lissovoy, 2010). The exercise of it is, to a great extent, carved within existing social relations and is also implicated in their reproduction (Anderson, 1980, as cited in White and Wyn, 1998). Thus, exploring how social life is shaped by structural relations and larger institutional and historical forces is essential in efforts to expand the potential of human agency, which lies at the heart of a liberating social science (White and Wyn, 1998, p. 316).

As powerful as it is intangible conceptually, agency in practical terms is a complex process with many distinctive interpretations. Still, experts associated with different theoretical frameworks have come to agreement regarding a few fundamental elements of it. For instance, drawing from literature from the field of international development, agency is generally understood as a multidimensional phenomenon, being exercised in different spheres, domains and levels - which can be micro (household), meso (community), or macro (state, nation) (Samman and Santos, 2009, p. 8). These include multiple societal structures and areas of life which either allow people to exercise their agency or constraint that possibility (Samman and Santos, 2009, pp. 3, 8).

In other words, the concept relates to the "capacity of groups or individuals to make purposeful choices in their lives" (Samman and Santos, 2009, p. 3), or, as Amartya Sen puts it, agency is "what a person is free to do an achieve in pursuit of whatever values he or she regards as important" (Sen, 1999, as cited in Samman and Santos, 2009, p. 4). On that premise, the extent to which people manage to exercise agency is contingent upon access to

all sorts of resources in the human, social and psychological spheres (which can be tied to financial conditions, health and education, sense of identity, feelings of belonging, level of self-confidence and self-esteem) as well as collective assets and capabilities (including having a voice, feeling represented and having the power for collective organization) (Samman and Santos, 2009, p. 3).

Similarly, bringing insights from the field of sociology, the greater achievement of agency may be identified with respect to three different dimensions: private goals (individual or personal choices linked to immediate circumstances), public domain (individual or collective project linked to limited change and/or the maintenance of existing circumstances or institutions), and social transformation (a collective project that connects to fundamental changes in the overall social order) (White and Wyn, 1998, p. 316). From this perspective, agency is a process that implicates "consciousness of the potential to take action, the willingness to engage in collective action in the interests of the group and, importantly, the knowledge and willingness to challenge existing structures… it is about knowledge, power, and the ability to activate resources" (White and Wyn, 1998, p. 318).

A key element of this sociological interpretation of agency as it relates to emancipatory education is the focus on individual and collective "conscious, goal-directed activity" that is connected to a larger project for social change. Specifically, it is a form of agency that seeks to "modify, reform or retain aspects of the existing social order…it is wrapped around the idea of tackling specific social problems, and action is conceived in terms of addressing specific and immediate public issues" (White and Wyn, 1998, p. 316). This is precisely the kind of daring project that a Freirean emancipatory education supports: the development of the individual as a critical and active subject with the end goal of helping build a more equal and just world for all. In all, the focus is not on agency that restrict change to the individual level; it is about transforming oneself in order - and on the way to - transforming society.

Pertinent to this dissertation, it is important to discuss agency from the perspective of youth populations specifically. The field of youth studies work to conceptualize and understand how young people exercise agency and take an active role in shaping their future (White and Wyn, 1998, p. 316). In line with an emancipatory project, in order to effectively maximize the range of meaningful choices available to young people (and to get a real picture of the choices available to them), this inquiry, some experts argue, must be historically and empirically located in the context of youth's lives and the social structures shaping their experiences (i.e. class, gender, ethnicity), while also taking into account the pressures and limits on agency these individuals face (White and Wyn, 1998, pp. 326, 319).

Drawing from literature from youth studies, Rob White and Johana Wyn compare and contrast three notions of social agency generally used in the field to explain the lifeworld of young people, those being deterministic, voluntaristic, and contextual (White and Wyn, 1998, p. 314). In short, a deterministic approach refers to a 'categorical notion of development' linked to stages and characteristics of adolescence, including the notion of it being a period for taking risks, so the goal is to restrict deviation from social norms. A voluntaristic one is concerned with 'individual choices' which are circumstantial and based on a range of pre-given options, so the focus is on increasing institutional choices within the framework of competitive inequality. Finally, a contextual approach has to do with 'social processes and social division' and takes into account different notions of youth groups and their experiences facing unequal power relations and institutionalized social division, thus the focus lies on social empowerment (White and Wyn, 1998, p. 318).

The authors explain that, in youth studies, there is a tendency to reply upon the first two approaches when exploring how agency is exercized by young people and what their role is in shaping their own futures. They argue that the most adequate way to conceptualize youth experience in this domain is through a contextual perspective that focuses on how

agency is shaped by and incorporates historically constructed social structural parameters (for example, they are skeptical of the relevance of age as a social category, placing the importance and relevance of adolescence in the social divisions and restrains associated to this life phase). This approach maintains that young people have the power to negotiate their own paths, although that process takes place within the specific social, political and economic conditions making up their lives (White and Wyn, 1998, p. 317).

In light of this discussion, we may conclude that social divisions and inequalities greatly impact the ability of individuals of any age or group - but particularly the poor and marginalized - from exercising their agency effectively; thus, the process involves constant transitions and flows depending on access to material assets and changes in group dynamics (White and Wyn, 1998, p. 318). Essentially, considering they do not get to experience and walk through life while enjoying the same privileges and openings as those who are economically, politically and socially more powerful, subordinate peoples and groups are restricted in their ability to exercise their agency through different avenues.

The opportunity structure available to people is, therefore, what enables or disables them from exercising power, which help advance the understanding that having a pro-active attitude is not enough when trying to transform choices in desired outcomes in a context where individuals are constrained by their surrounding environment (Samman and Santos, 2009, p. 4). As put forth by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative in a review of the agency and empowerment literature (2009), these external factors are manifested in the "institutional, social, and political context of formal and informal rules and norms within which actors pursue their interests," which may include access to information and the degree to which people get to participate in economic life and organize locally (institutional structures), or the actual opening for poor people to make use of opportunities and services (social and political structures) (Samman and Santos, 2009, p. 3).

In sum, the "building blocks" of agency and opportunity structure come together to allow for empowerment to ensue. Particularly in the framework of international development - which, notably, the World Bank has borrowed from considerably to design studies exploring the determinants and impacts of empowerment - the concept is analyzed from the perspective of whether choices even exist, whether people make use of them, and whether they bring about desired outcomes (Samman and Santos, 2009, pp. 3-4).

2.2.2. Processes of empowerment and emancipation

Concepts that allow for an investigation into ways people take control of their lives and free themselves from dominating structures have gained much attention in recent times with processes of empowerment and emancipation taking a central stage (Inglis, 1997). Although critical pedagogy is the main theoretical framework guiding this study, in the discussion that follows, I draw from different fields to explore both notions in relation to emancipatory education in attempts to connect the argument to larger frames of thought with important contributions to the debate beyond education. Empowerment and emancipation are complex, multi-layered and contested concepts that have remained considerably broad and do not have a universal definition or meaning - which only adds fuel to heated academic disputes and controversies (Barroso, 2002; Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007).

Starting with an analysis of empowerment, a key aspect is that it involves interrelated elements (such as values, knowledge, behaviour and relationships) that are manifested through multi-level constructs of practical approaches and applications at the individual and community levels which allow people to gain control of their lives (Jennings et al., 2006, p. 32; Jupp et.al, 2010, p. 16; Zimmerman, 2000). The concept relates to broader terms such as autonomy, self-confidence, self-determination, participation, liberation and notably agency - which, as noted earlier, is a key notion in understanding empowerment as a process of "expanding people's abilities to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability

was previously denied to them" (Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007, p. 383; Kabeer, 2001, as cited in Samman and Santos, 2009).

This advancement from a condition of disempowerment to empowerment - which can be understood as an expansion of agency - requires that individuals play an active part in carrying through the transformative process (Samman and Santos, 2009, p. 4). It is important to note, however, that increasing agency in one domain of life (i.e. household or social and political spheres) does not necessarily mean an increase in agency in others. For instance, a woman may be empowered at her job but suffer abuse at home, meaning that agency and empowerment are asymmetrical and non-linear concepts conditioned on experience gained from opportunities to exercise rights within a particular context (Jupp et.al., 2010, p. 16; Samman and Santos, 2009, p. 6).

In addition to the component of exercizing agency more fully, several authors in international development agree that empowerment also entails an opening in the institutional environment under which people function, or, as discussed earlier, the opportunity structures they have access to (Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007, p. 383). This aligns with Amartya Sen's notion of agency as being constituted by freedom of processes as well as opportunities (or capabilities), which translates to the ability of individuals to act on what they value and have reason to value and the combinations of functions that a person can achieve (Sen, 1982; Sen, 1985 and Sen, 1999, as cited in Samman and Santos, 2009). That is, it isn't just about a person's freedom to act; empowerment also entails "the concrete material, social and institutional preconditions required to exert agency" (Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007, p. 385).

Examples of additional frames of reference that advance similar ideas are John Friedman's (1992) threefold framework of empowerment, which comprises access to social power (productive wealth), political power (decision-making processes) and psychological

power (self-confidence) (Barroso, 2002), as well as Nayaran's (2002) four elements of empowerment, them being access to information, inclusion and participation, accountability and local organizational capacity, which maintains that "agency is influenced by people's individual (material, human, social and psychological) and collective (voice, organization, representation and identity) assets and capabilities" (Nayaran, 2002 as cited in Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007, p. 385).

Scholars in international development have mainly adopted the empowerment framework in studies dealing with issues of gender and the relative position of women in different spheres; nonetheless, there is a push for extending the discussion considerably to include the stance of groups and individuals along other axes as well (Samman and Santos, 2009, p. 2). As for the different interpretive approaches to the phenomenon, upon an extensive analysis of definitions of empowerment used across the field of international development, Solava Ibrahim and Sabina Alkire (2007) from Cambridge and Oxford, respectively, identified no less than 29 distinct definitions.[30] With this extensive literature in mind - and drawing particularly from Rowlands' four categorization of power (Rowland, 1997) - the authors advance a short list of internationally comparable indicators to measure empowerment in relation to agency expansion.

As per this framework, there are four main possible ways individual can exercise their agency in a manner that can lead to empowerment. Those include: control over personal decisions (power over/empowerment as control), domain-specific autonomy and household decision-making (power to/empowerment as choice), and the ability to change aspects in one's life at the individual and community levels (power from within/empowerment as change and power with/empowerment in community, respectively) (Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007, p. 388). Although most of these frameworks entail rigorous methodological designs

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[30] For a complete list of those definitions, please see Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007.

for data collection and analysis mainly from a quantitative stance, they are valuable informative models for my investigation of empowerment possibilities through emancipatory education from a qualitative approach.

Likewise, for the purpose of furthering understanding and illustrating the existence of multiple interpretations connected to the concept of empowerment, I will now briefly summarize distinctive notions stemming also from the fields of community and educational psychology and public health. A commonly used definition in the field of community psychology asserts that empowerment is a social action process that takes place at multiple levels, importantly within individuals themselves, but also within families, organizations and communities. That is, it is connected to notions of collective health, well-being and environment (Jennings et al., 2006, p. 33).

From a standpoint of educational psychology, Mark Zimmerman (2000) describes psychological empowerment at the level of the individual as focusing on fostering "capacity-building, integrating perceptions of personal control, a proactive approach to life, and a critical understanding of the socio-political environment," while collectively, empowerment involves "processes and structures that enhance members' skills, provide them with mutual support necessary to effect change, improve their collective well-being, and strengthen intra and inter-organizational networks and linkages to improve or maintain the quality of community life" (Jennings et al., 2006, pp. 33-34; Zimmerman, 2000).

Although this framework contains a clear element of collective empowerment, Tom Inglis (1997) notes that an issue with the popular empowerment literature in the field of psychology is that it focusses too much on individuals getting to be more powerful within the system (becoming more self-aware, confident, assertive, effective and dynamic) rather than transforming it (Inglis, 1997). To him, there is not much emphasis placed in exploring the social-structural and class constraints leading to oppression - and in how individuals

describe, identify and analyze them - as there is in investigating ways people may overcome such obstacles (Inglis, 1997, p. 8). Nonetheless, there have been recent efforts in the field towards explicitly connecting empowerment and emancipation notions with a deeper analysis of systemic inequality and systems of domination in a "Freirean fashion." In what follows, I provide an example of this theoretical shift in understanding empowerment directly related to youth groups.

From a perspective of educational psychology cutting across the field of public health (which has also recently experienced a change, moving from a focus on preventive approaches to at-risk youth behaviour to capacity building practices based on youth empowerment) Louise Jennings et al. (2006) contribute to the advancement of an empowerment model centered on collective socio-political change to help guide the efforts of interventions directed at young people (Jennings et al., 2006). Basing their findings on participatory research carried out with distinct youth organizations and drawing upon four existing models of youth development[31] (which includes an empowerment educational model that embraces Freire's critical social praxis within the context of adolescent health programs attending minority youth groups), the authors propose a critical social theory of youth empowerment (CYE) aimed at "supporting and fostering youth contributions to positive community development and socio-political change, resulting in youth who are critical citizens, actively participating in the day-to-day building of stronger, more equitable communities" (Jennings et al., 2006, p. 40).

The CYE theory revolves around six central dimensions the researchers identified as being present - although in varying degrees - in the four models of youth empowerment analysed for the study. Those include: 1. a welcoming and safe environment, 2. meaningful

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[31] For a full description of each one of the four models of youth empowerment presented as well as the six dimensions of a theory critical youth empowerment (CYE) developed please see Jennings et al., 2006.

participation and engagement, 3. equitable power-sharing relationship between youth and adults, 4. engagement in critical reflection in relation to interpersonal and socio-political processes, 5. participation in these socio-political processes with the objective of effecting change, and finally, 6. integrated empowerment and the individual and community levels (Jennings et al., 2006, p. 41).

The authors conclude that an integration of these six dimensions into the core of youth programs provide benefits at the individual and community levels, including the development of inter-personal skills in participants and youth-led community change, amongst others. Nevertheless, they call attention to the difficulty in measuring the impact of youth empowerment outcomes as they are multileveled and make up a series of experiences. Altogether - aligned with Freire's understanding of change in the self as a process that must be connected to a change in the world - the authors believe that true empowerment is contingent upon individuals building the capacity to address structures, processes, social values and practices encircling the daily issues they face, which also serve the needs of the community at large (Jennings et al., 2006, p. 51).

It is important to follow this discussion covering different definitions of empowerment with a consideration of how the concept itself has evolved - and has been misappropriated - throughout the years. Essentially, recent international development discussions have seen a shift in trends over the approach to analyzing poverty from beyond its economic dimension (poor people having limited economic resources) to exploring conditions of social, economic and political powerlessness - which led to a push for agendas centralized on poor people's active participation in different interventions and the overall development process. NGOs throughout the developing world then became ideal sites for advancing development objectives at the local level, offering programs directed at "empowerment of the poor" in countless fronts, thus the proliferation of academic studies dealing with the subject as noted

(Barroso, 2002; Mohan and Stoke, 2000).

To cite Tom Inglis once again, he notes that although empowerment originated in association with the work of social movements, it was appropriated by the business-oriented fields of organization management and industrial training, particularly starting in the 1980s and 90s (Inglis, 1997, p. 4). Empowerment, in this sense, consists of "getting workers to share the same values and practices as their managers and to work with them to improve competitiveness, quality, innovation, productivity and profit," with an eye towards greater business success (Inglis, 1997, p. 5). This model of empowerment is not concerned with helping individuals take control of their lives in efforts to effect social change; rather, it seeks to encourage workers to commit themselves to the goals and values of the company as the rational step in trying to improve their lives (Inglis, 1997, p. 6).

Inglis highlights that is it important to uncover a business approach to empowerment mainly because this nuanced interpretation is precisely what differs empowerment that is connected to self-regulation, discipline and control, often in the absence of critical analysis (working within the system) from empowerment that leads to a larger struggle for individual and societal transformation (working to change the system) (Inglis, 1997, p. 5). Furthermore, it reminds us that empowerment, in a Foucauldian sense, can also work as a subtle and pervasive "controlling" force leading to penetrating forms of incorporation into the present system (Foucault, 1977, cited in Inglis, 1997).

If we take Inglis' understanding of worker's empowerment as being limited to empowering individual to act within the system, then we may also concur with him that emancipation is enabled once individuals are empowered to transform their realities and that of those around them (Inglis, 1997, p. 3). In that regard, empowerment and emancipation may be approached as ends of a spectrum: some outcomes tend to people becoming more empowered while others lean more towards emancipation (Crowther, 2013, p. 1). In what

follows, I attempt to illustrate how this empowerment-emancipation range might be explored in practical terms, which I will use as food for thought for my own analysis of Agency.

Applying Steven Lukes' three-dimensional analysis of power, Jim Crowther (2013) looked into the work of different community interventions - including participants' perspectives on how these projects changed their lives - to advance a discussion about ways people may be able to exercise either empowerment or emancipation given each faces of power. Under the first dimension (which has to do with people's ability to influence and change decisions where there is a conflict of interest), a greater exercise of power may include people gaining access to information to defend their rights over top-bottom decisions impacting them, establishing contacts they can reach out to for advice and support, as well as building the determination to seek accountability from representatives of the state or other institutions of power. In this case, getting to exercise more power can be seen as empowering if it remains at the individual level and emancipatory provided it cross over to the institutional or societal levels (Crowther, 2013, pp. *4, 7*).

In the second dimension (changing the agenda of the powerful) a shift in power balance may occur, for instance, when people acquire greater confidence in themselves, improve their skills for effective and assertive communication, are able to identify and share their own knowledge as well as that of others, and work to develop their own distinctive abilities (Crowther, 2013, p. 6). In Crowther's study, these changes at the individual level were mainly tied to collective organizing efforts. That is, it was by relying on one another that people were able to work on individual empowerment.

As for the third and final dimension (transforming attitudes and perceptions shaped by ideological power that work against people's interests) changing power relations has to do with a shift in people's life outlook, attitudes and opinions about themselves and the

world, which may include people feeling empowered in terms of influencing change as part of a group, communicating ideas to others, as well as building a greater understanding of how to effect change in the long term (Crowther, 2013, p. 7). Crowther explains that, although much harder to assess and measure, changes under this particular dimension have the capacity for emancipatory impact in the sense that they help uncover how power operate and encourage new social and cultural practices - which can help adjust social relations at a collective and structural level altering the advantage position of the powerless (Crowther, 2013, p. 4). He also notes that in the case that these changes remain at the interpersonal or individual level (that is, they remain connected to an enhancement of confidence and skills in an empowering sense) they are still significant even though they may not lead to systematic change (Crowther, 2013, p. 4).

This consideration of the empowerment-emancipation spectrum lends to a nice transition into a discussion about the concept of emancipation itself in a broader sense. Originating from Roman law in what literally meant the freeing of someone from someone else (like a son or wife being freed from the head of the household, much like today with the emancipation of underage adolescents from their parents), emancipation has carried different interpretations over the centuries in connection to larger movements: from religious tolerance in the 17th century, to the emancipation of slaves and the enlightenment of the 18th century, and the emancipation of women and workers in the 19th century (Biesta, 2008, p. 169).

In tracing the educational and philosophical lines of the concept, Geert Biesta (2008, 2010) highlights that emancipation was a central tenet in the establishment of education as an academic discipline - which took place in Germany in the late 19th/early 20th centuries and was based on the idea of education as a process to orient people towards greater autonomy and freedom, rather them to insert them into the existing social order (Biesta, 2008, p. 170).

Furthermore, the concept influenced important educational movements of the first decades of the 20th century (pedagogical reform, new education, progressive education), which also drew strongly from Jean-Jacques Rousseau's argumentation of society and institutions as being forces that corrupt and denaturalize the individual from their inherit "goodness" (that is, the external social order is corruptive) initially developed in relation to the emancipation of the child as an individual (Biesta, 2010, p. 43; Rousseau, 1762). The horrors of World War II and the emergence of ideological systems such as Fascism and Nazism exposed the limitations of emancipation as a framework that could be easily adopted for harmful purposes (Biesta, 2010, p. 43). The lesson learned laid in the recognition that individual emancipation is contingent on societal transformation, thus, the tenet of societal change became central to critical approaches in education (Biesta, 2008, p. 171).

With these historical roots in mind, I would like to expand on the concept of emancipation in relation to education from the distinctive and, I argue, complementary, views of Paulo Freire and Jacques Ranciere. The main difference between the two philosophers is situated in their approach to the question of emancipation, which can either start from a place of equality or inequality. The traditional emancipatory education model, which can be ascribed to critical pedagogues, seek to expose and explain the works of power in efforts to promote emancipation. It departs from the understanding that humans are conscious and historical beings living in praxis; thus, emancipation is viewed as a process which individuals go through in order to become more equal and "learn the truth" about their oppression - which is often tied to an outside intervention (Biesta, 2010, p. 51; Galloway, 2012, p. 169).

A general critique to this approach is that it conceives emancipation as something that comes from the outside and that is "done to people," which creates dependency between teachers and students in a context where the former is viewed as the "emancipator" and the

later as the "emancipated" (In the next section, I will further discuss the notion of the "emancipator" relative to critical pedagogy) (Biesta, 2008; Galloway, 2012, p. 164). Fundamentally, Ranciere challenges this view by approaching emancipation as something that "people do to themselves," with the understanding that individuals do not need someone to come from the outside and explain their objective condition to them, which, to him, takes place from a stance of inequality of relationship between the one who educates and the one who receives - or is believed to need - education (Biesta, 2010, p. 51).

Within this debate lies the central tenet of his theoretical contribution to emancipation: the "equality of intelligence" concept. Unlike Freire, Ranciere moves away from making assumptions about the nature of humanity and does not ascribe to a "hierarchy of intellectual capacity," rather, he views all speaking beings as presenting the same intelligence.[32] The contrast lies in the realization of "what an intelligence can do when it considers itself equal to any other and considers any other equal to itself" (Galloway, 2012; Ranciere, 1995, a cited in Biesta, 2010, p. 55). Thus, to him, emancipation takes places when people act upon - and continue to validate - the basis of the presupposition of equality of intelligence amongst all people (Biesta, 2010, p. 53). This notion of equality places emphasis on the "act of the will," meaning that individuals who do not attend to their will are enacting what can be seen as a form of "intellectual weakening" which creates differences in achievement amongst people (Ranciere, 1995, as cited in Galloway, 2012, p. 9). In all, while Freire views equality as something to strive for through an emancipatory education - which starts from a position on inequality - Ranciere brings it to the present under the premise that it already exists and we just need to act upon it.

Although Freire and Ranciere start off from different angles in their recognition of

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[32] In line with this view, Ranciere is strongly critical of society's attempt to measure intelligence through standardized tests and IQ measurements as they start from the premise that intelligence isn't equal and determine valuable from non-valuable knowledge. For more on Jacques Ranciere's theory see *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (1987).

education as a non-neutral vehicle that can be used to oppress people (from a Freirean standpoint, oppression is connected to the concept of the banking model of education while for Ranciere the intellectual "stultification" of people and the "pedagogization" of the social order is what leads to oppression), they both challenge traditional educational concepts and are concerned with pedagogical practices that reject the socialization of people into the current order of things and offers the possibility for emancipation (Galloway, 2012).

Another similarity can be found in their rejection of teaching and learning as an activity that entails teachers delivering or explaining "more correct" knowledge to students (which is based on the understanding that a more equal relationship between teacher and students - and of students with the materials or curriculum they use - are central aspects of an emancipatory education) as well as in their assumption that emancipatory learning cannot be systematized or boxed-in by way of government policies, thus finding much more freedom to flourish outside the formal system of education (Galloway, 2012, pp. 183, 179). Hence, within their different theoretical assumptions and understandings of emancipatory processes and practices, lies the belief that education has the power to break down the imaginary and concrete walls that limit and stifle people - a paramount notion that help us advance the discussion about the possibilities of an emancipatory education.

2.2.3. Contours of the debate on emancipatory education

What are the principles of an empowering and emancipatory education? What roles does a critical pedagogy-oriented education play in the enactment of these processes? In efforts to grapple with some of these broader questions, in this section, I explore the strengths as well as the limitations of a Freirean framework for individual and community transformation. Before delving into the discussion, it is important to note that the purpose of this analysis is not, by any means, to establish an overarching methodology for emancipatory education - which, as both Freire and Ranciere would agree on, does not come

with a consensus guideline of what it consist of or how it should be applied in practice (Galloway, 2012). Rather, it is about taking lessons from the theory of critical pedagogy to further the discussion on youth empowerment, social action and community transformation from a prospect of more inclusive and humanizing educational practices.

My understanding of emancipation (or empowerment that leads to emancipation, likewise) is also positioned along these lines. That is, I do not hold that emancipation entails an act of people freeing themselves, directly and fully, from all the oppressive and unequal societal structures that keeps them down and out, nor do I think this is feasible. Borrowing from Noah de Lissovoy (2010), I see emancipation as belonging to the present, which does not necessarily start from an enactment of "equality of intelligence" amongst people, as Ranciere would put it, but can be found within the acts people take to transform the real despite starting from a position of inequality. In this sense, I believe in gathering insights and inspiration from some of the main elements and tools of emancipatory pedagogy - such as the central assertion that we all have knowledge that we can tap into and act upon in the struggle to change our lives and communities, which challenges the principle of educational "deficit" - to better understand how young people take part in changing oppressive structures and making their voices heard.

That is, the emancipatory education framework allows us to place less focus on the actual "construction of the citizen-subject" and celebrate the small victories people make against the works of power on a daily basis, in a continued process of transformation. Agency, thus, embody the actions people exercise every day in their survival, and not something that is a direct response of, or only made possible through, the pedagogical process. In short, emancipatory education provides the possibility for an "audacity against power," helping us uncover real openings to the greater humanization of individuals (Lissovoy, 2010).

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In the debate that follow, I analyze concepts of empowerment and emancipation specifically from the perspective of critical pedagogy, which complements my earlier exercise of exploring both concepts in light of approaches from different fields. First, I want to briefly note some of the shifts in societal circumstances and theoretical frames that influenced the evolution of these ideas. As has been noted, the history of the adoption of emancipation and empowerment concepts in educational discourses has been profoundly impacted by Paulo Freire's contributions to the field (Inglis, 1997). The idea of supporting ordinary men and women - particularly a generation of underprivileged groups such as the poor, illiterate, migrant and low-skilled - in the achievement of more "emancipated" grounds for living was central to this tradition, inspiring the ambitions of humanist, social-democratic and radical views of education leading to individual and societal transformation from all sorts of angles (Wildemeersch, 2014, p. 822).

Adult and community education is perhaps one of the fields that experienced the greatest influence from this tradition. Making a direct and clear connection between education and social action, the focus was on collective and group learning that led to a reflection of common struggles and the building of solidarity amongst people (Thompson, 2000). Starting in the 1980's, as the neoliberal discourse began to spread and take strength around the world, the concept of emancipation suffered an ideological shift from a collective towards an individual orientation, which, Danny Wildemeersch argues, emphasized responsibility in lieu of rights and self-help in lieu of solidarity (Wildemeersch, 2014, p. 823). He explains that it was in this period that emancipation was substituted by the notion of empowerment, which called for more self-responsibility, autonomy and employability, with individuals improving their competencies so as to adapt to the needs of the knowledge and production society with a focus on competitiveness (this aligns with Inglis' critique of the co-optation of empowerment by neoliberal managerial discourses discussed early in this

chapter) (Wildemeersch, 2014, p. 823).

Along with this theoretical change came the proliferation of initiatives and studies carried out by a multitude of organizations and institutions approaching empowerment from a variety of focal stances linked to a wide range of educational interventions - from programs focusing, for instance, on providing women and minorities with economic opportunities and advancing the interests of special needs people, to initiatives promoting literacy, basic education and student support in inner-city schools, amongst many others (Archibald and Wilson, 2006, p. 23). This selection of meanings and approaches connected to empowerment made it so the concept moved farther away from its initial emancipatory focus inspired by social action ideologies (Archibald and Wilson, 2006, p. 23; Barroso, 2002; Inglis, 1997).

The concern is that initiatives and educators using the concept may be doing so while ignoring (or paying little attention to) the underlying contentious power relations affecting the lives of purported beneficiaries - which is a central concern in empowerment from a critical pedagogy stance (Archibald and Wilson, 2006, p. 23). It is not surprising then to learn that Freire - similar to how he felt about the misuse of the concept of conscientization - was troubled about what empowerment based on his ideas came to mean and symbolize (Gadotti, 1994). As it is the case in the field of international development, empowerment within the context of critical pedagogy is also very much tied to multidimensional processes taking place at different levels.

Considering the field of adult education emerging out of this orientation, for instance, empowerment may be tied to micro (personal), interface (interpersonal) and macro (socio-political) levels (Van der Merwe and Albertyn, 2009). The micro level, which is seen as the baseline for empowerment, refers to individual feelings, attitudes and skills of social control; once individuals feel empowered they start building up the confidence to address other empowerment levels that are external to themselves (interpersonal and macro), which may

lead to involvement in community change (Van der Merwe and Albertyn, 2009, p. 164, p. 151). I would argue that, in real life, this process of empowerment is most likely not as linear as this framework suggests (for example, people may exercise forms of empowerment that impact their communities while still grappling with personal limitations at the micro level), but it does help us understand the multifaceted aspects of it, particularly when exploring other frames of reference and definitions of empowerment used in the field of education.

In more practical terms, empowerment in critical pedagogy may be defined as a process that not only help individuals engage with the world around them more critically, questioning and changing power and knowledge relations, but that also enable them to exercise the kind of courage vital to transforming the social order whenever needed (McLaren, 2009). This aligns with Aronowitz's view of empowerment acting also as a force for self-confirmation that stimulate individuals to develop a greater love and appreciation for themselves. He notes, "empowerment is gained from knowledge and social relations that dignify one's own history, language and culture traditions" (McLaren, 2009, p. 77).

As a collective process - which connects to capacity-building development approaches - empowerment may be understood as individuals and communities gaining the ability to set their own goals, make their own choices, and act collectively to drive change - which allows them to gain ownership of their own development mechanisms (Van der Merwe and Albertyn, 2009). From a critical education tradition, central to empowerment is, therefore, the very peoples and groups that empowerment processes seek to benefit and motivate.

This discussion is to say that there are significant differences in the understanding of empowerment, some more traditional and others more critical. We may concur with Freire that empowerment is, at the very least, what the poor and oppressed are able to express as they gain greater political and social space through emancipatory education (Blackburn, 2000). To him, empowerment has a strong link with the concept of conscientization

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discussed earlier and is at the heart of his liberating education, for it is the enhancement of people's capacity for critical thinking and the ability to understand the source of their oppression that leads to empowerment which is transformative beyond the individual level (Barroso, 2002).

Still, Freire was interested in employing the concept of empowerment in relation to both the promoting of consciousness-raising as well as material changes to address issues of inequality and oppression (Archibald and Wilson, 2006, p. 24; Gadotti, 1994). This is similar to the argument that Inglis makes stressing that, although the shift in the overall ideology of empowerment made it so it became synonymous with a variety of concepts related to coping skills, personal efficacy, self-sufficiency, self-esteem, competency, and mutual support, to name a few, individuals need access to such capabilities if they are to survive within the social structures that shape their existence (Inglis, 1997, p. 14).

He notes, rightly so, that people who are illiterate and/or lack basic social skills have great difficulty securing jobs which will allow them to live a decent life. Empowerment, thus, may be advanced to "create self-confidence, self-expression and interest in learning," which are central attitudes to help people escape inequality and poverty (Inglis, 1997, p. 13). All in all, even if we conceive empowerment as a process that leads to greater impact at the individual level - which could be framed within a banking education model as people make greater commitments and invest in their education as a mean to obtain greater rewards within the system as it is, and not to change it (Inglis, 1997) - it does not take away from the importance that it has, standing on its own, as a platform that allows individuals to acquire greater political, social and economic power in order to improve their chances of succeeding in life.

In line with the previous discussion, empowerment is somewhat blurred in the sense that it tends to occur mostly at the personal level but it may also have spillover effects on the

interpersonal and community domains, both processes which are connected to the concept. Emancipation, on the other hand, must be tied to broader societal transformation that result from individuals, who feel more empowered, moving towards the collective. That is, as Inglis points out, education for liberation and emancipation is a collective activity that involves structures rather than individuals and that is concerned with social and political transformation. Granted that such process leads to personal development, it does so within a context of social change (Inglis, 1997, p. 14). In Freire's words:

> "Liberation is a social act, a social process of illumination… if individuals are not able to use their recently-attained freedom to support others to attain their freedom as well but changing the totality of society, then you are only exercising an individual attitude towards empowerment and freedom" (Shor and Freire, 1987, p.109).

Thus, the idea of emancipation plays a central role in critical educational theories which seek to promote change beyond the empowerment sphere. Bearing similarities with the project of decolonization, the overarching premise is that emancipation entails an elucidation of power relations, meaning that individuals must first gain a deep understanding of how oppressive practices, theories and structures work upon their lives before they can address and influence them (Biesta, 2010, p. 40, Lissovoy, 2010; Thompson, 2000; Van der Merwe and Albert, 2009). As discussed previously, the idea that people's understanding of their situation is hindered by outside forces that oppress them and, thence, that emancipation entails a process of "demystification," is connected, for instance, to Marxist notions of ideology and false consciousness as well as Bourdieu's concept of misrecognition (Biesta, 2010, p. 40).

In this vein, educational practices must help students become independent and autonomous beings who are able to think critically, judge, and conclude for themselves, while being encouraged to create knowledge through the exchange of experiences and reflect upon their lives in terms of participatory strategies for change (Biesta, 2010).

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According to critical pedagogues, an education devoid of emancipatory intentions work against people's interests, leading them to accept the status-quo and discouraging their consideration of alternatives to transform their realities and social condition. Emancipatory education, thus, actively involves individuals in their own re-education towards self-awareness and self-understanding, which is guided by a larger project for social justice and human freedom (Van der Merwe and Albert, 2009, p. 150).

Translating the framework's larger ambitions into actual educational practices, according to Peter McInerney (2009), an emancipatory education incorporates the interests, knowledge and concerns of students into a shared curriculum, it challenges students to build a critical understanding of their presence in the world, and perhaps most importantly, it assists them to acquire knowledge and resources to engage in social activism (Freire, 2001; McInnerney, 2009, p. 27). And so, a fundamental question arises: how does emancipatory education help people progress from personal transformation to social and political transformation? (Inglis, 1997, p. 14).

Acknowledging that critical self-reflection is only one step in the fight for societal transformation, Freire notes that, at the heart of an emancipatory education, lies the work of critical educators who are committed to unite in the struggle of oppressed groups and peoples (Inglis, 1997, p. 14). "Without becoming necessarily a political activist, there is a clear role for the educator in facilitating a progression from individual transformative learning to emancipatory education," Inglis emphasizes (Inglis, 1997, p. 14). According to him, one of the main tensions a Freirean approach to emancipation presents is precisely the over-dependency on the role of the educator, which also raise questions about issues of feasibility (the opening that critical educators actually have to teach an emancipatory curriculum, particularly in traditional institutions shaped by hierarchy, individualism and competition) as well as autonomy (in order to be successful, struggles against power need

to emerge from the oppressed themselves) (Inglis, 1997, p. 14).

This lead us into a very important discussion about the limitations of critical pedagogy, as, I believe, no real attempt to explore and adopt the framework can be carried out without a consideration of some of its major critiques. First, it is important to note that criticism has always been an essential element of Freire's work, regardless of its nature, be it constructive, auto-critical, ambiguous, ill-informed, superficial, or straight up hostile (Kane, 2011). For instance, it is not difficult to find articles portraying Freire as being "corrupt," making up theories and adopting assumptions that serve the very system he claimed to want to transform, as being an "indoctrinator" who sought secular salvation via education, or a form of non-violent "guerillero" who wanted to conscientize people so they could dismantle the dominant system. Perhaps the harsher description of them all refer to Freire as a "pedagogy capitalist" who created the concept of the oppressed so he could provide an answer himself on how to liberate people through emancipatory education, thus, creating a demand for his theoretical and practical framework. According to this later argument, critical pedagogy reduces the oppressed to mere clients of a liberating education service (Biesta, 2010; Esteva, et al., 2009).

On a lighter note, Douglas Kellner points out that contemporary educators particularly acknowledge that Freire failed to clearly highlight issues of race, gender, sexuality, culture and religion when exploring the complexities of social inequality, poverty and oppression in the developing world - although he highlights that his contributions on some of these issues, including human's relationship with nature (namely "ecopedagogy") was cut short by his premature death (Galloway, 2012; Kellner, 2015). Given the scope of this section, I chose to focus on two illustrative critiques to Freire's work that are prominent in the broader literature, the first having to do with the categorization of the "oppressed," which is central to his power analysis, and the second, the position of the "emancipated"

educator vis-a-vis the subject who needs to be emancipated (Biesta, 2010; Blackburn, 2000; Esteva, et al., 2009; Galloway, 2012; Wildemeersch, 2014).

When reading Freire, one may be tempted to perceive "the oppressed" as a unitary subject (Hooks 1993 in Mayo, 1995). This is due to a lack of clarity about the socio-demographic characteristic of such groups and individuals, which makes his "label" somewhat broad and vague. Essentially, there is an over-simplification of people into categories of oppressor and oppressed, which includes assumptions about human nature that can be deeply problematic (Galloway, 2012). According to James Blackburn (2000), on anthropological grounds, the notion that completely powerless populations exist is a highly questionable one. He argues that, because Freire's understanding of power was based on European leftist traditions, notably, a Marxist notion of power in capitalistic societies, he did not place enough value on traditional and vernacular forms of powers (Blackburn, 2000, p. 11).

What he saw as a "culture of silence," might as well be a culture of resistance that people express in unexpected and uncommon ways. That is, even in a context of extreme poverty and marginalization, individuals who at first appear powerless or fatalistic, may actually exercise at least some power more subtly, which could be manifested in an engagement in sabotage, non-conformity, and the secret adherence of a particular culture or identity at the margins (Blackburn, 2000, p. 10). This aligns with James Scott's (1985) notion of "weapons of the weak," which speak to the small acts of resistance poor people take (peasants, in his particular analysis), that are coded and often hidden, but overtime, can be contagious and corrosive of dominant structures of power (Hayward and Lukes, 2008; Scott, 1985). Furthermore, the attempt to impose a certain vision of power on others is problematic considering that, for the very reasons just discussed, people may not perceive themselves as powerless or may not want to be "empowered" in the way that is being

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prescribed to them (Barroso, 2002).

Another major critique of Freire's framework concerns the notion that the critical educator possesses some kind of "magic bullet" that will automatically empower and emancipate others, which starts from a place of inequality between the teacher who knows and students who do not yet know (Biesta, 2010; Blackburn, 2000). This would also entail that emancipation requires an intervention from the outside led by someone who is not subjected to the forms of power that the oppressed seeks to overcome (Biesta, 2010). Amongst the given controversies and contradictions to this emancipatory logic, some critics have highlighted issues related to the dependency on the educator (similar to Inglis' position mentioned earlier) and the emancipatory process itself, as well as the tendency for critical pedagogues to take for granted people's own understanding of power relations. Let us first unpack the first argument.

Essentially, the critique holds that a Freirean framework requires critical educators to "hold students' hands" as they can walk the path towards freedom, which assumes that emancipation is contingent on a specific intervention and on the presence of an "emancipated" educator (this also raises issues about indoctrination as educators may use the framework as a disguise to impose their own ideologies and political agendas upon people) (Barroso, 2002).[33] In this view, these so-called "liberators" are the ones making visible the hidden power relations and systems that students are unable to see for themselves, which can be taken as an assertion that the oppressed "can neither liberate themselves nor can they even perceive fully this oppression" (Biesta, 2010; Esteva, et al., 2009, p. 5).

This aligns with Ranciere's problematization of the "logic of emancipation," which

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[33] Nicaragua's literary cruzades of the 1980's can be seen as a concrete example of a misuse of the liberating education framework for ideological and political purposes. The Sandinista regime explicitly employed Freire's methods in a widespread campaign that aimed to empower and alphabetize poor peasants, when in fact, according to Blackburn, these efforts served to promote a unified national revolutionary culture and to homogenize the country's population, which was particularly harmful to the few indigenous groups who scribed to their own particular identities (Barroso, 2002; Blackburn, 2000, p. 12).

maintains that when the educator explains to others how the world works as part of the emancipatory process, the people who are at the receiving end of the intervention become dependent on the truth and knowledge that is revealed to them (Biesta, 2010, p. 40; Ranciere, 1991). Furthermore, not only they rely on others to feed them knowledge and emancipatory possibilities, but they are also guided not to trust their own instincts and experiences - which is the second point in this discussion I wanted to highlight.

A general interpretation of Freire's conscientização framework, specifically, has to do with the notion that it is precisely because the way power works upon people's consciousness that they are unable to see how power works upon their consciousness (Biesta, 2010, p. 44). To put it simply, in order to achieve emancipation, individuals need to gain an understanding of how power shapes their beings and thoughts, but someone needs to come in and provide them with that awareness so they can look at their problems differently. This, rightly so, may be perceived as an arrogant attempt to explain people's objective condition to them, which would suggest that individuals are incapable of fully grasping what they see and feel on a daily basis (Biesta, 2010, p. 46).

If we take these critiques as they have been laid out we may easily conclude that critical pedagogy installs dependency at the heart of its emancipatory process, even though it claims it is concerned with a larger project for equality (Biesta, 2010). Contrary to this approach, this study is a concrete effort to continue to question, but also to place confidence, in a Freirean education. Adopting a different - and more hopeful - stance vis-a-vis the critiques I just discussed, in regards to the over-simplification of the oppressed "category," it is important to highlight that Freire had a concrete exposure to poverty and exclusion, having worked directly with landless illiterate peasants in Brazil's Northeast, individuals who, for generations, suffered with severe systematic oppression and worked in conditions close to slavery. This experience was, therefore, fundamental in his development of a pedagogy of

the oppressed and comes from a place of a real-world understanding of limitations upon the human condition.

It is also worth reminding that Freire himself urged people not to take his theory blindly and with no regards to context, which not only entail understanding the complexities of territories and communities, but also the lifeworld of specific populations the emancipatory projects seek to benefit, with an eye to the degree to which this process is already underway. As Noah de Lissovoy (2010) notes: "faithfulness to the emancipation project means pressing critical pedagogy itself to recognize human being and emancipatory agency even where they have not yet been engaged in any formal process of conscientization" (Freire, 1997; Lissovoy, 2010, p. 210). In addition, as we consider the element of over-dependency on the teacher, it can be said that critical educators are not the ones enacting an emancipatory education, rather, they join in the process of emancipation that emerges from within a community of learners and shares of knowledge (Inglis, 1997).

In my reading of his theory, Freire sees emancipation as a process that entails deep self-reflection and engagement with the world, and not something tangible that belongs to others to be given away. In fact, in his work late in life, Freire expanded on the concept of "radical democratic humanism," which refers to learning as a practice of empowerment of those who are relatively powerless, rather than an exercise driven by the leaders over the led (Aronowitz, 2009). Along these lines, I believe that the educational process needs guidance, but from an approach that values the knowledge both teachers and students bring to the table and that encourages dialogue so people can engage with and learn from each other's experiences, in a non-banking model that starts from a place that recognizes the subjectivity of every single individual. Based on this understanding, critical educators then act as facilitators in the educational process and not as "saviours."

Finally, with respect to the critique that critical pedagogy tends to disregard people's

understanding of their own conditions and experiences, we may argue that, rather than not being able to see the source of their oppression, Freire suggested that individuals find themselves at different stages in their critical reading of power relations and unequal social stratifies that shape their lives - which is reflected in his conscientization three-level framework. After all, emancipatory learning is rooted in the real interests and struggles of ordinary people, and invites them to take part in the process of changing their realities based on the knowledge they already possess, placing utmost respect in people's lived experiences and ways of seeing the world (Van der Merwe and Albert, 2009).

What Freire offer us is an alternative to the traditional model of education which can help us build a more democratic, just and egalitarian society. In my view, a Freirean emancipatory education is a process of self-actualization of the individual that fully recognizes the existence of oppression in our society and seeks to give people the tools so they can achieve their own liberation. This is an important point given that underestimating how much people can benefit from enabling mechanisms for creating the conditions for change to take place is analogous to ignoring that people live under social, cultural and economic conditions so powerful as to dictate what they can and cannot do as well as who they can be or may become.

An emancipatory education is, therefore, a pedagogy of possibility that, despite its limitations, offer us inspiration and hope. As Inglis points out, educators committed to emancipatory education in the postmodern era are caught - and have to juggle - between two main views: a Foucauldian pessimism that connects emancipation and the search for truth into "endless evolving politics of power in which discipline and order are implemented," and a Habermasian optimism, which maintains that power and its colonizing effects can be undone and that we can reach a more just world through rational communication (Inglis, 1997, p. 15). I choose to stick with the later perspective.

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Figure 1. **Theory snapshot.** Theoretical frameworks and fields informing the discussion on agency, empowerment and emancipation processes.

Agency
International development

- The capacity of groups or individuals to make purposeful choices in their lives; what a person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever values he/she regards as important (Samman and Santos, 2009; Sen, 1999).
- The small victories ordinary people make against power every day, findings ways to act within structural constraints and survive inside systems of oppression (Lissovoy, 2010).
- A multidimensional phenomenon manifested in different spheres, domains and levels (micro, meso, macro) covering multiple societal structures which either allow or constrain its exercise (Samman and Santos, 2009).
- Its manifestation is contingent upon access to various resources in the human, social and psychological spheres as well as collective assets and capabilities (Samman and Santos, 2009; Sen, 1999).

Sociology/youth studies

- Greater achievement of agency in connection to three dimensions: private goals (individual or personal choices linked to immediate circumstances), public domain (individual or collective project linked to limited change and/or the maintenance of existing circumstances or institutions), and social transformation (a collective project that connects to fundamental changes in the overall social order) (White and Wyn, 1998).
- Considering a contextual approach to social agency, young people exercise their agency amidst social processes and social divisions which shape their experiences and lifeworld (White and Wyn, 1998).

Empowerment
International development

- Empowerment as an expansion in people's abilities to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them (exercizing agency more fully) (Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007; Kabeer, 2001; Samman and Santos, 2009).
- Empowerment from the perspective of whether choices exist, whether people make use of them, and whether they bring about desired outcomes (Samman and Santos, 2009; Sen, 1999).
- Empowerment as an opening in the institutional environment under which people function or the opportunity structures they have access to; the concrete material, social and institutional preconditions required to exert agency (Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007).
- Threefold framework of empowerment: access to social power (productive wealth), political power (decision-making processes) and psychological power (self-confidence) (Friedman, 1992).
- Four elements of empowerment: access to information, inclusion and participation, accountability and local organizational capacity being that agency is influenced by people's individual and collective assets and capabilities (Nayaran, 2002).
- Four ways to exercise agency that leads to empowerment: control over personal decisions (power over), domain-specific autonomy and household decision-making (power to), and the ability to change aspects in one's life at the individual and community levels (power from within and power with) (Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007; Rowland, 1997).
- As a collective process, empowerment may be understood as individuals and communities gaining the ability to set their own goals, make their own choices, and act collectively to drive change, gaining ownership of their own development mechanisms (Van der Merwe and Albertyn, 2009).

Community and educational psychology

- Multi-level social action process taking place within individuals, families, organizations and communities; connected to notions of collective health, well-being and environment (Jennings et al., 2006).
- Empowerment at the individual level fosters capacity-building including personal control, a proactive approach to life and a critical understanding of the socio-political environment, while collectively, it involves processes and structures that enhance members' skills, well-being, support to effect change and access to networks/structures to improve quality of community life (Zimmerman, 2000).

Educational psychology and public health
- Youth empowerment model centered on collective socio-political change; a critical social theory of youth empowerment (CYE) support and foster youth contributions to positive community development and socio-political change (Jennings et al., 2006).

Adult/community education
- Empowerment may be tied to micro (personal), interface (interpersonal) and macro (socio-political) levels. The micro level refers to individual feelings, attitudes and skills of social control; once individuals feel empowered they begin addressing empowerment levels external to themselves (interpersonal and macro), leading to involvement in community change (Van der Merwe and Albertyn, 2009).
- Business-oriented approaches to empowerment connect to self-regulation, discipline and control, often in the absence of critical analysis (working within the system), while critical empowerment leads to a larger struggle for individual and societal transformation (working to change the system) (Inglis, 1997).
- A neoliberal notion of empowerment calls for more self-responsibility, autonomy, competency and employability, with individuals improving their competencies in order to adapt to the needs of the knowledge and production society with a focus on competitiveness (Inglis, 1997; Wildemeersch, 2014).
- Empowerment as a process to promote self-confidence, self-expression and interest in learning, central attitudes to escaping inequality and poverty (Inglis, 1997).

Critical pedagogy
- A process that not only help individuals engage with the world around them more critically, questioning and changing power and knowledge relations, but that also enable them to exercise the kind of courage vital to transforming the social order (McLaren, 2009).
- An enhancement in people's capacity for critical thinking and the ability to understand the source of their oppression, leading to transformation beyond the individual level (Barroso, 2002; Freire, 1970).
- Empowerment as the promoting of consciousness-raising as well as material changes to address issues of inequality and oppression (Freire, 1970).

Emancipation

Education/critical pedagogy
- While empowerment occurs mostly at the personal level with possible spillover effects on the interpersonal and community domains, emancipation must be tied to broader societal transformation that result from increasingly empowered individuals moving towards the collective (Inglis, 1997).
- A process to orient people towards greater autonomy and freedom, rather them to insert them into the existing social order (Biesta, 2008).
- Emancipation entails an elucidation of power relations, with individuals gaining a deep understanding of how oppressive practices, theories and structures work upon their lives with the goal of addressing and influencing them (Biesta, 2010, Lissovoy, 2010; Thompson, 2000).
- Emancipation takes places when people act upon, and continue to validate, the basis of the presupposition of equality of intelligence amongst all people (Ranciere, 1995).
- A process through which individuals go through in order to become more equal and "learn the truth" about their oppression (Biesta, 2010; Galloway, 2012).

Emancipatory education

Critical pedagogy
- Practices that help students become independent and autonomous beings who can think critically, judge, and conclude for themselves, while being encouraged to create knowledge through the exchange of experiences and reflect upon their lives in terms of participatory strategies for change (Biesta, 2010).
- The active involvement of individuals in their own re-education towards self-awareness and self-understanding, in a process guided by a larger project for social justice and human freedom (Van der Merwe and Albert, 2009).
- A model of education that incorporates the interests, knowledge and concerns of students into a shared curriculum, challenging them to build a critical understanding of their presence in the world and helping them acquire knowledge and resources to engage in social activism (Freire, 2001; McInnerney, 2009).
- A collective activity that involves structures rather than individuals and that is concerned with social and political transformation (Inglis, 1997).

Conclusion

The challenging exercise of investigating into - and trying to make sense of - empowerment, emancipation and associating concepts from the perspective of different fields of knowledge beyond education allowed me to position my study within a particular theoretical framework, while incorporating insights and lessons from relevant frames of knowledge concerned with advancing similar social justice-oriented ideas and practices. The broader philosophy of critical pedagogy is the critical education lens chosen to situate the study and observe the phenomenon in question; however, my central inspiration draws from a Freirean emancipatory education framework. Although North American critical pedagogues have essentially deflected from Freire's popular education tradition and its direct ties with social movements and radical societal transformation, the field continues to guide social justice efforts in education, but also in fields beyond it.

Despite its shortcomings (for instance, an appropriation of the framework by academics to further personal interests), critical pedagogy remains a relevant platform through which we may construct alternatives to education that empower the most marginalized groups in our society to reach their potential as citizens, social subjects, and agents of change. Borrowing from the contributions of different authors and frameworks in critical theory and Marxist philosophies, amongst other traditions, the foundational premise of the field is based on the assumption that men are only free in theory, as society excludes the poor and marginalized from realizing their freedom and exercizing their human capabilities. In the all-too-familiar context where there is an unbalance in institutional power relations, ideological and hegemonical forces operate upon people's consciousness and subjectivities, restricting their capacity to escape their boundary situations and recognize the forces shaping their social conditions.

Unapologetically and openly negating processes of exploitation and oppression,

critical pedagogues believe in the creation of a space outside the logic of domination that allows individuals to reach greater humanization as they dialogue with society. In line with this notion, they maintain that schools are crucial vehicles used to either reproduce or reject (and help transform) such patterns of socialization and alienation, highlighting the political nature of education and its ability to operate from different positions within the domination and empowerment spectrum. Rejecting schools' adoption of "bare pedagogies" stripped of critical content and calling attention to the power relations embedded in the production of knowledge - and its implications to social reproduction - critical educators promote pedagogical practices that encourage students to draw from their lived experiences and cultural identities, as they learn to develop a more critical view of the world and are given the tools to act upon their individual transformative capacities. These elements may be summarized as self-reflection, an awareness of oppression, and tools to build a new life.

A praxis and critically-oriented education, therefore, becomes the force by which uneven power distributions and unequal structures may be understood, confronted and, most importantly, altered. The possibility of applying a Freirean pedagogy in learning and practice in the most different settings beyond the classroom - from literacy training, to social movement practices, and a variety of platforms in non-formal education - demonstrate its potential to help foster processes of agency, empowerment, action and social change, benefiting marginalized communities and peoples in territories historically constrained by mechanisms of domination; places where transformation is desperately awaited and needed. Although the literature is more extensive, in this dissertation, I focus on seven of the most important dimensions and practical elements in critical pedagogy which can be used to guide emancipatory teaching and learning approaches, them being: problem-posing education, dialogic learning, negotiated curriculum, critical consciousness, praxis, cultural action for freedom and the element of love - all which have been discussed individually and in-depth

in this chapter.

The second major thematic addresses broader questions related to processes of empowerment and emancipation from different theoretical angles. Starting with an analysis of power - and expanding on insights from Bourdieu's capital framework, Foucault's regime of truth, and Habermas' domain of truth beyond power - the concept is presented as a complex social force that is located within overlapping, fluctuating, and ever-contested relationships that shape, and that are shaped by, social structures. Given that critical pedagogues are interested in approaching power from its position as an enabler or disabler of individual and collective action, the focus is placed on examining its operation through the institutionalized production, distribution and consumption of knowledge.

If power manifest itself through discourses and mechanisms which function as "truths," then it can be critically analyzed and confronted; thus, the importance of an education that encourages people to ask questions, engage, debate and open themselves to new ideas and prospects. Drawing from Lukes' three-dimensional analysis and the notion that relatively-less powerful individuals are limited in what they can do and be by social constraints that might be otherwise, the chapter continues bridging power to the debate on agency and opportunity structures.

Agency is identified as small victories people make everyday in the face of historical social and institutional barriers, which allow them to act differently and exercise purposeful choice-making in different domains of life in pursuit of the values they regard as important. It is mainly about whether people can even access choices, whether they can make use of them effectively, and whether they generate desired outcomes. Considering contextual approaches to social agency in youth studies, any attempt to explore (or maximize) young people's use of choices available to them as they work towards taking active role in negotiating their own paths, must then be historically and empirically located in the social,

political, and economic conditions of their lives. The assumption behind this notion is that social divisions and inequalities have a major impact in the ability of people of all ages to exercise their agency fully.

Given the focus of this study, I am mostly interested in agency that crosses over private and public domains to also touch the sphere of social transformation. That is, agency which links knowledge, power, and the ability to active resources stimulating conscious and goal-directed activities that address immediate public issues and seek to modify the existing social order, while challenging oppressive structures of power. Empowerment, therefore, may be understood as the result of a linkage between the building blocks of agency and opportunity structures - which exist in a nexus of power relations. That is - reflecting on insights from the literature in international development and Sen's capability approach - the concept has to do with an expansion in people's agency and freedom to make strategic choices, but also to their concrete opportunities to act more purposefully under the social, material, and institutional conditions that shape their lives.

An ambiguous and much-contested phenomenon, the discussion follows with a review of different frameworks of empowerment which are relevant to the study. The first one borrows from perspectives in educational and community psychology which hold that empowerment is a social action process that occurs both at individual and collective levels, involving capacity-building that promotes personal skills and behaviour, but that also incorporate processes and structures that help improve collective well-being and the quality of community life.

In a similar fashion, the critical social theory of youth empowerment (CYE) - drawn from the fields of educational psychology and public health - advance a model of youth development that place young people at the center of efforts to build stronger and more equitable communities, contributing to collective socio-political change. Frameworks of this

kinds are sources of motivation in light of a context of misuse and exploitation where empowerment has lost some of its initial critical and transformational qualities to be associated with concepts of self-discipline, self-responsibility, autonomy and responsibility in the absence of a commitment to engage in societal struggles.

The various conceptions, applications, and functions of empowerment means that individuals may be empowered to work within the system or to change the system, which has emancipatory functions, with many nuances in between this spectrum. Insights from the field of community education shows that participants involved in community interventions may exercise power at individual levels which can also be tied to collective organizing efforts, broadening the prospects for emancipatory impact (for example, by leveraging newly-acquired knowledge, skills, confidence and resources to help expose unequal structures and encourage social and cultural practices at the community level to address them).

With roots in Roman Law, emancipation evolved into a central tenet in critical approaches to education concerned with greater autonomy, freedom, and a re-structure of the current social order - although the concept has also undergone ideological shifts drifting away from the collective towards the individual; a by-product of neoliberal ideologies. Its paramount role in education is discussed from the distinctive views of Freire and Ranciere, whom, although approaching the question of emancipation from different angles (while Freire saw equality as something to be pursued through emancipatory learning, Ranciere started from the position that equality exists and just needs to be enacted), both challenged traditional educational structures, teaching practices based on introducing more correct knowledge to students, and the notion that emancipatory education can be standardized.

With this last point in mind, the concluding segment of the chapter focuses on the contours of the debate on emancipatory education, exploring the opportunities and

limitations of the framework with the purpose of drawing lessons to inspire the discussion on the intersection of youth education, empowerment, and social transformation. The concepts of empowerment and emancipation are brought back into the discussion, this time from a perspective of critical pedagogy. Paulo Freire's work contributed tremendously to the evolution of both concepts within the field of education, offering a theoretical and practical platform through which to support poor and marginalized populations in their efforts take control of their lives and free themselves from systems of oppression. Bearing similarities with interpretations already discussed coming from relevant fields, empowerment in the critical pedagogy tradition also incorporates processes taking place at different levels which are internal and external to the individual (personal, interpersonal, community).

However, more than a tool to help advance community's ownership of their own development mechanisms (ability to set their goals, make their own choices, and act to drive change), from a critical pedagogy stance, empowerment which may lead to emancipation is associated with an increase in people's capacity to think critically and engage in social transformation with an understanding of how oppressive structures, discourses, and practices impact their lives and communities. One of the frameworks' greatest strengths lies, therefore, in its potential to connect the promotion of skills, feeling and attitudes which help broaden the possibilities for personal empowerment and self-actualization, with resources, knowledge, and critical reflection that inspire participatory strategies for change.

As for the limitations of emancipatory education, most critiques of Freire's work discussed in this chapter address genuine concerns that anyone interested in studying or applying his pedagogy should take notice of and carefully consider. From a failure to incorporate other dimensions beyond class in his analysis of oppression, to an oversimplification of individuals into categories of oppressor and oppressed, and an over-

dependency on the educator - and the process of emancipatory learning itself - to open doors for emancipation, amongst others, criticism of all nature, skepticism, and even hatred have been a central component of Freire's legacy from his time as an outcast from his own country to today - which is a reflection of his continuous relevance to larger aspirations for social justice and ability to denounce ugly truths that echo at the core of our societies.

At a moment when a new wave of conservatism is slowly swiping through Brazil and the senate is even considering a proposal that attempts to revoke Paulo Freire's title as the country's patron of education, we need his contributions, inspiration, and faith in the power of critical education to help build a more just world perhaps as much now as ever before.

CHAPTER 3

Methodological Approaches

Introduction

Using the framework of emancipatory education as fuel to my inquiry, my interest in exploring the lifeworld of young people, delve into their stories, and get a sense of the meaning they make of their experiences led me to take a qualitative approach to my study, as it provides a suitable fit for my research needs and questions. This chapter presents the methodological orientation guiding the dissertation and strategies used for data collection and analysis.

It begins with a review of the qualitative research tradition (3.1) and the case study methodology (3.2), followed by a discussion on interviewing as a primary mode of data collection, with a focus in the in-depth phenomenology based strategy (3.3), an overview of the study design and the different data sets directing the research (3.4), as well as a summary of coding techniques used to organize, manage, and analyze the qualitative data using NVivo software (3.5).

The chapter also includes an introduction to the Agency program, their main objectives, core premises, educational approach and progress (3.6) and provides a socio-demographic profile of the study population, including information on sampling strategies. Finally, the chapter concludes with a consideration of issues of reliability, validity and ethics, with a self-assessment of how these principles were ensured in my own study (3.7).

3.1 A qualitative understanding of the world

Although territories at the margins can be oppressive spaces, progressive scholars like bell hooks - a pupil of Paulo Freire, renowned author, feminist and social activist - recognize

that these locations have liberatory potential that can provide strength and valuable insight from where counter-hegemonic discourses can originate (hooks, 1999). To her, "stories are a way of knowing that contain both power and the art of possibility" (hooks, 2010, p. 53). I also believe that we need more stories in the world of academia. Far too many voices are excluded, accounts are left untold, and contrasting realities are kept in the dark when people's lifeworld are approached solely from a quantitative perspective.

In recent years, the impulse to narrate people's stories in order to get a sense of their lived experiences and find meaning has been gaining increasingly more attention in the behavioural and social sciences (Atkinson and Delamont, 2006; Polkinghorne, 1995; Riessman, 2008; Sandelowski, 1991). Research approaches that are focused on exploring the human side of an issue allow investigators to build a qualitative view of the world, in which interpreting individuals construct domains of meanings and act upon them through purposeful lines of action as they go by their everyday lives (Hilal and Alabri, 2013; Morrison, 2002). Given that behaviour follows meaning, in qualitative research, to make sense of the way people act and conduct themselves, one must be able to "uncover the meaningful objects in people's worlds and understand those objects from the perspective of the people being studied" (Morrison, 2002, p. 26). It is all about attempting to develop an understanding of how individuals see and construct the environments they live in, how they interpret their lived experiences, and what kinds of meaning they ascribe to those experiences (Merriam, 2009, p. 5).

As a situated activity that locates the observer in the world (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005), qualitative research is a relatively new phenomenon. Particularly from the early 1990's onwards, sociologists and anthropologists engaged in fieldwork worldwide sought to develop new ways to study people's lives, their social condition, cultural context and individual understanding of their realities, moving away from the dominant positivist

tradition towards interpretative methods (Merriam, 2009). One work in particular is recognized as having marked the emergence of qualitative research as we know today. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies of Qualitative Research* by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967) offered theoretical and practical strategies for building theory in qualitative research through inductively analyzing social phenomena. From then onwards, the field developed rapidly, producing a growing number of publications contributing to the understanding of this form of research and attracting adherents from diverse fields, from education, social work, and counselling, to law, health and administration, to name a few (Merriam, 2009, p. *6-7*).

As for philosophical frames, qualitative research is most often located within interpretivist ontological and epistemological traditions, which understand reality to be a socially constructed and relative phenomenon with multiple forms of interpretation that cannot be observed in one single reality (unlike a positivism orientation that assumes the existence of an external world and a single objective reality which is observable, stable and measurable) (Merriam, 2009, p. 8). That is, interpretivist research strives to understand and interpret the reasons, meanings and other subjective experiences which shape human behaviour and are context bound, and not to generalize and predict causes and effects (Neumann, 2000; Udson and Ozanne, 1988).

Building on over three decades of experience teaching qualitative research in education, Sharan Merriam (2009) identifies six main approaches most commonly used: basic qualitative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, narrative analysis and critical qualitative research (Merriam, 2009).[34] Basic qualitative research - perhaps the most common form of qualitative research used in the field of education - was

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[34] For a detailed description of each type of qualitative research, please see Merriam, 2009.

chosen as the appropriate research method for this study as it allows me to understand how favela youth make sense of their lives and experiences in the Agency program, with a focus on how they construct their worlds, how they understand such experiences and what meanings they attribute to them. Data is generally collected through a combination of interviews, observations and informational documents. During the analysis process, the researcher identifies recurring patterns and themes that characterize and are supported by the data, which then become the research findings (Merriam, 2009, p. 23).

Although my qualitative research stance is situated within interpretivist/constructivist approaches - it seeks to understand the phenomenon and the subjective meaning it has for participants, in a world where meanings are negotiated socially and historically, being formed through interaction with others (Cresswell, 2007; McKinley, 2015) - it overlaps with a critical qualitative perspective, in which the goal of inquiry is to "critique and challenge, to transform and empower" (Merriam, 2009, p. 34).[35] Given my research focus on marginal groups and pathways for empowerment, emancipation and community transformation in light of a reality situated within a specific social, cultural and political context, the analysis goes well beyond uncovering the interpretation of participants' understanding of their worlds to incorporate larger questions of social justice.

Applying a theoretical lens of critical pedagogy, I strive to understand and analyze a phenomenon, but also to critique and challenge its foundations; to read people's experiences in terms of interactions and community, but also in terms of contextual systematic marginalization and oppression; to interpret people's socially constructed realities, but also help uncover unequal power dynamics which shape their lives and ways of seeing and acting upon the world (Merriam, 2009, p. 10).

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[35] According to Merriam, critical research - which has roots in neo-Marxist, Freirean, and Harbermesian traditions, drawing, nowadays, from feminist, critical race, and postcolonial theories, amongst others - can be combined with other research methodologies in qualitative inquiry (Merriam, 2009, p. 9, 35).

3.2 The case study approach in qualitative research

Case studies are widespread in qualitative research. In this type of investigation, data collection and analysis is carried out in relevance to the case; that is, the single entity or multiple instances of a phenomenon that develop into the focus of the study (Bazeley, 2013, p. 5). With roots in sociology, anthropology and psychology, case studies allow researchers to investigate complex social units with multiple real-life variables, resulting in a rich, highly descriptive and holistic account of a phenomenon (Merriam, 1998; Merriam, 2009). Alike its sibling qualitative methodologies, the main objective of case studies is to find meaning and understanding though the application of inductive investigative strategies together with intensive and detailed analysis, with the researcher acting as the primary instrument for data collection (Merriam, 2009; Soy, 1997).

The decision to use this approach, Merriam notes, has to do with the fact that this design is chosen precisely because researchers are interested in "insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing" (Merriam, 2009, p. 42). Robert Yin (2003) identifies four instances when a case study approach to qualitative research should be considered: a) when the study seeks to answers 'how' and 'why' questions, b) when the participants' behaviour cannot be manipulated, c) when understanding contextual conditions is essential to studying the phenomenon, and finally, d) when the bounds between phenomenon and the context are not clear (Yin, 2003). Common examples of case study research include analysis of a particular person, a group of people, an organization, an institution, or a specific policy (Merriam, 2009; Starman, 2013). Prevalent in the field of education, case studies are particularly useful for exploring educational innovations, evaluating programs and informing policy-making (Merriam, 2009; Merriam, 1998).

The most defining feature of case studies is the delimitation of the main object of the research (the case); that is, the unit of analysis, rather than a specific topic, is what

characterizes the investigation (Merriam, 1998). The method can be defined as an in-depth description and analysis of a "bounded system" (single entity around which there are boundaries) with the researcher making a conscious choice of what is to be studied and "fencing in" that choice, within its perimeters and limitations (Merriam, 2009, p. 40). To be qualified as "intrinsically bounded," case studies need to be finite, meaning that researchers should be able to calculate, for instance, the number of people who could be interviewed for the project and the amount of observation time it would approximately take in order to get an understanding of the unit of analysis to be investigated (Merriam, 2009, p. 41).

In this sense, case studies are mostly useful to study a phenomenon or object that cannot be separated from its context, such as the case of Agency, a program that targets youth from underserved territories of Rio who, for the most part, share similar social conditions. Furthermore, case studies share three characteristics. They are 1) particularistic, as they focus on a particular phenomenon, program, event or situation, revealing insights related to what they are and represent, 2) descriptive, as their end product offers a rich and "thick" description of the phenomenon being studied, making use of qualitative tools to describe finding, such as documentation of events, quotes and narratives, and finally, case studies are 3) heuristic, as they shed light on the reader's understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, bringing about the uncovering of new meanings based on the particular experiences of each person engaging with the text (Merriam, 1998, p. 29-30; Merriam, 2009).

Some authors have further distinguished case studies according to types, function or number of cases (single or multisite) (Merriam, 2009). Amongst some of the most prominent ones identified in the literature are: historical case studies, observational, life history, explanatory, exploratory, intrinsic, instrumental, multi-case studies and collective, amongst others (Bodgan and Biklen, 2007; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2003). As it attempts to do more than

just understanding a particular phenomenon, providing insights into an issue, redrawing generalizations and helping refine a theory, my study falls in the instrumental category. That is, a close examination of a phenomenon, its activities and context, exemplified by the case (the Agency program, from the perspective of its impact on participants' lives) play a supporting role in facilitating understanding of something else (opportunities and constraints of using emancipatory tools in youth education) (Baxter and Jack, 2008; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2005). The possibility to carry out "interpretation in context" relative to program, place, peoples and processes within one single case study is what made this approach particularly relevant to my study.

As for the scope of the research and data collection strategies, in general terms, case studies are often challenging because the phenomenon under investigation is tied to specific political, social, economic, and historical conditions, which greatly expand the range of possibilities for identifying research questions and frameworks. Thus, in order to scale down the scope of the investigation and delineate the case, in addition to conducting interviews, it is important that researchers apply an "analytical eclecticism," relying on supporting data to enrich and offer further evidence to their analysis (Starman, 2013). Aligned with other research methods within the qualitative tradition, these may include observations, review of documents and reports, analysis of physical accessories and audio-visual materials, as well as survey findings (Merriam, 2009). Case studies, therefore, incorporate both quantitative and qualitative approaches in their in-depth exploration of the complexity and uniqueness of a phenomenon from its multiple perspectives (Simons, 2009).

3.3. Interviewing as a way of knowing and learning

The decision to use interviews as the primary mode of data collection is based on the kind of information researchers aim to collect (Merriam, 2009). In my study, engaging in conversations with participants and relevant actors in the Agency program constituted the

informational foundation that allowed me to answer my research questions. This person-to-person encounter created a space that encouraged young people, notably, to share their background and experiences, express their fears and dreams for the future, and articulate, in their own words and understandings, the impact the methodology they have been exposed to has had in their lives, as well as the pathways for hope, growth and knowledge it has opened up.

There is a wide range of practices one can follow to conduct individual or group interviews, the three most common strategies being: 1) standardized/highly structured interviews that follow a predetermined protocol and order, 2) semi structured interviews that have no particular wording or order but, nonetheless, include a list of questions or issues to be explored, and, 3) unstructured/informal interviews, which are basically "friendly" conversations and exploratory in nature (Merriam, 2009, p. 89; Seidman, 2013; Olson, 2011). My interviews followed an open-ended/semi-structured format, with my only guideline being a list of themes to be discussed with participants, so there was no specific wording for the questions. This strategy gave me the flexibility to adapt and direct the conversation according to participants' engagement and disposition (for interview protocol see Appendix 4).

Although, in a sense, all qualitative studies draw from phenomenology (which is both a school of philosophy and a type of qualitative research), researchers may also choose to use some of its particular elements to conduct data collection through interviews (Merriam, 2009, p. 24). Given that phenomenologists are mainly concerned with people's lived experience and how they are transformed into consciousness, interviews based on this approach seek to identify the basic underlying structures of the meaning of an experience from the participants' point of view (Merriam, 2009; Seidman, 2013). In particular, I draw from Irving Seidman's (2013) construct of the in-depth phenomenologically based

interviewing strategy, which attempts to reconstruct the participants' experience within the topic under investigation focusing in four main themes: 1) the temporal and transitional nature of human experience, 2) participants' subjective understanding of their experiences, 3) the elements of lived experiences that constitute the phenomenon, and, 4) the meaning-making of experiences considering the larger context of participants' lives (Seidman, 2013, pp. 16, 18).

Primarily using open-ended questions, these themes are then used to structure a three-interview series that examine: the life history of participants (interviewees are asked to reconstruct their early experiences with family members, friends, in school and growing up in their neighbourhoods), the details of the experience in their lives (interviewees share concrete details of their present lived experiences with the phenomenon in question, placing them in context) and finally, a reflection on the meaning of their experience (interviewees are invited to think about the essential factors in their lives and how they have interacted to bring them to their present situation) (Seidman, 2013, p. 21-22). To fully accomplish the goal of each one of these thematics, Seidman recommends conducting three 90-minute interviews with each participant (Seidman, 2013, p. 25). However, given the size of my sample, I explored a modified approach to his structure and conducted interviews and focus groups under single interviews lasting between 90-150 minutes.

Not only did this approach to qualitative interviewing fit well with the scope of my proposed study, but I also experienced it to be a dependable and information-rich, and yet personal and humanizing way, for collecting information, particularly concerning personal and sensitive issues. I believe people are more willing to open their hearts and share their stories when the researcher has demonstrated a genuine interest in their lives and takes the time to get to know them and attentively hear what they have to say. It is also important to actively engage with interviewees as they delve into their experiences, acknowledging what

they are saying at all times (i.e. nodding, smiling), asking follow-up questions, and waiting patiently for an opportunity to touch on more delicate topics. Often times, before a researcher can reach the pinnacle of an interview and ask the questions that are most relevant to the study, he/she may have to listen to an hour of less relevant accounts - and that is a natural part of the process. If the goal of a phenomenological study is to analyze complex issues by exploring the concrete lived experiences of people and what those experiences mean to them, one should be, at the very least, fully willing to listen to people at their own pace and readiness.

Both as a researcher and an individual committed to social justice, I feel thankful for having had the opportunity to listen to the inspiring and rich life stories my interviewees confided in me. Also, I have learned tremendously from these young people - and that is one of the most valuable aspects of qualitative research. As Freire notes, the qualitative tradition goes beyond a "vertical process of information collection" and constitutes an educative act in itself, as it allows the subjects being studied and the researchers to reflect together on the experiences that are being shared and to learn from one another. He writes:

> Research, as an act of knowledge, has, from one side, the professional researchers as cognizant subjects, and from the other, the popular groups, and the concrete reality as the object to be unveiled. The more the popular groups conceive and practice the research, they deepen, as subjects, the act of self-knowledge and knowledge of the relationship with his/her reality, overcoming previous understandings in their most ingenuous aspects. This way, as I conduct research, I educate and I am educating myself with the popular groups…. In the sense hereby described, to research and to educate can be identified as permanent and dynamic movements (Freire, 1996, p. 36).

3.4. The research design

Having laid out my methodological orientation of choice, the case study approach and interview strategies, I will now introduce the research design and data sets guiding the analysis. Considering Agency's work with young people in Rio de Janeiro's favelas as base

to explore the opportunities and constraints of emancipatory educational practices in light of individual and community transformation, this case study comprises empirical findings on three main thematics aligning with the study's main research questions and corresponding sub-questions concerning the 1) the lifeworld of favela youth and program impact at the individual level, 2) entrepreneurship and youth-led community action, and 3) educational practice and program methodology vis-a-vis critical pedagogy (see figure 2 for a complete study scheme).

Complementary to a review of the literature on themes related to the youth experience in Rio de Janeiro favelas and beyond as well as the educational framework of critical pedagogy and processes of emancipation and empowerment, in order to develop the analysis which informed my findings and the discussion emerging from it, I relied on a combination of qualitative and quantitative data sets, including:

- Semi-structured **in-depth phenomenologically based** interviews and focus groups personally conducted by me with participant youth (17), members of Agency's coordinating team (5) and political actors/practitioners involved with the youth agenda in Rio de Janeiro and Brazil (4) (see figure 3 for a visualization of interviewees). Most interviews with participants and staff took place at Agency's headquarters in Lapa, Rio de Janeiro, in June 2016 and political players were interviewed via e-mail/Skype. While I selected some participants based on previously-established contact at the personal level, Agency gave me access to the bulk of interviewees based on their availability and willingness to take part in the study and considering a balance in terms of gender and territorial representation. They also helped me schedule all interviews and set up the necessary logistics.

- **Informal interviews and conversations** carried out with people of interest in the program and participant youth starting when I first came into contact with Agency

in 2012 and lasting until the final stages of the study in 2017. These conversations were particularly important early in the research process as they helped me explore the phenomenon I wanted to study and formulate questions for the interviews. They continued to be crucial throughout my analysis, giving me the opportunity to ask questions and clarify program elements and processes whenever the need arose;

- **Supplementary interviews** administered by Agency for a 2016 radio show entitled "I am Next," which sought to explore new ways of experiencing the city of Rio de Janeiro from the perspective of participant youth in the program (25) and staff members (6). Although I did not take part in setting up the protocol for these particular interviews, most of the thematics explored overlap with my own study, which is ultimately why I chose to use this data as supporting material in the analysis;

- **Survey findings** from an impact evaluation being carried out by the Program on Poverty and Governance (PovGov) from Stanford University in partnership with Agency. A total of 386 Agency youth were surveyed for the study at different times between September-December 2015 (pilot study) and September-December 2016 (impact evaluation). I take part in this project as a co-principle investigator alongside political science professor and PovGov director, Beatriz Magaloni, who was kind enough to allow me to use the raw survey data sets in this dissertation. With that being said, survey findings are mainly employed as descriptive statistics.

- Analysis of several **informational documents** including: a) a systematization of program methodology and instruments conducted by Sara Rizzo at Agency's request, b) program informational and promotional publications, notably, Agency's dictionary authored by Ana Paula Lisboa and Veruska Delfino, leading coordinators in the program, c) internal data on participant demographics and other basic information, d) program evaluation reports prepared for sponsors, as well as e)

online publicity materials and social media sources, including videos, Facebook pages, groups, etc.;

- Occasional **observations** over a five-year period (2012-2016) while conducting fieldwork in Rio de Janeiro as a research assistant for PovGov in addition to collecting data for my own study. Observations of program activities, staff training sessions and overall interaction with participant youth mainly took place at Agency's headquarters and during external events.

To investigate into the lifeworld of favela youth and their experiences as participants in the Agency program (**RQ1**), interview questions considered a) experiences growing up, b) educational background and aspirations, c) skills and resources advanced through the program, d) as well as Agency's role in their process of personal development. Qualitative data was complemented by a review of informational documents as well as survey findings on participants' demographics, self-reported skills development and program impact, mobility, program satisfaction, and general life conditions, such as violence exposure and overall well-being. To capture Agency's role in promoting community development in Rio's favelas (**RQ2**), interview questions looked into a) changes in participants' relationship with the community and the city after experiencing Agency in addition to b) projects created and the impact they had in the territory. Interviews were complemented by Agency internal data on projects developed inside the methodology, visual and social media sources, as well as survey findings on community life.

Finally, to explore the lessons this particular case study can provide us with as to the use of emancipatory educational practices in youth education within marginalized communities (**RQ3**), interview questions examined a) a possible connection between Agency's educational instruments and critical pedagogy, as well as b) program relevance and limitations in implementation and sustainability given the context the program in

inserted in. This section draw particularly from the views and experiences of Agency's coordinating team as well as political players and practitioners specialized in the youth agenda. Interview data was complemented by informational and promotional publications, the systematization of program methodology and instruments, as well as survey findings on participants' work life and income, community violence, and public security perceptions.

In building the analytical framework to research all themes mentioned above and develop the analysis, observations and informal interviews were used in combination with qualitative findings, informational document analysis and survey data to substantiate the findings (triangulation). Figures displaying the particular data sets and nodes used to answers all three research questions, and how they connect to findings categories and sub-categories, are presented at the beginning of each findings chapter.

Figure 2. Study scheme. Study research questions, data streams, and overall scheme of qualitative and quantitative data sources supporting findings.

Opportunities and constraints of applying elements of emancipatory education in youth provisions as an instrument to promote individual and community transformation in marginalized communities

How do youth make sense of their lived experiences as favela residents and participants in the Agency program?

What is Agency's role in promoting community development in Rio's favelas?

What lessons can Agency teach us about applying the theory of critical pedagogy in youth education practice within marginalized communities?

The lived experiences of favela youth and outcomes at the individual level

Project creation and community impact

Educational practice and program methodology vis-a-vis critical pedagogy

Qualitative thematical folders
(Total of 57 interviews)

1. Background and childhood (13 nodes)
2. Educational experiences: past and present (12 nodes)
3. Views on the Pacification and public security (6 nodes)
4. Agency instruments (11 nodes)
5. Agency proposals (10 nodes)
6. Projects created through Agency (24 nodes)
7. Skills and abilities (8 nodes)
8. Views and experiences: Agency coordinating team (12 nodes)
9. Community life and mobility (5 nodes)
10. Youth development (12 nodes)
11. Youth problematics (10 nodes)

Survey findings
Population of 386 Agency participants (courtesy of PovGov, Stanford University, 2015-16)

Informational documents
Methodology and instruments systematization
Informational and promotional publications
Internal data on participants and projects
Evaluation reports (sponsors)
Online publicity materials (visual) and social media sources

Other
Observations and a series of informal conversations over a five-year period (2012-2016)

Exploring the lifeworld of favela youth and experiences in the program
Tools for youth empowerment

Young people as agents of social change
Tools for youth-led community transformation

Critical pedagogy as a platform of possibility
Tools for a youth-centered emancipatory education

Pathways of hope for the favela youth

Figure 3. Interviewees. Visualization of interviewees by primary sources (orange) and secondary sources (yellow).

3.5. Analysis strategies

The interviews (including semi-structured, informal and supplementary), focus groups and observations conducted for this study translated to hours of recordings and over 350 pages of raw data in Portuguese, which is my native language. Thanks to a dissertation fellowship from UCLA I was able to hire a local researcher in Rio de Janeiro who worked for Agency and knows the project intimately to transcribe all interviews in their original language on my behalf (Sara Rizzo), allowing me to dedicate more time to data analysis. What follows is a discussion of how the work developed.

Seeking to understand a particular phenomenon, researchers engage in qualitative analysis to uncover the relationship between categories and themes emerging from the data that are responsive to the research questions; a laborious and detail-oriented process that seeks to bring order, structure and meaning to dozens of pages of unprocessed information (Hilal and Alabri, 2013). As the 'critical link' between data collection and their explanation of meaning, coding involves seeing and interpreting what has been said, written or done, requiring researchers to reflect on evolving categories, consolidate and reduce data, and decide on what is important to follow up on (Bazeley, 2013; Merrian, 2009; Saldaña, 2013).

As Merriam notes, this process must involve the constant move between concrete pieces of data and abstract concepts, inductive and reductive reasoning, description and interpretation. The meanings, understandings and insights that derive from this exhausting exercise comprise the study findings (Merriam, 2009, p. 176). The coding process, so as the thematic and narrative analysis of all qualitative data sets, was carried out on NVivo. Having previously worked in a project containing substantial qualitative data, I chose this software due to its user-friendly design, effective organizing features, and abundance of options to see and display data. Below is a snapshot of my NVivo screen at the final stage of the analysis and an example of a feature used to visualize nodes by sources and references:

Figure 4. NVivo snapshot. NVivo screen at the final stage of the analysis.
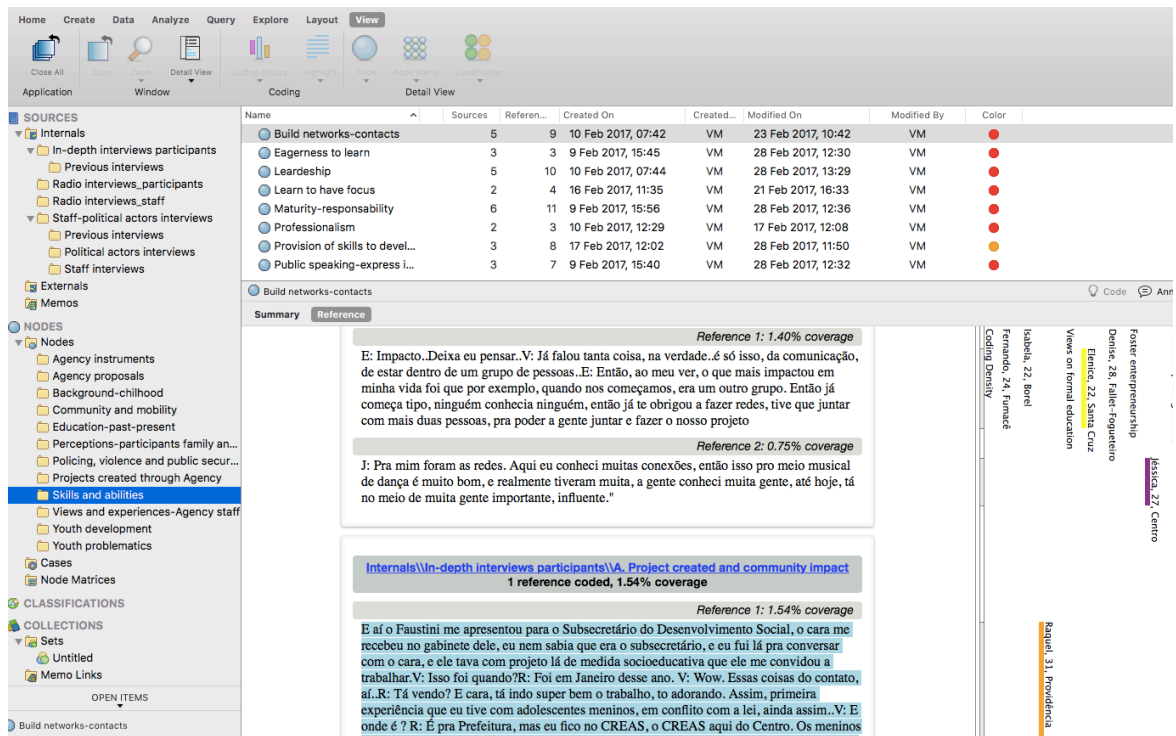
Figure 5. Nodes visualization. Example of NVivo's feature "explore diagram" used to visualize nodes generated during first cycle coding, references and data sets.
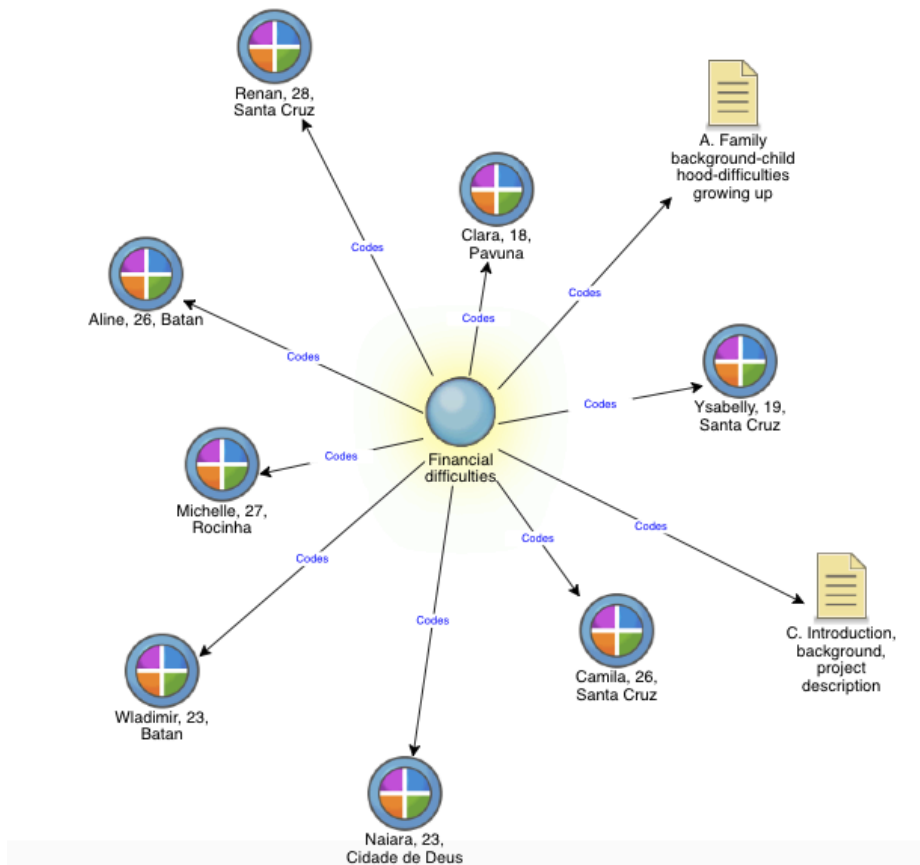
The process of constructing categories for data analysis usually begins with 'open or initial coding' (Level 1), a strategy that requires researchers to examine the text closely at the initial phases of the coding process so as to break down the data, comparing them for similarities and differences (Bazeley, 2013; Saldaña, 2013). It is an opportunity to reflect deeply on the contents and nuances of the data and begin the process of taking ownership of it (Saldaña, 2013, pp, 100). Open coding then leads to 'focused coding' (Level 2), which is used to create categories and sub-categories; these are main themes derived from the data from which the analysis draws upon, also known as a process of "shaping the data." From there, categories are connected to study themes and concepts for more general and abstract constructs ('thematic coding' or Level 3 coding), which finally progresses towards the theoretical grounds of the analysis (Saldanã, 2013, p. 58).

In sum, a code is a "researcher-generated construct" that attributes interpreted meaning to text-based data, preparing it for pattern detection, categorization, theory building and other analytical processes (Saldaña, 2013, p. 4). When generating codes, there are dozens of types of strategies researchers can choose from, each one focusing on a specific aspect of the data. For example, in first cycle coding, elemental methods such as 'descriptive coding' can be used to summarize the main topic of the interview excerpt, while in 'in vivo coding,' words or phrases derived directly from the interviewee's speech are used to create codes[36] (Saldanã, 2013). When I first organized my transcribed interviews and focus groups scripts, I used the research questions themselves to group the data first into a master excel codebook then into different NVivo folders. The exploratory segment of the process in which emergent frameworks began to be defined took place alongside the open coding

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[36] In The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers (2013) Johnny Saldaña identifies 25 coding strategies that can be used during first cycle coding according to different methods (grammatical, elemental, affective, literary and language, exploratory and procedural methods) in addition to five methods for second cycle coding (focused, theoretical, etc.) (Saldaña, 2013). For more on coding strategies, see Saldaña 2013 and Bazeley, 2013.

process, naturally leading to a critical reading of the data and an initial understanding of patterns for the future analysis, similar to putting pieces of a puzzle together.

My coding strategy best fits the category of a "splitter" coder. That is, when reading passages from interviews I tend to split bits of data into "codebase moments" in a detailed fashion, developing a more in-depth analysis of the social actions represented in the data from the start of the coding process and strengthening it as I go (Saldaña, 2013). I do not necessarily code line-by-line, but I do make an effort to take a close look at each passage in order to carefully unpack and systematize the meaning of participant's statements, including those that might not be so apparent and require a closer look in order to "decipher" (Saldaña, 2013). Experienced qualitative professionals such as Kathy Charmaz, a sociologist and grounded theory expert, believe that such coding strategy promotes a more credible analysis as it reduces the chances researchers will input their own individual ideas and feelings about the study into the data (Charmaz, 2008). As a result of this time-consuming process, during first cycle coding, I generated over 200 nodes from the interviews and focus groups, organizing them into several tentative thematic folders.

Seeking to further crystalize my analytical work, in the second cycle coding, I applied a mix of two different strategies to re-code part of my data and condense some of the nodes into a more compact set of analysis, them being pattern and focused coding. Pattern codes are explanatory or inferential codes that "identify an emerging theme, configuration or explanation," while focused coding targets the most frequent or significant codes to "develop the most salient categories," requiring researchers to make decisions about what initial codes make the most sense analytically (Saldaña, 2013, p. 210-213). Both methods are useful in generating major categories, constructs and themes from the data. During this process, I recoded and reorganized the over 200 nodes originally created into 123 nodes spread through 11 final thematical folders (for a code matrix including a description of thematical

folders, a list of all nodes and their frequency, see appendix 2).

These thematical folders were eventually synthesised into 8 major categories and 16 sub-categories, creating a framework of meaning which became the basis for the results analysis and write up. Employing a narrative approach, the stories and accounts collected through the interviews were presented throughout the study in descriptive, narrative form mainly through quoted words and phrases from participants. The document is an exhaustive construction and description of the phenomena being studied derived from the voices, feelings, experiences and meaning-making of favela youth. The figure below provides a visual mapping of the categories and sub-categories in the study emerging from the main research question thematics and data analysis:

Figure 6. Visual mapping of study categories and sub-categories:

Research questions thematics	Categories	Sub-categories
The lifeworld of favela youth and program outcome at the individual level	"Difficulties give you courage:" Rising above adversity growing up in Rio de Janeiro's favelas	▪ Navigating household instability ▪ Navigating violence
	"It is a sort of stairway; step by step we will get there:" Keeping the dream of education alive	▪ Barriers along the educational pipeline ▪ Paving the way to university
	"You know you are part of a network that is there to help you:" Skills for growth and resources to help navigate the future	▪ A platform for advancing technical and life skills ▪ Building networks for professional advancement
	"Agency helped shape me:" Expanding personal development and worldview	▪ Strengthening identity and deconstructing dominant discourses ▪ Experimenting with a new world of possibilities
Project creation and community impact	"If I want to see change take place I need to become agent of this change:" Engaging, embracing, and empowering communities	▪ Recognizing the community as a place of potency ▪ Investing in local culture and breaking social barriers
	"With one small action you can change a person's life:" Fostering social entrepreneurship to drive community change	▪ Creating solutions and projects to address favela challenges ▪ Impacting lives and building stronger communities
Program methodology vis-à-vis critical pedagogy and lesson in educational practice	"They put you to do things instead of just teaching:" Bridging theory and practice in youth education	▪ An overview of Agency's educational instruments ▪ Identifying connections between critical pedagogy and the Agency program
	"Agency turned everything I knew about youth programs upside down:" A look into program strengths and challenges	▪ Engaging educators for social responsibility ▪ Social, political and operational constraints

As for the remainder of qualitative data sets gathered for the study (observations, informal interviews), they were mainly used as supporting documentation, being assembled with other data sets to form a case study database (they were included in NVivo as sources, but the analysis took place in Word). For instance, the semi-systematic field notes of observations produced over the years were used in combination with interviews and document analysis to substantiate the findings (triangulation), but did not lead the analysis. That is the same for the supplementing quantitative data, which complemented the prevailing qualitative approach to help create a meaningful narrative in line with the purpose of the investigation (Starman, 2013). On this note, for the descriptive statistics analysis, relying on PovGov's Agency database, I combined all raw survey data relevant to my research into an Excel file, which was then formatted and analyzed in the statistical analysis software SPSS. Finally, all the writing for this dissertation was carried out using Scrivener, a practical content-generation tool that help writers structure and compose long documents.

3.6. The 'Agency for Youth Networks' Program

Introducing an innovative methodology that incorporate elements of social entrepreneurship and empowerment, Agency is a non-formal educational program that position young people from favelas and peripheries of Rio de Janeiro as protagonists in the process of creating projects with a social impact, paving the way for advancing territorial transformation, strengthening citizenship and expanding autonomy. Guided by a capacity-building educational methodology carried out in the course of three to five months (groups who are not awarded the funds to implement their projects leave the program in an earlier phase), Agency participants are encouraged to formulate, develop, present and implement business ideas that are connected to the realities of their communities, which are based on their own language and understanding of the human and cultural capital present in those spaces. During this process, in addition to being provided with skills for engagement useful

inside and outside the favela, youth are given tools to expand their "place for speech" and exercise their right to the city.

Although it dialogues with these dynamics, Agency is not a platform that seeks to promote formal educational credentials and technical competencies that are attractive in the job market. Rather, their main goal is to engage, empower and equip the favela youth so they can challenge the unequal social dynamics of the city and invent new platforms for community and personal advancement. The struggle consists in reversing the paradigm associated to these communities as places of need and disorder, by rethinking and presenting them as territories brimming with potential for incubating new solutions and ideas. Ultimately, Agency believes the peripheral youth to be essential to any process of urban transformation. Working with incentives for autonomy and experimentation, the methodology rejects "pre-determined menus" generally adopted by social and educational provisions in favelas, as if dwellers were "empty individuals" expected to simply receive and retain knowledge without questions. In complete contrast to this approach, Agency recognizes young people as creative subjects and not as mere passive objects of social action.

In order to encourage and enable young people to take part in the program, Agency offer participants a daily allowance for transportation and food and a monthly stipend of R$100 ($31), which is meant to symbolize a sort of financial autonomy to these individuals. In addition to taking part in weekly meetings - the number of times varying depending on the needs of each project and group - participants come together every Saturday in the so-called "stimulus cycle," which is when the theoretical and practical elements that make up the methodology are introduced (information on the various instruments and elements used in the methodology during and after the stimulus cycle are introduced in chapter 6 and guide the analysis between educational practice and critical pedagogy).

Performing different functions, this work is carried out by a team of coordinators,

mediators, local producers, tutors, and university students who support and orient participants throughout the process and are strongly committed to helping them grow and succeed in the program. Most of these young professionals are residents of Rio favelas and peripheries themselves and have a deep knowledge of participants' culture, struggles and realities, allowing them to establish a genuine connection with more ease. According to Agency, this relationship is characterized by affection, but also attention, clarity and objectivity (Rizzo, 2017).

Once the projects have been put together conceptually and logistically, participants present them to a panel of judges led by important cultural, political and civil society actors of the city and compete for a R$10,000 ($3,123) award that enable its realization, transforming their desire into reality. Projects created inside the methodology are multifaceted, covering a wide range of issues and populations, from arts and sports initiatives focused on children, to leisure programs to the elderly, and culture, education, and job training actions directed at youth and adults (some of these projects are described in depth in chapter 5; for further examples of projects created though Agency see figure 10, in which they are listed by category).

Agency participants are as diverse as the projects they create. From the evangelical to the "funkeiro" (one who is passionate about Funk music), from the social butterfly to the introvert, from the university student to the high school dropout and the young apprentice to the street vendor, the goal is to create a space for young people to exchange knowledge and celebrate their similarities, but also learn how to respect their differences. For this reason, when mobilizing and selecting participants for the program, Agency strives to form balanced cohorts that represent the totality of the diversity unique to peripheral territories. That is, while they focus on selecting black young people from impoverished communities who find themselves in situation of social vulnerability (i.e. experiences or has experienced

direct violence, is involved in risky behaviour or has a family member who is, is not in school or dropout frequently, is older than 18 and works informally or does not work at all, live in a household experiencing financial difficulties), they also prioritize youth who already present a strong wish to change their communities and have an understanding of entrepreneurship. To them, to appreciate the differences in territory, gender, viewpoint, education, conduct and behaviour, is to rupture with the idea that favelas and peripheries are single blocks, giving voice to the plurality of individualities that exist within these spaces.

When Agency was first established in 2011, they main intention was to attend young people residing in favelas impacted by the Pacification security policy. However, from the 2016 cycle onwards, the program shifted its focus to communities of Santa Cruz in Rio's West zone, where some of the neighbourhoods with the lowest Human Development Index of the city are located. Also in 2016, Agency tested a shorter methodology ranging from two and four months, which was meant to keep the program running and working with as many young people as possible despite financial and logistical shortages they experienced at that time. Agency was awarded an inaugural financial package from Petrobrás, Brazil's semi-public oil giant, subsequently receiving funding from Rio de Janeiro's City Government and the Municipal Secretary of Culture.

Other partners include SEBRAE, Brazil's largest supporter of micro and small businesses, the "Culture Points" program from the Ministry of Culture, which intends to support and bring together entities that develop cultural actions throughout the country, as well as The People's Palace Projects, an independent arts charity that advance the practice and understanding of arts for social justice and is housed in Queen Mary, University of London. Agency recently secured a three-year partnership with the Ford Foundation and is now carrying through its seventh cycle inspired by the slogan "Every Youth is Rio." The new cycle - an adapted version of the original methodology, which should resume in 2018 -

focuses on developing leadership and political networks through a series of home events and workshops bringing together over 800 young people from various communities throughout the city to discuss and develop proposals for action in their territories.

Amongst its many recognitions, in 2013, the program was one of the winners of the Urban Age Award promoted by the Deutsche Bank. In its six years of existence, and with investments of over R$ 2,5 mil (800,00 USD), Agency has mobilized around 2,500 potential participants and directly engaged more than 1,000 young people between the ages of 15 and 29 residing in over 32 different favelas and peripheries of Rio de Janeiro. Up to 2016, among the 180 original project proposals developed inside the methodology, 93 were funded, 22 were formalized as MEI (individual micro-entrepreneur), and one became its very own NGO. The Agency program has also crossed borders, inspiring the creation of an entrepreneurship program for young people in the cities of London and Manchester in the UK, promoted since 2013 by the Battersea Art Center and Contact Theatre in collaboration with the People's Palace Projects. The project recently won a National lottery funding of over £800,000 to go national and greatly expand its reach over the next three years.

3.7. Study population

A widely used method to select research participants within the qualitative tradition, non-probabilistic sampling allows researchers to solve qualitative problems related to a particular phenomenon, including "discovering what occurs, the implications of what occurs, and the relationship linking occurrences" (Honigmann, 1982, as cited in Merriam, 2009). The goal, therefore, in not to answer quantitative questions such as 'how much' and 'how often' like in probability sampling, which is focused on generalizing study results from the sample to the population from which it was drawn (Merriam, 2009, p. *77*). Through purposeful sampling, the most common form of nonprobability sampling (Chein, 1981), researchers can select individuals who have an in-depth knowledge of the phenomenon

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under study by virtue of their professional role, expertise or experience with it (Pacho, 2015, p. 46). In order to discover, understand and gain insight into a case, a sample from which the most can be learned must be selected (Merriam, 2009, p. *77*).

As mentioned earlier, Agency helped me select most of the young interviewees, with the only criteria being that they needed to be former Agency participants - although Agency tried to create a gender and territorial balance. This 'typical sample' reflects the "average person, situation, or interest of the phenomenon of interest" (Merriam, 2009, p, *78*). As for members of the program's coordinating team and political players/practitioners, I mainly followed a 'snowball' sampling strategy, meaning that key participants with whom I had established a relationship helped me get in touch with other people of interest for the study, either by providing me with their contact information or personally introducing me to them.

To recap, the total number of participants who informed this study was *57*, distributed as follows: *17* Agency participants, *5* staff members, and *4* political players/practitioners who took part in interviews and focus groups conducted by me, as well as 25 participants and *6* members of the program coordinating team, respectively, who took part in the radio interviews administered by Agency. Their views and perceptions provided baseline data and insights that allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the Agency program and participant experience. Excluding external actors, 35 of the 53 interviewees are female and the medium age is 24.41 (for a complete list of individual participants and additional information, please see appendix 1).

Table 1. Interviewees basic information:

Male	Female	Medium age
18	35	24.41

As noted earlier, a hallmark of case studies is that it includes multiple data sources, mainly qualitative in nature but also quantitative, which help strength data credibility

(Baxter and Jack, 2008; Starman, 2013). In addition to conducting interviews and relying on different qualitative sources of data, in attempts to reach a holistic understanding of the phenomenon being studied, I also integrated survey data to my analysis. The information below, which is first summarized then presented in tables format, comprises the demographic profile of 386 youth who participated directly in Agency in the 2015 (217), 2016 (117) and earlier cycles (52). Please note that statistics related to education, employment and income, amongst other relevant information, will be introduced later in the dissertation along with discussions developed in the findings chapters.

Summary of the sociodemographic profile of Agency participants:

- Agency has a larger share of women taking part in the program compared to men: 59% against 41%, respectively.

- The medium age of participants is 19, while the age group with most representation in the program is 14-16-year-olds (32%) followed by 16-18-year-olds (27%). Although the age range required for participation is 15-29, aligned with their goal to target young favela residents, 76% of individuals benefited by Agency are 21 or less;

- Only 12% of survey respondents classify themselves as white, while the majority are either black (47%) or 'pardo' (38%), which refers to mixed race;

- Youth residing in different communities of Santa Cruz have a larger representation in the program (38%), followed by Batan/Fumacê and City of God with 12% and 10%, respectively. Agency brings together young people from over 32 different communities spread throughout Rio's North, Central and West zones.

- The greatest majority of respondents declared to be single (91%) and 75% live with parents or relatives (26% live with their mothers). Only 5% are married and the same share of participants live alone or with friends. In addition, 19% live in households with one single room that serves as a bedroom and 40% share their homes with 5 or

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more people (mean of persons per room is 2.32);

- As for religious practices, 58% of participant youth reported that they attend church at least once a week (18% affirmed they go to church every day) and only 17% rarely or never go to mass or religious meetings. Evangelicals are the most representative group (40%), followed by those who are not religious, but believe in God (33%) and Catholics (16%). Despite the large proportion of blacks and pardos amongst participants (85%), only 5% indicated to follow religions of African roots, such as Umbanda and Candomblé;

- Although living in low-income communities, access to a variety of domestic amenities and personal items is widespread. Close to all survey takers have a color TV, stove and refrigerator in their homes (97%, 97% and 96%, respectively); still, only 43% have air conditioning. Notebooks remain a luxury item (only 22% reported having one), but 74% of participants own a smart phone, which help explain their strong presence in social media platforms such as Facebook (96%) and Instagram (86%).

Table 2. Participants' sex:

Male	Female
59%	41%

Table 3. Participants' age range:

Age groups	%
14-16	32%
16-18	27%
19-21	17%
22-29	22%
30 and older	2%

Table 4. Participants' reported race or color:

Race or color	%
Black	47%
Pardo (mixed race)	38%
White	12%
Yellow	2%
Other	1%

Table 5. Percentage of participants per community:

Community	%
Santa Cruz (João XXIII, Cezarão, Guandú, Veridiana, etc.)	38%
Batan/Fumacê	12%
Cidade de Deus	10%
Pavuna	9%
Rocinha	4%
Other	27%

Table 6. Marital status:

Marital status	%
Single	91%
Married	5%
In a domestic partnership	4%

Table 7. Participants' living situation:

Living situation	%
Live with both parents	40%
Live with mother, only	26%
Live with father, only	3%
Live with other relatives or partner	20%
Live with grandparents	6%
Live alone or with friends	5%

Table 8. Participant's religion:

Religion	%
Catholic	16%
Evangelical	40%
No religion, but believe in God	33%
No religion and do not believe in God	2%
Umbanda/Candomblé	5%
Other	4%

Table 9. Church attendance frequency:

Attendance frequency	%
Daily	18%
At least once a week	40%
At least once a month	13%
Once every six months or once a year	12%
Rarely or never	17%

Table 10. Percentage of participants who live in homes containing the following amenities:

Amenities	%
Color TV	97%
Stove	97%
Refrigerator	96%
Washing machine	86%
Electric shower	75%
Cable TV	66%
Microwave	65%
Home computer connected to the internet	63%
Air conditioner	43%

Table 11. Percentage of participants who own the following personal items:

Personal items	%
Smartphone	74%
Regular cell phone	22%
Notebook	25%
A car	8%
A motorcycle	3%

Table 12. Social media presence:

Social media platforms	%
Facebook	96%
WhatsApp	86%
Instagram	59%
Twitter	43%
LinkedIn	5%

3.8. Validity, reliability, and ethical considerations

In qualitative research, in order to ensure validity (the extent to which findings are credible) and reliability (the extent to which findings are consistent), the investigation must be conducted rigorously and systematically (Merriam, 2009). The quality and significance of research studies to practice and policy in any given field is contingent on researchers being able to present insights and conclusions in such a way that ring true to readers, demonstrating that there is a sound basis for their inferences about the phenomenon under investigation (Bazeley, 2013; Merrian, 2009). Given that qualitative researchers - or any other researcher involved in knowledge production, for that matter - cannot capture an objective truth (they assume the holistic, multidimensional and ever-changing nature of

reality), validity becomes a goal rather than a product, something that cannot be proven nor taken for granted, and that needs to be assessed in relation to the research objectives and circumstances (Merriam, 2009, p. 214).

Strategies for achieving trustworthiness, confirmability, dependability and transferability in qualitative research - or the active process of increasing the credibility of findings - involves consideration of a series of elements which are used to evaluate the rigor and assess quality in the appropriate use of data and methods in the study, as well as in the conclusions draw from such processes (Baxter and Jack, 2008; Bazeley, 2013, p. 402-403). Pat Bazeley (2013) identifies questions to consider related to 1) the quality of data: sampling choices, researcher influence of the situation being investigated, description of the study context, relevance of data to answer research questions; 2) the quality of process: implementation of procedures designed, reasons behind methods choice, analytical schemes for turning the data into conclusion; 3) the quality of product: the significance of findings given the study purpose, clear links between data and arguments, detailed report of categories and themes using contextualized quotes to illustrate results, evidence of critical thinking throughout the research, clearly expressed and structured findings; and finally, 4) the quality of outcome: research contribution to existing or new knowledge, practice or policy (Bazeley, 2013, p. 403-404).

Considering these points and drawing from additional literature (Baxter and Jack, 2008; Merriam, 2008; Starman, 2013), below, I expand on some of the strategies I used in my study in efforts to increase data and analysis credibility:

- Pilot interviews were carried out two years before I established my research questions and overall study framework;
- Adequate time was dedicated to familiarizing myself with the program, or the case, as an outside observer (my initial exposure to Agency was in 2012); as for the sample

within the case, I worked with qualitative and quantitative data comprising almost 40% of the total number of program participants from all cycles;

- Within non-populistic purposeful sampling, "typical sampling" was used to select interviewees whose profile is that of a typical participant in the program; "snowball, chain, or network sampling" with key interviewees was also applied at the beginning of the study to maximize and strengthen the research sample;

- Qualitative findings were triangulated (or crystalized) with additional sources of data such as observations, informational documents, and notably, survey findings;

- Although the main data interpretation was not shared with participants, I conducted member checking in instances when I was unsure of the meaning of the given information or wanted to request more details;

- Following a "splitting coding" strategy, I analyzed qualitative data in-depth and explored different interpretation patterns, generating over 200 nodes in the first coding cycle;

- A detailed analysis of how the coding process took place is provided along with a complete list of nodes and theoretical folders generated;

- Visual schemes of all data sets (including specific qualitative nodes) used to create larger thematical frameworks in response to each research question are presented along with findings;

- In addition to incorporating all 57 interviews into the coding process, I strived to provide a maximum variation in the number of participants whose voices were directly highlighted through quotes and/or narratives throughout the document (a total of 47);

- Rich "thick" descriptions containing contextual information relevant to the phenomenon in question and the study population were provided not only in the

findings chapters, as a reflection of the data, but also in the background chapter.

Furthermore, it is fundamental to address one's position and reflexivity in the research process. Being that qualitative methods allow investigators to enjoy a fair share of intellectual and interpretive freedom (analytical induction), acting as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, issues of bias and potential distortion of research outcomes must be acknowledged and balanced at all times during the research process. Particular worldviews, assumptions and theoretical orientations introduced by the researcher have an impact on the investigation. That is, "all information is filtered through the researcher's eyes and ears and influenced by his/her knowledge, experiences and background" (Lichtman, 2009, p. 21). In addition, the relationships that are formed between researchers and subjects as a natural result of the interactive nature of the investigation process may also impact impartiality. Nonetheless, issues of bias are not exclusive of qualitative research, as no research activity, despite its methodological orientation, is completely devoid of it.

However objectively a researcher attempts to approach a study, he/she is guided by some kind of impulse or curiosity that led them to investigate the phenomenon in the first place, which in turn shape their preconceived notions and expectations they have for the scientific inquiry (Babbie, 1979; Jones, 2001; Wolcott, 1995). That is, data instruments, whether qualitative of quantitative, reflect the interests and orientation of those creating them, so does the entry-level theorizing and propositions that become the basis for the study (Wolcott, 1995). Therefore, the question of whether one needs to be "neutral" in order to be "objective," some authors argue, is inappropriate when assessing objectivity in research (Babbie, 1979; Hammersley, 1999; Wolcott, 1994). According to Harry Walcott (1995), bias - which should not be confused with prejudice, resulting from irrational and out of context judgments - can in fact stimulate inquiry without interfering with a systematic and objective process of investigation (Wolcott, 1995; p. 186). All in all, what is important is to make bias

explicit, rather than trying to reach total objectivity.

The validity and reliability of qualitative research is also contingent on researchers conducting the study in an ethical manner, which can be guided by the investigator's technical abilities, but also - and perhaps to a greater extent - their own principles (Merriam, 2009). In addition to level of training, experience, track record and status - requirements that can be particularly hard for novice researchers to meet - credibility also involves "intellectual rigor, professional integrity, and methodological competence," which are qualities that all involved in research must strive to build and stand by (Merriam, 2009, p. 228). Following guidelines and codes of ethics in research, such as obtaining informed consent, guaranteeing participants' right to privacy and to withdraw from the study, minimizing risks of harming subjects, and avoiding the use of deceptive practices, are all essential principles to conducting ethical research. Although helpful in terms of providing a direction on the kind of issues that need to be considered, the actual adherence of these guidelines depends on the researcher's own sensitivities and values, Merriam notes (Merriam, 2009, p. 230).

Recognizing and clarifying one's positionality is also an important aspect of improving the trustworthiness of a study. The fact that I had a humble upbringing in the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro and have taken part in action-oriented research in some of the city's favelas, building personal relationships with individuals and getting a more intimate understanding of their plight, makes it so I engage with these topics from a place of much respect and sensitivity, impacting how I approach the research and the population it represents. My passion for social justice education and my theoretical orientation of choice are also significant elements which have helped shape my analysis and findings.

This reasoning concerning my own biases and subjectivity, to the extent I can identify them, is part of a reflexive approach that recognizes the human dimension in research

(Jones, 2001). Also, through reflexivity exercised from a variety of angles (introspectively or through mutual collaboration, for instance), researchers can situate themselves within the larger scope of the study and explore their personal reactions to it given the interplay of action and reflection, including evaluating asymmetrical power relations in their interactions with interviewees, their role in the co-construction of knowledge, and their accounts of people's assumptions, conventions and practices (Finlay, 2002; Jones, 2001). In summary, awareness of pre-determined regulations is no certification to producing ethically sound and reliable work. Researchers can, however, make every effort to become conscious of the various ethical issues that pervade the research process and consider their own theoretical and epistemological orientations vis-a-vis these concerns (Merriam, 2009, p. 235).

Conclusions

This chapter reviews the methodological approach and data analysis techniques employed in the study, in addition to giving a closer look into participants and the case under analysis. With the understanding that reality is a socially constructed phenomenon with multiple meanings that cannot be generalized or "boxed," the qualitative tradition drawing from interpretivist/constructivist approaches allow researchers to explore how people perceive and construct their environments, how they interpret their experiences, and the meaning-making that ensues from this exercise.

A critical qualitative perspective - from which I also draw from in this study - becomes a tool for linking people's interpretation of their world with inquiry that incorporates larger questions of social justice, oppression, and empowerment. The case study - a data-diverse method of qualitative research commonly used in the field of education - involves the in-depth description and analysis of a single bounded entity or unit that cannot be removed from its context, providing an ideal lens from which to explore a program targeting young people sharing similar characteristics and social conditions.

At the heart of qualitative research lies data collection practices that require researchers to engage in person-to-person encounters with participants guided by respect and a genuine interest in learning about their backgrounds, experiences, hopes and fears. Drawing from in-depth phenomenology based interview strategies, in this study, I use mainly semi-structured interviews to investigate into the life history of participants, the details of the history in their lives, and their reflection on the meaning of their experiences, learning tremendously from their rich accounts of perseverance and strength.

Aligned with the overarching aim of exploring the opportunities and constraints of applying elements of emancipatory education as a tool to promote individual and community transformation in light of Agency's work with favela youth, the study revolves around three main research thematics, them being, 1) the lifeworld of favela youth and program impact at the individual level, 2) project creation and program impact at the community level, and, finally, 3) educational practice vis-a-vis critical pedagogy. In order to tackle these larger questions, beyond semi-structured in-depth interviews, I incorporate survey findings and additional qualitative data sets, including informal and supplementary interviews, informational documents, and observations.

As for data management and analysis, the qualitative software NVivo served as the foundation for all coding - the critical link between data and their explanation of meaning - and reflection of ideas, patterns, and themes. Applying initial, pattern, and focused coding strategies, the over 200 nodes generated at the first level of the coding process were recoded, and then compiled into more condensed sub-categories and categories, from which the analysis of findings is built. Such detailed description of the phenomenon under study help shed light on the voices, feelings, experiences, and meaning-making of favela youth in their essence.

This chapter also provides relevant information on my case study of choice. In short,

Agency is an action-oriented program that supports the peripheral youth in expanding skills, frames of reference, tools and resources to create and implement projects of social impact, grounded in their experiences and social history, that are significant to their communities. The premise is that favelas are territories brimming with unique solutions to social challenges, and that any process of urban development that is truly concerned with transformation must approach young people as creative subjects rather than objects of social action. Since 2011, the program has engaged (either directly or indirectly) over 2,500 young people from dozens of favelas and peripheries of Rio, incubating 180 original projects covering a wide range of categories and activities.

As for the study population, with the goal of gaining insight into the Agency program and assessing its impact, purposeful nonprobability sampling and snowballing strategies were applied to select individuals who displayed in-depth knowledge of the phenomenon by direct involvement in it. The study incorporates 26 primary interviews in addition to 31 supporting interviews and survey findings on over 380 former Agency participants, whose demographic profile is also laid out in this chapter.

The presentation of methodological approaches concludes with a discussion about issues of validity, reliability and ethics, highlighting the importance of striving to conduct qualitative research with a focus on intellectual rigor, methodological systematization, and professional integrity. Considering questions related to quality of data, process, product and outcome, I make use of several strategies to increase credibility of the study analysis and findings, also engaging in a self-reflection on how my standpoint helped shaped my interpretation and investigation of the phenomenon in question.

CHAPTER 4

Exploring the Lifeworld of Favela Youth and Experiences in the Program

Introduction

Following a review of the literature and the introduction of relevant background information on the study, the theoretical lens of choice and guiding methodological orientations, I now begin to delve into the findings emerging from the analysis. This chapter explores the lifeworld of young favela residents, the population of interest in this research, and their experiences as participants in the Agency methodology, setting the contextual foundation for the entire investigation.

The analytical categories covered are meant to give a glimpse of the many hopes, fears, and dreams young people carry with them, the conditions surrounding their lives, and the potential of Agency for serving as a platform for leading transformative change at the individual level. The discussion starts with an analysis of participants' experiences growing up (4.1), which revolve around the central issues of household instability (4.1.1) and violence (4.1.2), following is an assessment of their educational background and aspirations (4.2), along with barriers moving up the educational pipeline (4.2.1) and accessing university (4.2.2).

The last two segments of the chapter explore the impact of the Agency program on participants' lives, first from a perspective of increased skills and resources (4.3) related to technical and life skills (4.3.1) as well as networks for professional growth (4.3.2); and finally, considering their role in strengthening personal development (4.4), with a focus on questions of identity, self-reflection and a critical approach to the world (4.4.1) and the opening of opportunities for experimentation (4.4.2). Combined, these contextual and process thematics allow us to investigate into the "tools for youth empowerment" advanced

by the Agency methodology, drawing from participants' own understanding and perceptions of how relevant changes materialized in their lives.

The figure below summarizes the data sets used to guide the analysis, shape the narrative, and establish the findings presented in this chapter

Figure 7. Data matrix RQ1. Categories and sub-categories emerging from data sources used to address research question thematics.

THEME 1

Experiences growing up

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CATEGORY

Rising above adversity growing up in Rio's favelas

SUB-CATEGORIES AND DATA

Navigating household instability

- Qualitative nodes
  - Dysfunctional family structures
  - Experienced financial difficulties
  - Parents worked long hours
  - Raised by single mom or grandparents
  - Took up responsibility from an early age
- Survey findings

Navigating violence

- Qualitative nodes
  - Community violence/could not play on the street
  - Experienced physical violence at home
  - Had a family member killed
  - Had a good childhood
  - Lost mother or father
  - Suffered from psychological issues
- Survey findings

THEME 2

Educational background and aspirations

↓

CATEGORY

Keeping the dream of education alive

SUB-CATEGORIES AND DATA

Barriers along the educational pipeline

- Qualitative nodes
  - Was just a regular student
  - Did well in school/got good grades
  - Made trouble in school
  - Suffered bullying/racial discrimination
  - Mother was involved in education
- Survey findings

Paving the way to university

- Qualitative nodes
  - Pressure from parents to attend university
  - Educational references
  - Dreams of attending university
  - Difficulty pursuing desired major/getting into university
  - Takes short educational programs in lieu of university
- Survey findings

Figure 8. Data matrix RQ1. Continuation.

THEME 3	THEME 4

Skills and resources

Personal development

CATEGORY

CATEGORY

Skills for growth and resources to help navigate the future

Expanding personal development and worldview

SUB-CATEGORIES AND DATA

SUB-CATEGORIES AND DATA

A platform for advancing technical and life skills

- Qualitative nodes
  -Learn to focus
  -Maturity/responsibility
  -Professionalism
  -Provision of skills to develop/implement projects
  -Public speaking/express ideas clearly
  -Critical thinking
- Survey findings

Building networks for professional advancement

- Qualitative nodes
  -Build networks/contacts
  -Concretize a dream or desire
  -New work/educational paths
  -Professional development
- Survey findings

Strengthening identity and deconstructing dominant discourses

- Qualitative nodes
  -Personal development
  -A sense of Agency
  -Political conscience/social critique
  -A broaden worldview
  -Involvement in activism
- Survey findings

Experimenting with a new world of possibilities

- Qualitative nodes
  -Self confidence
  -Leadership
  -Eagerness to learn
  -A sense of agency
  -A broaden worldview
  -Expanding mobility/right to the city
- Survey findings

4.1. "Difficulties give you courage:" rising above adversity growing up in Rio de Janeiro's favelas and peripheries

4.1.1. Navigating household instability

As I listened to the rich life stories of Agency youth the word resilience kept coming to mind. Their background and childhood experiences are nothing short of inspiring and help tell an important story about finding strength in situations of hardship. Growing up in peripheries and favelas of Rio de Janeiro means being no stranger to poverty, and this is no different for Agency participants. For instance, the survey indicated that 36% of these young people live in households benefiting from *Bolsa Família*, Brazil's internationally acclaimed cash transfer program that distributes funds to families in poverty or extreme poverty provided they meet the necessary conditions (to quality, the monthly income for each person in the household cannot exceed R$140,00 or roughly $45). These numbers suggest that at least 1/3 of Agency youth and their families currently face serious economic problems.

In a like manner, accounts surrounding the topic of financial difficulties experienced in the household growing up were raised by at least half of participants during the in-depth interviews. Renan, a 28-year-old music teacher from Santa Cruz who migrated to Rio from rural São Paulo with his grandparents when he was a boy, described how a heavy summer tropical rain literally swept their home as soon as they arrived to the big city, leaving the entire family to take shelter in a single room located behind a bar:

> It was a difficult time because at this bar we slept on the bare floor, there wasn't even a mattress, there was nothing. Then the neighbourhood kids would make fun of me because I didn't have a home… Today, thank God we overcame that, we have a new house, but back then it was bad.

While some struggled with limited access to material things such as not being able to get the coolest video game in the market, for others, unemployment by one or both parents meant that, at times, even the most basic household necessities such as buying milk could not be met. In several cases, the fact that mothers alone were sustaining the household

without any additional support brought about not only financial difficulties but also emotional ones, which, some of the interviewees indicated, greatly impacted their upbringing. In fact, the survey showed that 39% of Agency youth were raise by their mothers and/or grandmothers and had an absent father. More alarming still, 26% reported they never met or barely knew their fathers. Hugo, an 18-year-old student from Providência who is an only child, explained how being raised by a single mother who always relied on others for help made him feel. Given that his mother worked in several jobs and was gone all day, he spent his childhood bouncing from house to house in the community.

> I think this situation was the biggest problem of my childhood. My mom would always leave me at other people's homes so they could watch me, take care of me, and sometimes that made me uncomfortable. I would just stay very quiet and keep it to myself… then, when I was about eight years old, I started to become a little more independent, cleaning the house, cooking ramen noodles, doing these basic things that children can do at that age, and that is when I started to focus on what I wanted.

Hugo mentioned that once he gold older and gained more maturity he developed the confidence to talk to others. Then, whenever his mother had to work and leave him with somebody, he would take the initiative to arrange things himself asking permission to the mothers of his favourite friends to stay at their house. This way, at least he would get to spend time in a place he enjoyed. Similar to Hugo, who adapted to his child care circumstances and learned how to look out for himself, many of the interviewees pointed out that they were forced to take up responsibilities from an early age. A common occurrence amongst single-parent households and families struggling to make ends meet, kids are often time expected to help around the house, a duty that may persist throughout life. For instance, 16% of Agency youth claimed to be financially responsible for someone (in half of the cases these are either their parents and/or siblings) and 41% spend between 1-10 hours per week helping around the house for no pay (15% of respondents indicated to help their families for over 10 hours weekly).

Whether it was caring for a younger sibling while the adults worked or taking up a job to bring home some extra cash, during the interviews, Agency youth shared experiences of performing duties during their childhood that many young people growing up in middle and upper class families don't get exposed to until they reach adulthood, if ever. For example, upon her parent's divorce, Aline, a 26-year-old cultural producer born and raised in Batan, became her mother's primary supporter and had to bare the enormous responsibility of taking care of her baby twin brothers even though she was still a child herself:

> My childhood was very unstable. My parents separated when I was only six years old and I was raised with the pressure of responsibility. My mother would leave the house early to go to work and I took care of my brothers, who were only a year old at that time. So, in a way, I feel like I am their mother.

The accounts mentioned above may be analyzed from the perspective of "parentification," a process of role switching in which children are forced to assume adult stances too early on in life, either by serving as their parent's main confidents (emotional parentification) or by becoming care-givers to other family members (instrumental parentification) (Hooper, 2008). Literature produced by psychologists in the past decades have widely documented the connection between parentification and maladjustment later in life. Such experiences restrict the normal evolution of other critical development processes and leave emotional scars that extend well into adulthood and may even last a lifetime (Hooper, 2008). Yet, more recently, empirical studies have linked parentification with the advancement of positive psychological outcomes such as resilience building, interpersonal skills development and a feeling of competence (Hooper et al., 2007).

This coping mechanism is also present in the life stories of Agency participants. For both Hugo and Aline, for example, despite being prematurely forced into becoming "mature individuals," they think their childhood was good and had no other major complaints to share. Similarly, amidst accounts of family hardships and disruptions, most of the other interviewees found the time to speak fondly of their experiences growing up, telling stories

blooming with feelings of nostalgia and gratitude. Renan recalled:

> My childhood was very good, and whenever I wasn't in school I was playing on the street. My grandma would always tell me: "Hey, you better be home by five." That was my warning because if I wasn't at home by then she would slap me with a tree stick (laughter). So, it was very good, so much so that it took me forever to grow up.

Overall, however challenging, it appears that most parents and caregivers were able to transform adverse life conditions into loving households displaying a strong family support system. Indeed, as Agency youth reflect on their relationship with their families today, 73% of them expressed to get along well with their parents and close family members, 63% can always count on them for advice, and 58% frequently hear how much they are loved by their relatives.

4.1.2. Navigating violence

In Rio de Janeiro favelas, poverty and state disregard for the human rights of dwellers has historically walked hand and hand with violence, meaning that its prominence in the narratives of childhood experiences and everyday lives of youth does not come as a surprise. As I will show briefly, violence has mainly manifested itself in the lives of Agency youth in different forms within the context of their communities and social surroundings. Still, some of them have also experienced violence and trauma inside their own homes. For instance, 30% of survey respondents claimed they were beaten by their parents, siblings or other family members and 27% grew up in a household where fights and screams were common. Thainá, a 19-year-old student from Batan, struggled with her mom's temper growing up as she often resorted to violence as a way to keep her and her sisters in check.

> Because we were raised in the favela, my mother didn't want us to get involved in things or have bad influences, so I never played on the street. It was a very difficult childhood and I got beaten up a lot because my mother had a very short fuse. There were four girls at home, so if one of us got into an argument with her, she would take it out on all of us. Then, I started to go out without her knowing, doing these things adolescents do.

Yet, Thainá pointed out that there were also benefits to being raised "the tough way." She explained that her mother actually preserved her a lot, keeping her and her sisters out of trouble and forcing them to focus on their education. In fact, one of her sisters is currently enrolled in nursing school and the other is on her way to study medicine. "Our relatives and neighbours always say they wish their kids were like us," she boasted. In efforts to problematize this account, it is important to note that, from a developmental context, experiencing some form of violence as a child is a serious traumatic exposure that may hinder crucial developmental stages (Marans and Adelman, 1997; Osofsky, 1999).

Unlike adults, given that children have not yet matured their adaptive capacities, defensive structures and internal resources, they are less equipped to deal with the trauma that ensues from exposure to violence. This leads to increased vulnerability to maladaptation and compromise their normal development of cognitive, affective and regulatory capacities as they grow older (Marans and Adelman, 1997). Both Aline and Renan mentioned that they and their siblings suffered abuse from people who were brought to their home by their parents to care for them, which impacted them profoundly. "I had to see my brothers getting beat up by this person. I developed major psychological issues because of that," Aline added.

The experience of violence is particularly acute amongst youth who grew up in close contact with a person battling substance abuse. Survey results show that out of those who reported getting beaten as a child by a relative 47% grew up in the same household with a family member who was an alcoholic or a drug addict, compared to 24% for those who did not. In addition, given that favelas have been historically dominated by drug factions and the complex social organisation such environment has fostered, it comes as no surprise that many Agency participants have close relationships with individuals involved in criminal activities. Roughly 17% of survey respondents had a relative or sibling in jail and a whopping 42% revealed that one of their family members was involved in drug trafficking (when

considering the proportion of friends involved in crime, this figure jumps to 57%).

According to Clara, an 18-year-old college student from the Chapadão favela in Pavuna, before the Pacification and the alleged reorganization of the drug trafficking structure that forced criminals to shift territories took place, the community had a more familiar view towards these people. "Before, the criminal was the guy who grew up with me, who knew me, who knew my parents. They wouldn't do anything to us. Now, the guys are all from the outside. Nobody knows anybody anymore," she stated.

Consequently, growing up in low-income communities displaying high crime rates and entrenched criminal networks has a direct impact on the safety and well-being of individuals. Survey data also shows that a large proportion of Agency youth experience what public health specialists call "chronic community violence," that is, the frequent and continual exposure to different forms of violence in the community, including beatings, shootings, drug usage, verbal assault, etc. (Osofsky, 1999). Alike Thainá's mother who would try and keep her inside of the house as much as possible, several other participants complained that their parents kept them from playing on the street for fear of violence.

During the 1990's - the decade when most these youth were growing up[37] - turf wars involving the three leading drug factions in Rio over control of the cocaine trade, in addition to confrontations between drug traffickers and the police, escalated drastically and led to a spike in the overall level of violence in favelas (Marino, 2000). This shows in the extent of exposure to violent incidents a large share of these youth experienced growing up. Notably, 74% claimed they would hear gunshots on a regular basis, 64% saw a dead body, 57% found themselves caught in a shootout, 26% had their homes invaded by drug traffickers or the police, and 16% said they witnessed a homicide. In a time of their lives when their main problems should concern common every day worries such as getting along with parents or

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[37] The mean age for Agency youth participating in the study is 19.

doing well in school, 57% of these young people feared getting killed.

Table 13. Summary of violent incidents experienced during childhood/adolescence:

Incident	%
Was threatened by a police officer	15%
Was threatened by a drug trafficker	5%
Had home invaded by drug traffickers or the police	26%
Was caught in a shootout	57%
Heard gunshots regularly	74%
Saw the body of a dead person	64%
Witnessed a homicide	16%
Feared getting killed	57%
Got hit by other children/youth in the neighbourhood	23%
Was raised in the same household with an alcoholic or drug dependent relative	26%
Got beaten by parents, siblings or other relatives	30%
Had a family member involved in drug trafficking	42%
Had a friend who was involved in drug trafficking	57%
Had a friend who was an alcoholic or used drugs	60%
Had a relative or close friend who suffered a violent assault or was murdered	36%

Ysabelly's account - a 19-year-old administrative assistant from Santa Cruz whose mother was murdered by drug traffickers when she was only six years old - speaks to this issue as she lived in constant fear for her own life and the lives of her loved ones.

> After my mom died I got scared of going out on the street. Mainly because it wasn't a natural thing, they killed her because of a dispute of territory. After a while they came back for my father, then he got really scared something would happen to us and we moved out. Soon after that, my uncle, who used to take care of us, got killed inside my dad's home, then we moved again… my sister and I were children and we did not understand things, so we feared everyone would do the same to us.

Unfortunately, in a context where violence has become rather normalized, Ysabelly's case may be drastic, but it is not exceptional. Quite shockingly, approximately 36% of

Agency youth revealed they have a relative or close friend who either suffered a violent assault or got killed. Nonetheless, as has been noted, while faced with numerous hardships that transcend financial needs, these young people's ability to overcome obstacles, look for the silver lining in challenging situations, and continue to dream of a better future takes a front-seat role in directing their lives. Ysabelly, for instance, found enough strength to move on after her mother's death and focused on caring for her loved ones. She helped raise her little sister and landed her first real job - an internship at a beauty salon - at the age of 13 so she could also help support her brothers born outside het parent's marriage. "I've always worked to give the best to my siblings… Even today, I am married, my sister is married, but she can count on me if she needs anything," she affirmed. Ysabelly is currently finishing up high school and would like to study to become a nurse.

Maicon, a 28-year-old musician and cultural articulator born and raised in Paciência, one of the neighbourhoods with the lowest HDIs in Rio de Janeiro, give us another example of resilience. Despite having lost his father, who was involved in drug trafficking, at the age of four and being forced to look after himself, when looking back, he still manages to retrieve an important life lesson from his experience growing up amidst difficulties.

> My mom worked a lot so I was basically raised on my own, learning how to be a man on the streets, seeing how the other men did it… so, the world view I have today is a lot less harmful than the perception of someone who was raised by two parents. That person might not have gone through the same things that I have, so they do not see danger the way I do. I think that difficulties give you courage, it gives you a sense of direction.

4.2. "It's a sort of stairway; step by step we'll get there:" paving the way to a dream education

4.2.1. Barriers along the educational pipeline

As I began to explore the school trajectory and experiences of Agency youth in the primary and secondary education stages, it looked so I could easily divide their accounts into three main categories: those who did quite well, those who were just "regular students,"

and those who often got into trouble. Yet, I soon understood that those categories were not fixed and that most youth eventually navigated back and forth through these phases, or straight up assumed more than one of these attitudes at a time. Along the lines of "we messed around, but we got good grades," that is how Aline, Thainá and several other interviewees described their school performance during primary school, comparing their behaviour to that of most children they knew. Clara, whose father was a teacher and expected her to excel academically, explained that she had to learn how to balance fun and responsibility so she would not disappoint him.

> I was a very easy-going student and always got good grades. When I got to the fifth grade I started to become a bit sassy, wanting to fool around a bit more, but even then, I did well. That was the thing, I knew that if I got bad grades I would have problems at home, so I tried extra hard.

While Clara's relationship with her father is unlikely a commonplace in this regard (at least half of Agency youth grew up very or somewhat distant from their fathers), indeed, a large proportion of participants were able to rely on a parent to offer them support with 74% claiming their mother was involved in their education. As for those who admitted they belonged to the "back group" or *turma do fundão* - a term used to describe students who sit in the back of the classroom and are often disruptive - it appears that kind of behaviour changed in accordance with different life phases. Maicon, for example, explained that while he was considered a troublemaker throughout much of his early education years, he calmed down once he moved on to high school and began to mature.

> I was a problem child. My mother moved us a lot during primary school so I jumped from one school to the next. I missed classes and was unruly. Then, on freshman year of high school I told myself: "Hey, this whole deal of being rebellious and violent isn't working out" … I had more of a conscience then, I started to respect the teachers and other students.

Given that a significant proportion of Agency participants studied most of their lives in public schools, it is no surprise that some experienced problems endemic to the Brazilian

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public educational system and that are associated to poor school infrastructure and environment. For example, only around one quarter of survey respondents reported that their schools promoted sports and leisure events regularly and roughly 20% did not consider their school to be a safe and happy place. In addition, 63% indicated that kids in their school assaulted one another either physically or verbally sometimes or frequently - an everyday challenge that particularly students from low-income communities are no stranger to. The following two accounts are very much illustrative of this issue.

When looking back at his school days, Wladimir, a 23-year-old business management student from the Batan favela, reflected on his difficulties dealing with racial bullying and confronting questions of racial identity from a young age. "I had a difficult time in school and with my friends mainly because of my race, my color. I've thought about it many times since then… I wanted to be white and have blue eyes. It was my dream. How can a child think such things?" he asked. While Wladimir suffered from bullying because of his skin color, Ysabelly was physically assaulted by other students for the simple reason she performed better than her peers.

> I got very good grades in school. My teacher would call on me to review my tests and I already knew the result. The girls in my school, because they were envious I knew more than them, would take me to the back of the school and hit me… Then, I decided I would no longer be bullied so began "playing fight" with my cousin and started hitting the girls back.

In spite of these difficulties, the overall perception of Agency youth with respect to their experiences in school is rather positive with 68% indicating they like/liked their school and 67% agreeing they receive/received support from teachers on a regular basis. Yet, as we move away from lived experiences and enter a more pragmatic discussion about their current educational level we are faced with a more challenging scenario. Given their young age, while it would be expected to find that the greatest share of Agency participants is still in school (indeed, 73% are currently studying), it is important to point out the difficulties

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involved in moving along the educational pipeline and completing secondary education.

Survey results point to a major distortion in the age per grade level progress of participants, particularly at the primary level. Out of the 21% share of survey respondents who indicated they have not yet completed primary education, as much as 92% are older than 14, the considered adequate age for completing such school level in Brazil (in fact, 13% of them are old enough to have finished high school). At the secondary level the scenario is still worrisome, although it shifts positively. Amongst the 38% of Agency youth who are in high school almost half are still within the official graduation age (17 years old) (Portal Brasil, 2014). In addition, out of the respondents who indicated they are not studying at the moment, only 29% have a high school diploma or higher.[38]

This scenario shed light on the relevance of the dropout phenomenon amongst this particular group. About 25% of Agency youth have dropped out of school at least once in their lives, 42% at some point during primary education and 56% during high school. When asked to indicated the main reason why they interrupted their studies, financial pressures ranked first with 35% (which includes leaving school to work or help family) followed by the birth of a child (24%) and formal expulsion (8%). Regardless of all barriers these youth need to overcome to complete their formal education, the good news is that if we analyze their overall academic achievement in comparison to that of their parents we notice an improvement (see table 14).

While the highest level of education achieved by the greatest share of Agency participants is incomplete secondary education (38%), in the case of parents, incomplete primary education displays the higher percentage (31% and 25% for mothers and fathers,

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[38] This study did not explore a direct causation between educational level and participation in the Agency program as there was no available data to support such analysis and that is not an explicit program objective. In addition to recruiting young people from all levels in the educational pipeline (from incomplete primary education to college graduate), meaning that participation does not depend on formal education standing, the program runs for a few months only, so a causal analysis of this kind would require continuous data collection at different points in time.

respectively). Agency youth are also less likely than their parents to have skipped formal schooling with 1% having never attended school compared to 5% of mothers and 8% of fathers. Yet, at the university level the change has been minor with only a one percent difference between the highest post-secondary educational level achieved by youth in comparison to their mothers (compared to fathers the difference comes out to 3%). This result support evidence that shows how difficult it still is for the favela youth (and favela population in general) to reach this particular educational milestone.

Table 14. Highest level of education achieved by respondents and their mothers:

Educational level	% respondent	% respondent's mother	% respondent's father
No formal schooling	1%	5%	8%
Incomplete primary education	20%	31%	25%
Primary education	7%	7%	8%
Incomplete secondary education	38%	13%	9%
High school diploma	25%	26%	24%
Some university	7%	4%	3%
University diploma or higher	3%	6%	4%
Unknown	-	7%	19%

4.2.2. Paving the way to university

Despite having attained essentially low educational levels, the analysis indicates that some parents of Agency youth hold high expectations that their children will receive a much better education than they ever did - and that reflects on how these young people view their own future educational aspirations. Several participants talked about how they were constantly lectured about the value of education by their parents and pressured to continue their studies. As Aline added, the widely recognised phrase "you have got to make something out of yourself" was repeated to her over and over at home. Elaine, a 27-year-old college

student and resident of the Chapadão favela in Pavuna whose work advance women's empowerment and black culture, explained that even though her mother walked out of her life too early, the fact that she had a degree from a public university had a long-lasting impact in how she came to understand the importance of education as a vehicle for transformation.

> My mother has a degree in pedagogy. Before she disappeared, she was the director of a school where my sister and I used to study. She always had this very strong connection to education… so, even though I wasn't raised by her, a lot of people tell me that I have a lot from her because of the cultural events I produce.

It is important to highlight that such incentive to invest in education did not come solely from the more educated parents. Thainá's parents, for instance, only studied up to the third grade but her mother has always made her wish to see her daughters graduating from college crystal clear. "My mom is crazy about us finishing up our studies, going to university, becoming somebody… so she is always on my case about it because I left high school before finishing my senior year." As for those who have a parent or close relative who managed to go to university, moving up the educational pipeline post-secondary education is almost like a natural step to take.

For Jéssica, a 27-year-old cultural producer who enrolled in university to pursue architecture when she was only 18 years old, the fact that she grew up around people who had gone to college facilitated her educational trajectory. "My mom was an electrical engineer… my brother has a degree in journalism… my cousin, who is like another brother to me, studied business administration… so, I have many educational references," she explained. As a matter of fact, 22% of Agency youth reported having a sibling who is currently attending college or has already obtained a university diploma.

Yet, as survey data shows, the number of Agency youth who in fact reach university is very limited, much less so if we consider those who managed to ingress into the highly-competitive public institutions of higher education (out of the roughly 10% share of

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participants who reached higher education, less than 2% did so through a public university).

As explored in chapter 1, public universities in Brazil are still, for the most part, a commodity of the elite. Students who are unable to score high on the entrance exams and secure their spot amongst the few vacancies made available must find the means to pay their way through a private university if they are to ever fulfil their dream of obtaining a college diploma.

As expected, the educational and financial barriers to accessing higher education in this unbalanced scenario came to light during the interviews. Back in 2014 when I first interviewed Gabriel, a 20-year-old journalism aficionado from Batan, he spoked cheerlessly about his very narrow chances of getting into a public university upon his high school graduation from a public school.

> I finished high school but I didn't really prepare to try to get into college. I mean, I don't have that many chances. My dream is to study journalism but not in a public university, I won't be able to get in. I would have to spend years of my life preparing for that. So, my plan in to work, make money, then pay for a private university.

And that is precisely what he did. Gabriel is currently enrolled at a private university pursuing the degree in journalism that he so longed for, thanks to his hard-earned savings and family support. Unfortunately, few of Agency youth have the same opportunity to take an alternative, and very costly, path to higher education. Amongst participants who have earned a high school diploma as their highest educational level, 44% indicated they are not currently enrolled in university because they are either saving money or lack the financial means to pay for a private university at the moment, followed by 43% who are yet to take the entrance exams to attempt to get into a public university or receive a scholarship, and 24% who have taken the exams but obtained low scores. Elenice, a 22-year old from Santa Cruz, pondered the limitations of young Brazilians to go to university considering the system they must face. She said:

> I know and have heard of people who are in public university but have money, while those who do not have money study in

> private universities. They work while going to school in order to pay for their own degree, while those who are better off [study for free]… I don't agree with this and I think it should change somehow.

Elenice - who lost both her parents and now lives alone with her sister - is considering getting a technical degree in nursing so she can start working and save money to go to university. "It's a sort of stairway; step by step we'll get there," she added. Several other interviewees also described taking alternative paths to fulfil their educational ambitions, earning technical degrees or taking short programs in their area of interest as they pave their way to university. Hugo, whose educational interest and overall plan is very similar to that of Elenice, spoke confidently about his personal dream for higher education:

> When I was in my sophomore year of high school I started to become interested in the medical area. Then I thought: 'you know what? I love animals,' so I moved towards veterinary sciences and decided that is what I want to do. But for now, to start off, I am going to become a nurse technician so I can work and pay for college… And what I have in mind is, I don't consider myself a very intelligent person but I work really hard, so perhaps I can even get some kind of scholarship.

This is the kind of hopeful thinking and energy that seems to guide the future educational aspirations of much of Agency youth. Despite all personal setbacks and institutional barriers, when asked whether they have the intention of attending university in the future, 90% of survey respondents replied positively and all of them were able to name the exact major they would like to pursue.[39]

4.3. "You know you are part of a network that is there to help you:" Skills for growth and resources to help navigate the future

<u>4.3.1. A platform for advancing technical and life skills</u>

Although Agency's methodology is introduced within the time span of a few weeks, its capacity to promote important life skills while unleashing participants' potential for growth

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[39] This specific question was administered to a survey group of 119 respondents only.

is evidenced in the reflections of favela youth about what they learned and the improvements they made. When asked to discuss some of the main changes in attitude and behaviour they experienced while in the program, several participants mentioned public speaking as one of the areas they developed the most. Elenice, for example, explained that when she first arrived at Agency she was so shy she could barely talk. And yet, to carry out her project on historical and cultural tourism in Santa Cruz, she had to speak to the public on a regular basis, which forced her to let go of her insecurities:

> You have to put yourself out there and talk. 'Hi, I am Elenice, I am from Agency and we are developing such project.' You have to arrive with confidence. So, this is the best that happened to me inside Agency. Before, I was very, very shy and could never bring myself to talk in public like that.

In fact, "losing the fear of speaking in public" is the main difficulty participants indicated to have experienced inside the program (33%), followed by "expose ideas in a clear and convincing manner" (31%). Interestingly so, these activities are amongst the top skills they reported to have gained through Agency: 66% of survey respondents indicated that the program improved their public-speaking skills "a lot" and again 66% believe Agency taught them how to formulate arguments to convince people of what they think at the same degree. Referring to the capacity she developed to communicate with others with more ease and express ideas more effectively, Larissa - a 19-year-old from Batan whose first encounter with Agency took place in 2012 - said:

> When I first got to Agency and had to explain my project idea I stuttered, I almost cried along with the other girls from my team. Today it isn't like that anymore. I am still shy but I know how to talk, how to communicate, you know? It's a form of personal growth and not only professional. It's an affirmation of the "I."

Given Agency's focus on guiding favela youth to become social entrepreneurs and have a direct impact in their communities (I expand on this topic in chapter 5), it comes as no surprise that interviewees reported gaining a range of different skills related to the creation

and implementation of projects. From learning technical skills such as creating a business plan, defining project objectives, stipulating a budget, and writing proposals for funding competitions, to carrying out on-the-ground project implementation activities such as conducting market research in the communities and organizing project logistics. Viviane - a 26-year-old activist and sociologist from Cidade de Deus whose first encounter with Agency took place in 2011 - talked about the importance of the program in supporting young individuals working to reshape and strengthen the social and cultural scene in favelas. "Agency has helped train many cultural producers of the new generation and you see that today. These guys who went through the program, who learned how to write a proposal, create a budget, including me, today, we can dominate this 'know how,'" she said.

Considering those who received the cash prize to carry out their ideas, the fact that youth themselves were awarded a large sum of money and had to bear all responsibilities related to the implementation of the project, led to an increase in their sense of professionalism and maturity, several interviewees noted. Naiara - a 23-year-old college student from Cidade de Deus whose project encourages children to experiment new leisure activities - talked about the commitment that winning the investment entailed. "There is a lot of responsibility involved. It is no joke, getting this money, having people pressuring you, people counting on you. You have to make things happen," she pointed out.

Carlos Eduardo - a 25-year old who founded a school in Borel to promote a typical favela dance style popular amongst children (*passinho*) - also emphasized the importance of keeping up with obligations when leading a project, noting that he used to be quite disorganized before his experience in the program. "Agency gave me experience for life, and having responsibility is the most important lesson. Because if you have responsibility and your feet on the ground you will keep going," he added. In some instances, this sense of responsibility seems to have spread beyond the context of Agency. For instance, Elenice

explained that creating the budget for the project helped change the way she deals with her own personal finances:

> If you have a salary, you need to have a financial plan. I didn't have any of that. I would take my money and spend the whole thing, but not anymore. [Now I think] I have so much money, I can allocate this much to this or that, and I might even have some left. So, creating the budget for the project also helped me in life.

Finally, some of the interviewees mentioned that their experience in the program also impacted their capacity to focus, with 72% of survey respondents indicating that Agency helped them "a lot" to organize ideas and concentrate in one activity. As explained by Camila - a 26-year-old from Santa Cruz who leads a music education project in public schools alongside her husband - the process of narrowing down the specifics of her own project with the Agency team helped her in this regard:

> We had too many ideas floating around at first. We wanted to give classes but we didn't know where, we had no focus, we wanted to put the guitar somewhere and that's it. Then, Agency helped us organize our ideas, they helped us with the creation and implementation of the project. [They asked us] 'What is your focus? What kind of public are you targeting?'… So, Agency came in strong in this part of formulating the methodology, of organizing and administering the content of the classes. It was truly a turning point for us.

Finally, an increase in the capacity for critical thinking was also mentioned by Agency youth as one of the greatest skills they have acquired through the program. As part of the methodology, participants take part in group discussions that touch on various current social and political issues impacting their lives and communities and are encouraged to reflect on them in a holistic way before forming their own opinions. The goal is to have these young people practice the important exercise of critically analyzing the underlying discourses and motives driving particular policies and state action/inaction. As a result, 67% of survey respondents reported that the program bolstered their capacity to think critically about new ideas and discourses. Aline - who, as per Agency's indication, began taking part in a local

initiative that brings together academics, practitioners and individuals to debate public policies transforming the city (*Rio de Encontros*) - explained how this element of the methodology impacted the way she thinks and expresses herself today:

> I can say with confidence that Agency made me a critical person. I wasn't critical at all before. I basically just followed the crowd and never looked for the veracity of things, in politics, in everything. Today, I really unleash my voice and I don't care. I say what I have to say.

Table 15. Self-reported abilities and life skills developed though Agency:

Abilities and skills	% A lot	% Somewhat	% Not much
Work in group	78%	18%	4%
Make decisions	70%	24%	6%
Speak in public	66%	24%	10%
Organize ideas and concentrate in one activity	72%	20%	8%
Formulate arguments to convince people of what I think	66%	27%	7%
Think critically about new ideas and discourses	67%	26%	7%

4.3.2. Building networks for professional advancement

Another leading proposal of Agency is to expand the network of participants and open doors to partnership building so they can more effectively implement their projects and maximize their potential impact. These connections are made possible thanks to Agency's extensive contact base in Rio de Janeiro, which is comprised of individual and collective social actors, intellectuals, politicians, policymakers, artists, and culture makers of all sorts. In particular, Agency's founder Marcus Faustini, a published-author, film-maker, writer and director, is an important figure in the arts and culture urban scene in Rio de Janeiro. He is the former municipal secretary of culture of Nova Iguaçu (under Lindbergh Farias' administration with the Worker's Party) and the founder of the first audio-visual movie school in the Baixada Fluminense, Rio's second-largest region known for its high levels of

poverty and urban violence.

Denise - a 26-year-old from the Fallet-Fogueteiro favela whose project seeks to bring parents closer together to their children through interactive games and activities - discussed how Agency's networking stimulus developed as she began to seriously envision her project taking shape:

> The hardest part was to think about the networks element. 'Who am I going to talk to? How will I approach this person? Gosh, will this person buy my idea?' And that is exactly when Agency comes in and give us their support. They say: 'we know people who would find your project really cool and we can facilitate your contact with them.' Then, when we approach this potential partner, they tell us: 'Oh, you are from Agency? Come here and let's have a talk. We have much to discuss and to develop.' This all makes it so you don't feel alone anymore. You know you are part of a network that is there to help you.

In the case of Michelle - a 27-year-old college graduate in social communication from Rocinha who, alongside her brother, created a community newspaper to honour the strong North-eastern culture in her community - the support system she found at Agency was crucial in helping her establish the basic components of her project, turning unpolished overall objectives and floating ideas into a concrete scheme:

> Agency was fundamental because when we decided to make a newspaper we knew absolutely nothing about newspapers, and they put us in touch with people who helped us make it happen… we received so much support, and we learned so much from people who have experience working with this, people in production, from all places. They helped us construct it and became creatures of the project with us. To me, that was the most important thing.

As reflected in the interviews, this effort to expand the network of favela youth is helpful beyond facilitating the realization of their projects; it can also serve as an avenue to professional opportunities. Raquel's trajectory in the program is a perfect example of this prospect being materialized. In addition to her 2011 project on women's empowerment and teenage pregnancy in Providência taking off (it gained additional funding, grew in size and scope, and became its own NGO) Agency also helped Raquel publish a book about her

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social entrepreneurial experience and recently landed her a job with the Rio State Secretary of Social Assistance and Human Rights. She recalled how the job offer took place:

> Faustini introduced me to the sub-secretary of social development and he meet me at his office; I didn't even know who he was. We talked and then he invited me to work on a project having to do with socio-educative measures for young people in conflict with the law. Everything is going really well and I am liking it a lot.

Igor - a 23-year old who leads a community audio-visual school that gives youth a platform to work with arts in Cidade de Deus - also talked about Agency's impact in his professional development. He mentioned that when he decided to work with audio-visual on a full-time basis he had difficulties finding someone to give him a first opportunity (like so many young people) - until Agency stepped in. "I wanted to get in the job market but I didn't have an opening. Then, I met a producer through Agency and she invited me to intern at her company," he explained.

Similar to the experiences of Raquel and Igor, 17% of survey respondents reported that they were able to find a job through contacts they made at Agency. In addition, 79% of participants agree or strongly agree that Agency helped develop their professional life and 46% believe the program has opened doors for new work opportunities at the same degree. It is important to recognise this as an advantage given that finding formal employment for participant youth is not the main objective of the methodology, but rather a positive consequence arising out of the networks and stimulus they exposed them to.

Furthermore, several interviewees discussed how Agency encouraged them to think about the kind of work they envision doing in the future, opening a new set of options and possibilities. Thaiane, who is only 16, was inspired by her project on children's leisure activity engagement through theatre to follow a career in cultural production. "If it weren't for this opportunity, I wouldn't have been able to see myself as a producer, to know what I can become. The impact that I saw my project having really opened my eyes. It helped me

see that I can make a living out of art," she affirmed. Experimenting with making and disseminating art also helped Thainá develop a new outlook towards her professional life. Comparing her perspectives now from when she first started Agency, she said: "I felt really lost. If you asked me what I wanted to do I wouldn't be able to tell you. I didn't like to do anything. Today, if you ask me what I want to do in five years from now I know more or less. I want to study cinema, God allowing."

By providing a platform for young people to cultivate their own ideas and desires and concretize them through their entrepreneurial projects, Agency has also supported participants in the realization of their personal dreams. For example, Fernando - who is the lead singer of a funk/hip hop group and leads a project on dance education - explained that even though he always had an interest in the performing arts, he did not think it was possible to build a career in the field - but that all changed. "Before going through Agency I didn't see that as a reality… I could have never conceived that one day I would be making art, giving concerts, interviews… that was something I only imagined in my wildest dreams," he recalled. For Guilherme - a resident of Favela do Zinco who created a mobile library that focuses on personalized readings - experiencing Agency was the boost he needed to transform his idea into a concrete social project in pro of his community.

> Meeting Agency was the first step in helping me see that it is indeed possible to have a desire to create something… to have a dream and make it happen. They helped me to get my ideas out of my head, put them on paper, and see what the possibilities were to create a project to benefit my community. This has brought me so much joy.

It is important to note that, in attempts to stimulate young people to work towards accomplishing what they have in mind and unleashing their imagination, Agency refrains from using the word "dream" in their methodology, as it tends to imply the existence of a long distance between vision and the concretization of it, particularly for those with limited resources. Instead, they use the word "desire," which is more centred around what a person

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wishes to do, have, create, develop and project into the future. Thus, the desire is an invitation to action, and the opportunity to realize that desire is what keeps youth engaged with Agency (Lisboa and Delfino, 2012).

Table 16. Potential benefits gained through Agency:

Benefits	% Agree or strongly agree	% Neither agree nor disagree	% Disagree or strongly disagree
Agency opened doors to new work opportunities	46%	34%	20%
Agency helped me form a group of friends with similar interests	70%	21%	9%
Agency connected me with people who work in my field of interest	61%	26%	13%
I got a job through contacts I made at Agency	17%	34%	49%

4.4. "Agency helped shape me:" expanding personal development and worldview

4.4.1. Strengthening identity and deconstructing dominant discourses

Several participants talked about their experience at Agency as a critical point in their lives, which not only bolstered their opportunities in work and education, but also provoked them to develop a new understanding of the reality around them and to make a reflection of their place in it. "Agency opened a completely different world to me," that is how Elaine described how the program impacted her at the personal level. Being a black woman, she explained that although she lived her entire life in a favela, she had failed to recognize patterns of racism and discrimination until Agency encouraged her to step out of her own experience and consider how these issues impact the lives of so many around her. As she attempted to make meaning out of the process of self-discovery she has undergone through Agency, she said:

> I learned how to get to know myself better. I was obligated to observe my behaviours with other people, to observe my thoughts about certain issues, and the lack thereof. For example, the question of racism, which is central to my work

> today, even though I had gone through some things myself, If
> I hadn't been inside a group that talked about it, or if I hadn't
> been introduced to other references, I wouldn't have awakened
> to it. Although these things had been with me my entire life, I
> was unable to see them.

Today, Elaine proudly wears turbans, sports an afro, and opts to color her full lips with bright-colored lipsticks - all which are part of traditional black beauty styles she could not bring herself to embrace some years ago, she confessed. To her, the most important benefit Agency provided her with was the incentive to immerse herself deep into her racial roots. "[Agency] made me reflect on my own person, on my life history, which relates to questions of ancestry, the black movement as a whole… it took me back to my origins," she explained.

To empower and capacitate the favela youth - particularly blacks and low-income - to become protagonists of their lives and of the transformations taking place in their territories is an explicit and central objective of the Agency program. Projects created by these young people are not only meant to speak to issues that are relevant to their communities, but also become a platform for representation used to highlight the agency, knowledge, creativity, and potency they possess. This allows for the emergence of a counter-narrative to the invalidating discourse that portrays these young individuals as dangerous, lazy, and purposeless, or worse yet, as mere empty objects waiting to be filled with knowledge, in Freire's truest sense of a banking model of education.

As reflected in Elaine's account, the result of this revolutionary action that seeks to change these roles is an increase in participants' embracement of their local cultures[40] and identities. Cristiano - a 26-year-old who created a clothing line to celebrate favela fashion in Cidade de Deus - shared an emotional account of how his experience at Agency helped shape his identity as a young black man and a favela resident.

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[40] In this dissertation, local culture is referred to a set of experiences, customs, behaviors, and traits found at the heart of everyday life in Rio's favelas and that are shared, preserved, and promoted by its local residents.

> Agency helped me to find my place inside my community and also in my life. I had many issues with being a black man living in a favela, and Agency gave me this understanding, this reality shock; it brought me to life. I think that if it wasn't for Agency I wouldn't be here. I wouldn't be who I am today. Agency helped shape me.

Along the lines of Cristiano's account, Ana Paula - a 19-year-old from Salgueiro who created a magazine directed at young girls from Rio favelas and peripheries - also shared a few words about Agency leading her on a road to and self-acceptance.

> I had a very closed view with relation to everything. I was ashamed of going to the mall, I was ashamed of using the clothes I had, I was ashamed of wearing my natural hair… I was ashamed because of society and I thought that would never change. With Agency, I opened my mind and started to accept myself more. Agency truly change my life, in a more general way, in everything.

To fully understand the significance of these statements it is important to recognize the levels of discrimination and racial profiling favela youth face, particularly black males, which is, as previously discussed, the population most vulnerable to urban violence in these communities. For example, when considering the answers of all survey participants, 15% somewhat or strongly agree that they feel discriminated when they frequent urban spaces outside of the favela and the same percentage feel that people fear them because of their appearance at the same rate (when adding "neither agree nor disagree" answers these figures jump to 41% and 31%, respectively).

Now, if we only consider the answers of black males to these two statements the proportion of participants who respond positively in the agreement scale goes up to some extent: within this specific population, 20% agree or fully agree that they feel discriminated and roughly 25% feel that people fear them. If we control by white males, these figures drop to 7% and 0%, respectively, with the greatest majority of respondents (around 86%) disagreeing with the two statements. These results indicate that black males have different experiences, and therefore perceptions, of social discrimination and prejudice compared to

their fellow youth.[41] Furthermore, blacks are more likely to be poor (amongst those who receive Bolsa Família, used here as a proxy for poverty, 49% are blacks, 37% pardos and only 9% whites), to be unemployed (56% blacks, 37% pardos and 6% whites) and to not have an income (49%, 39% and 10%, respectively).[42]

As previously discussed, some of the activities carried out by the Agency program that are meant to stimulate the youth to think critically about dominant discourses (i.e. exercises in critical media analysis, study groups covering current social and political topics) play an important role in this process of self-discovery and self-development. For example, Aline explained that having the opportunity to engage with Agency's team on a regular basis as she developed her project (especially the university students) stimulated her to use her critical thinking capacities to develop a better understanding of the society she lives in. "Agency's team really helped me think. I try to look at things differently now, not only in relation to my project, but also as a person. It gave me a new view towards politics, inequality, everything," she added. In a like manner, 68% of survey respondents indicated that Agency provoked them to see the world differently.

Through this exposure to a form of discourse analysis activities, Agency also becomes a platform for expanding participants' political and social conscience, as reflected in Wladimir's account about the changes he experienced as an individual and as a citizen.

> I've changed as a person. I opened my mind to learning new things. Like, I never cared about politics, I would always vote blank. Today, I see the importance of voting, I read the newspaper, I try to deepen my knowledge about these topics, about culture. Agency has opened this dimension for me.

Gabriel - who is now building a career in communications thanks to his background

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[41] When controlling by black participants, both male and female, the proportion of those who somewhat or strongly agree that people fear them because of their skin color is 3x as high than for whites, although the question about discrimination produced balanced answers amongst both groups.

[42] Although whites are slightly more likely to have reached university compared to blacks and pardos (13% against 7%, respectively), their distribution across primary and secondary education is comparable.

in community journalism, a field Agency helped expose him to - shared Wladimir's awakening in politics after experiencing the program. "Agency has woken me up for life. I am starting to become more political. I want to learn how politics impact my community," he said. Furthermore, his account of how the program helped him understand state and police engagement with the favela youth shed light on Agency's capacity to broaden participants' understanding of the conditions shaping their lives and experiences, allowing for a demystification of disempowering discourses to ensue. "We need to understand our reality and our community apart from the opinions coming from the top. We need to realize those opinions are biased. Like, the youth in favelas have always been repressed. We are seen as vandals, like we just want to fool around," he denounced.

4.4.2. Experimenting with a new world of possibilities

The element of "experimentation" sustains much of what the Agency methodology is all about and plays a major role in how the program choses to stimulate and involve its young participants. For example, while exposing the favela youth to new narratives and providing them with skills and tools for engagement they traditionally lacked access to, this experimentation element of the program also allows young people to look at themselves in their potentiality, as they are exposed to new ideas and possibilities. As pointed out by Larissa, who joined Agency at the age of 16 and now owns a clothing line catered to the favela market: "Agency changed my attitude so much; before, I never thought about having a project, or better said, I never thought that was a possibility."

For many of these young people, Agency gave them the first real opportunity to experiment with a new world that extends beyond their daily routines and social interactions, which can be rather limited - particularly for those who are forced to enter the workforce at an early age and have little access to cultural and territorial mobility. During a TED event in Rio de Janeiro in which he discussed the experiences and issues that

inspired him to create Agency, Marcus Faustini talked about the importance of focusing on the youth in efforts to radicalize the democracy. He said:

> "The peripheral youth have suffered much, and still suffers, with this capitalistic society that wants to control bodies so they can serve as market reserves. Bodies that do not act upon their desires, and that are submitted to a single logic of existence inside the market… Then why intervene in this space from the perspective of the youth? Because, above all, to make poor people work 12 hours a day in their youth is to condemn them to be poor for the rest of their lives. Because it is in our youth that we make the best experiences, the best combinations, the best encounters, and open our repertoire and networks" (Faustini, 2013).

And this is exactly the kind of exposure and opportunity to experiment that young people like Clara exercised in the program. Recalling that, prior to Agency, she barely left her house or got involved in any kind of community activity, Clara discussed how the program helped her let go of her insecurities and shortened the imaginary distances she had created in her mind about her stance in the city.

> It was such a great experience because it gave me the opportunity to meet a lot of new people, to hear a lot of stories, and to get to know new places… it brought me maturity and many responsibilities, things that I never imagined I would do. Like, they make you circulate, go to many different places, take the bus, the metro… I used to be so scared, but now, it seems like these places aren't as far as I used to think they were. I even talk to the new people I meet whereas before I was quite shy. Agency gave me a kind of autonomy that I didn't have; it truly opened my horizons.

Survey results show that overall Agency youth have a similar perception to Clara when it comes to describing the different kinds of life exposure the program provided them with. For example, "meeting new people," "being exposed to new ideas and discourses," and "getting to know other parts of the city" are all amongst aspects of the program participants indicated to have enjoyed the most (59%, 45% and 30%, respectively) (see table 18 for full list). With regards to mobility - understood in this study as having access to public spaces and cultural resources - it is important to highlight that favela and peripheral youth still experience considerable limitations in enjoying these platforms for leisure and education.

This may be tied, for example, to their place of residence (living too far from the cultural centers available in the city) or a lack of incentive to frequent such spaces.

The survey shows that, before Agency, a large proportion of youth had never set foot on places considered hubs for cultural exposure such as libraries (21% indicated to have never visited), museums (36%), theatre (38%), bookstore (35%), and universities (69%). Being that "expanding mobility" is one of the proposals of the program, in only four months of exposure to the methodology, the percentage of participants who visited these spaces at least once is comparable or higher to the rate corresponding to the year prior to them joining Agency. The table below shows a pre-post intervention comparative of results considering participants from the 2015 cycle, only.[43]

Table 17. Pre-post intervention comparative of places visited by participants at least one time considering different timeframes:

Places	Pre-Agency % At least one time in the last year	Post-Agency % At least one time in the past three months
Library	69%	61%
Museum	56%	45%
Theatre	54%	67%
Bookstore	59%	52%
Universities	23%	34%
Workshops, lectures, or conferences	46%	61%

As reflected in the varied accounts shared by youth about their experience in the program, we may say that Agency help participants develop their self-confidence in many fronts (for instance, 70% of survey respondents reported that Agency helped develop their self-esteem). Some of these young people have not only strengthened their communication

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[43] These results consider a respondent pool of about 200.

skills, expanded their contact base and mobility, discovered new professional and educational paths, and began taking steps towards the long journey to self-discovery, but they have also been impulsed to recognize and positioned themselves as empowered individuals capable of driving change in their lives and communities. As Wylliana - a 26-year-old from Providência who leads a project to support homeless people - said: "I look at Agency as a base; a base that allows me to see myself as the transformation of the place in which I live."

When discussing some of the main changes he has observed on participant youth, Jorge - a cultural producer from the Baixada Fluminense who is a former tutor in the program - talked about the importance of Agency's focus in placing the youth in a position of protagonism and leadership:

> I think Agency is training a generation of leaders. Some of these guys have a lot more of the 'swag' necessary to position themselves in the city now… that 'swag' of someone who has been empowered. I feel like now they talk to people like one of them, you know? [Although they are only beginning] they communicate on equal terms and dispute that space. I think this is truly wonderful; this might actually be the element of Agency I like the most. The city becomes 'theirs' each day more and more, so they speak about it with a sense of authority.

For some, this opening of possibilities and repertoire brought along an eagerness to learn and continue growing. Take Aline, for example, who confessed she picked up a taste for reading thanks to Agency. "I hated reading, I truly did. But Agency's team worked with me in such a way that I was awakened to it," she asserted. Like Aline, the program appears to have stimulated a large share of participants to become more curious-minded. For instance, 82% of survey respondents indicated they now have an increased desire to learn new things and 83% reported that Agency influenced them to continue their studies. Renan also discussed how he experienced an educational stimulus through Agency. He said:

> My head was in the clouds all the time. I had a hard time paying attention to people even when they were talking to me. Now, I pay more attention at things, at what people say, and if I don't

> understand something, I go home and I research about it. Before, I wasn't like that at all. I would hear something and just nod. But this has changed completely today.

An improvement in personal development described by Renan and many others is reflected on how Agency youth perceive their overall experience in the program, translating to a very strong participant satisfaction rate and - considering the social context in which the program operates - low dropouts: a whopping 93% of survey respondents reported they are satisfied or very satisfied with the program, while, on average, less than 20% of participants from each cycle decide to withdraw from the program for various reasons (In expand on the dropout discussion in the study limitations section).

As Fernando pointed out, Agency represents a concrete opportunity to invigorate and further direct the lives of favela youth. "Before Agency, I had nothing. My mom helped me out with food and stuff but I didn't have a work structure, I didn't have a path that I could walk. What motivates me at Agency is that it opens this path so I can keep walking. I can do and discover new things, learning always."

Table 18. Aspects of Agency participants indicated to have enjoyed the most:

Aspects	%
Meet new people	59%
The learning process	54%
Develop a project from start to finish	48%
Being exposed to new ideas and discourses	45%
The involvement with the community	42%
Help in my life project	42%
Learn about entrepreneurship	38%
Get to know others parts of the city	30%
Meet Marcus Faustini and learn from him	20%

Interpretation and discussion of findings

<u>Theme 1: Experiences growing up</u>

Aligned with the qualitative tradition, at the heart of this study lies the objective to explore the lifeworld of young people, get a sense for how they understand their experiences and what kinds of meaning they ascribe to them. Particularly, this chapter set off to analyze the lived experiences of youth as favela residents and participants in the Agency program. Perceptions pertaining to their childhood and background, the first topic of investigation, yield interesting results that shed light on the many social and economic challenges urban youth living in poverty-stricken communities are forced to cope with daily, which impact their quality of life in many fronts. Residing mostly in mother-headed households, study participants struggled with frequent economic hardship (currently, one third live in poverty or extreme poverty), the bearing of adult responsibilities from a young age, emotional distress caused by the hazardous behaviour of parents or relatives and, to an extent, physical harm. A comprehensive study carried out by IPP also points out to a significant number of favela youth living under financial pressure, being raised solely by their mothers and having an absent father (IPP, 2017).

Vulnerabilities growing up in favelas also take shape in the form of chronic community violence. Similar to the experiences of millions of Latin Americans whose urban realities are engulfed by criminal violence, participants have been largely exposed to different kinds of violent incidents, including being trapped in shootouts, hearing gun shots regularly or having a relative or a close friend victimized in a violent assault - leading them to fear for their own lives. Given that, historically, favelas have found themselves at the receiving end of drug-related and state-led violence, these results were expected, but not in such pervasive terms as the survey responses and narratives illustrate. Also surprising is the extent to which participants have friends or relatives involved in drug-trafficking (nearly half), a reflection

of the complex patterns of sociability shaping the relationship between favela residents and local criminals, which is found at the intersection of supportive coercion and repressive violence (Dowdney, 2003). Despite facing numerous hardships, the results have shown participants to be resilient and hopeful young people, with the ability to overcome obstacles and continue dreaming of a better future. For the most part, they have been able to establish long-lasting relationships with their families and remember their past fondly.

Theme 2: Educational background and aspirations

The second thematic tackled in this chapter involves participants' views regarding their school trajectories and future educational aspirations. In general, participants indicated to like their schools and to dispose of a good support system from people close to them, such as teachers and their mothers - a positive outcome considering the shortcomings of education in low-income communities. Expressed in some of the accounts, school alienation - which involves student estrangement in many forms, from passive disengagement to disruptive behaviour and evasion - was mainly described as a natural part of the educational process, changing according to different life phases and levels of maturity. This result contradicts the notion that students disconnect from schools simply because they lack confidence, self-assurance, motivation and cultural capital to succeed (McInnerney, 2009). Rather, much of what negatively impacted the educational background of participants has to do with school structural issues and overall climate (lack of extra-curricular activities, violence, bullying, etc.) in addition to immediate life pressures.

For instance, the majority of those who dropped out of school before completing secondary education did so because they started working, were expected to support their families, or had a child. This is a widespread issue that impacts one third of young Latin Americans, mostly from poor households, as they tend to leave school earlier than their better-off peers (OECD, 2017). Thus, many complex factors caused by social divides -

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which contributes to producing alienation in the first place - need to be considered when exploring the phenomenon of school dropouts (McInnerney, 2009).

The greatest barrier in the educational trajectories of study participants, accordingly, concerns moving up the educational pipeline. Recent progress in the universalization of basic education in Brazil (and across the developing world) means that participants are more educated than their parents, but they still struggle to make the transition between primary and secondary education, displaying major distortions in the age per grade level and low completion rates (amongst participants who are 19 or older, roughly 38% have not yet obtained a high school diploma). These results align with more comprehensive figures on educational progress amongst youth in Rio favelas and Brazil (IPP, 2017; OECD, 2017). Furthermore, overcoming generational barriers in education come to a halt at the university level, with the proportion of participants who have reached higher education (10%) nearly corresponding that of their parents.[44]

Although a pillar to social and economic mobility, these results illustrate the extent to which favela youth lack behind in educational attainment and how enormous the gulf between them and higher education remains. Yet, participants stay optimistic they will, one day, attend university and are motivated by their parents and relatives to do so. Brought to attention during the interviews, an interesting strategy found by participants to cope with barriers to higher education is to enrol in technical and short courses in areas they would like to major in as a way to create a pathway to university. This alternative plan of action highlights the potential of non-formal educational programs to serve as a platform back to

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[44] A recent study by IBGE confirms the strong educational generational mobility experienced by Brazilian in the past years with almost 70% of the population having improved their educational level in comparison to their parents (against 5% who have it worse). However, noting that structural changes in education tend to move faster than in the labour market, the study also points out to limitations in the occupational mobility of Brazilians: while half of the population have improved their lives in terms of occupation in relation to their parents, this mobility is concentrated in the lowest levels of the occupational pyramid (sons and daughters of farmers who ascend to positions in manual labour, for example) (Perrin, 2017).

the formal system of education.

Theme 3: Skills and resources

The third question examines the types of skills and resources participants advanced through the Agency platform, which was done mainly on a self-reporting basis. At least two thirds of participants reported having improved their ability to speak in public, make decisions, work in group, organize ideas and concentrate in one activity. A reflection of Agency's efforts to encourage youth to take part in discussions about current issues impacting favela dwellers and to consider, from a critical stance, the motivations behind particular state policies or inaction, participants also claimed they are now more critical when thinking about new ideas and discourses and feel more prepared to formulate arguments and defend them to others. Some of these skills are the very same ones they identified as being very challenging to develop before they started the program, which demonstrates Agency's ability to help young people work through some of their fears.

Given that young people themselves are at the forefront of project creation and implementation and must bear all related responsibilities, during the interviews, participants also talked about cultivating a sense of maturity and professionalism. These results show clear patterns of non-cognitive skills development, comprised of attitudes, behaviours and individual traits which facilitate success in important aspects of life. Aligned with the larger literature, and, particularly, Gutman and Schroon's (2013) identification of key life skills essential in the developmental process of children and youth, Agency has helped participants cultivate communication and social skills, motivation, creativity, self-confidence, self-control and perseverance (Gutman and Schoon, 2013; Zhou, 2016). This outcome is consistent with positive findings from evidence-based studies that have analyzed the impact of out-of-school programs and extracurricular activities on student's learning and non-cognitive skills enhancement (Durlak and Weissberg, 2013; Baker, 2013; García, 2014).

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It is worth noting that, although specifically directed at project development (defining project objectives, stipulating a budget, creating a business plan, carrying out market research, writing proposals for funding competitions, etc.), participants interviewed reported improving technical skills, which incorporate cognitive capacities including focusing, solving problems and doing math (NCME, 2017). In sum, the methodology employed by Agency successfully engages participants in the important process of strengthening a range of non-cognitive skills - which, according to findings from long-term adolescent interventions, produce better outcomes than programs focused on cognitive skills (Kautz, et.al., 2014) - while concurrently promoting cognitive learning, "marrying" these two central and interdependent skills strands (García, 2013).

As it relates to the provision of different resources, the expansion of networks throughout the city and contacts in participants' field of interest are particularly stimulated inside the program. Added to Agency's mentorship and guidance, this external support system - comprised also of actors who serve as sources of inspiration for young people - assist participants in building partnerships, more effectively implementing their projects and maximizing their impact. These connections, a large share of participants note, broadened opportunities for professional development, resulting in concrete job offers in some instances. Despite not being its focus, Agency's ability to open pathways to formal employment to participant youth is a positive by-product of the program, especially considering that difficulty finding decent work is a major inequality that persists amongst the youth population today (ILO, 2012).

Theme 3: Personal development

The fourth and final sub-question investigated in this chapter deals with participants' perceptions about Agency's role in their process of personal growth. As highlighted in the literature, the adolescence phase - a crucial period when young people are forming their

basic identities and trying to "find themselves" - is filled with struggles and confusions involving both social and internal processes (Erikson, 1968). In a postmodern society where young people's world and consciousness are being shaped by communications technology and mass media (and representations powerful enough to shake foundations of meaning and identity), advancing pathways that stimulate critical thinking, subjectivity and imagination in the tumultuous stage of adolescence is fundamental to help form empowered citizens capable of driving change (Frymer, 2005, Giroux, 2010; Kellner and Share, 2007; McInnerney, 2009).

This is precisely what Agency provoke participants to do: develop a better understanding of the society around them and reflect about their place in the world, results reveal. The exercise of stepping out of their own experiences to consider the reality of others, critically analyzing media and state discourses, and taking part in discussions about current issues impacting the favela youth, for instance, has led participants to identify and seek to change deep-rooted patterns of inequality and discrimination, broadening their political perspectives and social engagement. Over two third of participants attribute to Agency their inclination to now see the world differently.

By capacitating mostly black and low-income youth to become protagonists of their lives and lead community change, the program is taking an active role in creating a counter-narrative to dominant discourses that portray young favela dwellers as lazy, powerless, dangerous or mere objects of social action. Instead, they are presented as potent, creative, knowledgeable and resourceful individuals, who are capable of findings solutions to some of the city's biggest problems. The actions that are born out of this approach help transform the politics of representation of favela dwellers and confront the culture of marginalization of the poor, as it will be further discussed in chapter 5 (Grandra, 2015; Perlman, 2010; Souza e Silva, 2014).

As participants are encouraged to embrace their identities and advance local culture, they further engage in the process of self-discovery and self-acceptance, a crucial step in the development of non-cognitive skills such as self-perception, coping and resilience (Gutman and Schoon, 2013). Notably, over two thirds of participants believe that being a part of the program helped improve their self-esteem. This is a particularly important finding given that favela youth face serious barriers on quality of life including exposure to poverty and violence, limited work and income opportunities, and lack of platforms for cultural affirmation. In addition to being more likely to experience financial hardship compared to their white counterparts, black males, in particular, are disproportionately impacted by lethal violence, racial profiling and discrimination. The study revealed that being black and a man deeply shapes one's perceptions about race and racism. For example, black males (as well as black participants in general) feel more discriminated when frequenting urban spaces and believe that people fear them because of their appearance in larger proportions than their fellow youth, and even more so than white males.

The element of "experimentation" so prominent in Agency's methodology, invites young people to engage with new ideas and possibilities that extend well beyond their immediate lives. The result is a rupture of geographical and symbolic divisions in the form of expended repertoires, tools for engagement and mobility - which symbolizes Agency's contribution to the radicalization of democracy. The study reveals that favela youth face considerable limitations in access to public spaces and cultural resources, with one third of participants indicating in the onset of the program to had never set foot inside a museum, a theatre and two thirds inside a university campus. Within four months, participants' mobility in the city had expanded considerably thanks, at least partially, to Agency's efforts to make way to platforms for leisure and education.

Finally, as they support youth through the process of personal development,

participants discussed how Agency gave them stimulus to open their horizons, consider what they can accomplish, and become more curious-minded. The majority of participants point out that Agency increased their desire to learn and influenced them to continue their studies. Displaying a program satisfaction rate of over 90% and a dropout rate of less than 20% per cycle, we can conclude that Agency has successfully created mechanisms to keep young people engaged and excited about the learning process, while helping them cultivate a "sense of place" in the world through a platform that invites them to act on their capacities and lay de groundwork for transformation in their own lives and communities.

Tools for youth empowerment

These findings offer important implication to the literature on empowerment and possibilities to promote it through education. In the discussion that follows, as well as that of chapters to come, I borrow from critical pedagogy, but also theoretical frameworks beyond it, in efforts to connect the broader elements of empowerment to the experiences of participants in the Agency program mainly through a people-centered approach to participatory development (Jupp et.al, 2010). It is important to note that this study is not aimed at measuring empowerment using pre-established indicators, nor did I design my data collection strategy with a particular framework of empowerment in mind; rather, I explore ways in which theory may inform practice (and vice versa) in helping interpret real life processes of personal development and community transformation that, at a particular point in time and at a particular setting, impacted people's lives, as they themselves interpret it.

As noted in chapter 2, agency is at the heart of empowerment. If, like Hayward and Lukes (2008), we agree that what "relatively powerless" individuals can do, be, and how much power they can exercise is significantly limited by social constraints (although there is much discussion around the sources of those constraints), then agency is a catalyst linking freedom for purposeful and strategic choice-making and actions for transformation, which

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may be exercized in multiple areas of life and societal dimensions (private, public and social domains) and are contingent on access to different assets and capabilities (Ibrahim and Alike, 2007; Nayaran, 2002; Samman and Santos, 2009; Sen, 1999; White and Wyn, 1998).

Being that the opportunity structures available to people is what enables or disables them from exercising agency effectively and transforming choices in desired outcomes, then, it is imperative that any real attempt to explore pathways for empowerment is centered on people's lifeworld. Accordingly, drawing from youth studies, a contextual approach to conceptualizing youth experiences in light of social agency incorporates the analysis of social processes and social divisions shaping the lives of young people, which place pressures and limits on their agency (White and Wyn, 1998).

In line with this, my analysis reveals that participant youth benefiting from Agency face challenges characteristic of informal urban communities. They are poor, grew up in conditions of hardship and emotional distress, are largely exposed to criminal groups and impacted by community violence, have low educational levels, and face great barriers to attending university. Blacks, in particular, suffer racial discrimination and are more likely to have a low income. They are also disproportionately exposed to lethal violence, as discussed in chapter 1. And yet, these young people display great resilience, a positive outlook on life, and an enormous potential to negotiate their own futures and work through adverse social and economic conditions (i.e. navigating household instability and violence, breaking barriers to education, creating alternatives to university).

A multi-faceted process that occurs in different spheres of life, empowerment is a complex and contested concept that remains broadly defined. At the level of the individual, borrowing from frameworks in educational psychology and adult education, empowerment may be understood as a process of capacity-building through which one becomes more self-aware, self-sufficient, confident, assertive, effective and dynamic (Crowther, 2013; Inglis,

1997). It refers to individual feelings, attitudes and skills which are essential in expanding peoples' capacity to take control of their lives (Jennings et.al., 2006; Van Der Merwe and Albertyn, 2009; Zimmerman, 2000). In this sense, participants' development of a series of important non-cognitive skills via the Agency program, including the ability to organize ideas, formulate arguments, speak in public, make decisions, work in group and get focused, are illustrative of personal empowerment outcomes.

By encouraging youth to exercise self-expression and to embrace their local culture and identities, Agency deepens the process of self-discovery and self-acceptance, resulting in participants' improving their self-esteem and cultivating a renewed stimulus to continue learning and growing. This pattern of empowerment which act as a force for self-confidence allowing individuals to develop a greater love for themselves, is, Peter McLaren notes, gained through knowledge and social relations that dignify one's history, language and cultural traditions - approaches that are at the heart of Agency's methodology (McLaren, 2009). According to Tom Inglis, these are central feelings and attitudes brought about by empowerment which help people scape inequality and poverty, but they cannot stand alone (Inglis, 1997; Nayaran, 2002).

Considering that empowerment also involves material, social and institutional preconditions to the exercise of agency (Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007) and the fact the favela youth traditionally lack access to tools for engagement and platforms for personal development beyond the scope of their immediate lives and social interactions, the expansion of repertoire, networks and mobility in the city advanced by Agency - which serve to expose participants to new knowledge, frameworks of references and professional opportunities - are also important mechanisms of survival and purposeful choice-making within the restricting social structures that shape their lifeworld.

Finally, from a critical pedagogy standpoint, empowerment is strongly linked to the

process of consciousness-raising and an expansion in people's capacity to express themselves, recognize patterns of inequality, and critically analyze the various ways in which oppressive structures and practices work upon their lives (Barroso, 2002; Biesta, 2010; Galloway, 2012; Lissovoy, 2010). Translating these efforts into educational practice, as the results show, Agency involve participants in activities that are meant to stimulate them to discuss and engage with issues related to the socio-political environment around them, bolstering their capacity to think critically about different ideas and discourses and leading them to reflect upon their place in the world.

Apart from efforts to help create a counter-narrative to dominant discourses about the favela youth, presenting them from a positive and new light, Agency's positioning of young people at the forefront of initiatives relevant to their territories as protagonists is, most importantly, an invitation to larger social change. That is, Agency open up new possibilities for the favela youth to transform themselves as they transform their communities. This is connected to the broader discussion on the different facets of empowerment, one which is mainly exercized at the individual (micro) level, leading to people enhancing their skills, learning to navigate and becoming more powerful within the system, and empowerment at levels external to individuals themselves (interpersonal and macro), which carry a politically-radical component that seeks to address unequal power relations, and, ultimately, help transform society (Inglis, 1997; Partiff, 2004; Van Der Merwe and Albertyn, 2009). The extent to which program participants act upon their capacities and newly expanded skills beyond the individual level to lead community change is explored in chapter 5.

Conclusion

Favela youth face challenges characteristic of marginalized communities. Over one third of Agency participants live in poverty or extreme poverty, with blacks being more likely to face financial hardship and have a lower income. Consequently, most grew up in

conditions of hardship (whether financial or emotional) and carried the weight of household responsibilities from a young age. For instance, a significant share was raised by their mothers and at least one quarter had an absent father or lived with a drug-dependent parent. A reflection of favelas' entrenched history of criminality and lack of state presence, participants experienced (and still do today) incredible community violence and nearly half have friends or relatives who have been involved in drug trafficking. And yet, they tend to view challenges from their childhood in a positive light and have a hopeful outlook for the future, despite facing limited options for social and economic mobility.

Barriers in education, from low completion rates, to high age-per-grade level distortion, and the school dropout phenomenon (which is mainly connected to the need to meet immediate life pressures) are pervasive amongst this group. Although more educated than their parents overall, participants have been unable to break generational barriers in education at the higher education level - an obstacle they attempt to overcome by enrolling in alternative non-formal courses as a pathway to university. Thus, empowerment as discussed in this analysis, takes place in a context of poverty, social risk and inequality, but that also breeds resilience and creative ways to navigate through adverse life conditions.

Through the Agency platform, participants improve a series of life skills crucial to personal development, including, but not limited to, the ability to organize and concentrate, speak in public, work in group, make decisions and formulate argument to assert their ideas. They also cultivate technical skills related to project creation and implementation, strengthening cognitive capacities. However, one of the most significant emerging elements of empowerment - which is closely tied to emancipatory practices - is reflected in young people's engagement in activities that encourage them to think critically about different issues and discourses impacting their lives and communities. As participants develop a better understanding of the society around them and reflect about their place in the world, they

also broaden their political perspectives and social engagement. In addition - given that favela youth are often limited in their access to external contacts, public spaces, and cultural resources - the program advance strategies to expand young people's mobility in the city, repertoire and networks, resulting in an opening in their frame of reference and opportunities beyond their immediate lives, from new professional pathways to support systems for project development.

Essentially, Agency capacitates mostly black and low-income youth to draw from their lived experiences and knowledge to find solutions to community challenges and lead actions of social impact. By doing so, they take an active role in creating a counter-narrative to dominant discourse which stereotype young favela dwellers, portraying them instead as the potent, knowing, creative and resourceful individuals they are. Such affirmative approach to working with young people through an educational platform that invites them to act on their capacities and become protagonists of their own lives, leads to a deepening in the process of self-discovery and self-acceptance. Participants not only improve their self-esteem and learn to embrace their identities and culture, but they also find a refreshed stimulation to continue learning and investing in their desires under a new horizon of possibilities.

CHAPTER 5

Young People as Agents of Social Change

Introduction

Aligned with the study interest in approaching education as a vehicle for social transformation, this chapter analyzes participants' use of their capacities, skills and assets - expanded through a process of personal empowerment - to lead community change. The main objective is to help set a picture of the concrete ways in which youth have impacted their territories via the Agency platform and the program's overall role in promoting community transformation in a context of social marginalization. The first segment of the analysis considers changes in participants' relationship with their communities (5.1) from a perspective of how they perceive and embrace the territory (5.1.1) and how they make use of the potency present in those spaces to break entrenched barriers of favela segregation (5.1.2). The chapter move on to explore the use of social entrepreneurship to drive community change (5.2) by surveying into participants' contributions to create solutions to address some of favelas' biggest challenges (5.2.1), and providing examples of outcomes in territorial impact from the various projects created through the methodology (5.2.2).

The figure below summarizes the data sets used to guide the analysis, shape the narrative, and establish the findings presented in this chapter.

Figure 9. Data matrix RQ2. Categories and sub-categories emerging from data sources used to address research question thematics.

THEME 1

Relationship with the community and the city

CATEGORY

Engaging, embracing and empowering communities

SUB-CATEGORIES AND DATA

Recognizing the community as a place of potency

- Qualitative nodes
  - Community belonging
  - Community engagement
  - Community value
  - A sense of agency
- Survey findings
- Informational documents

Investing in local culture and breaking social barriers

- Qualitative nodes
  - Tap into community's potential
  - Expanding right to the city
  - Generating a new city narrative
  - Protagonism and potency
  - Representation and visibility
- Survey findings
- Informational documents

THEME 2

Entrepreneurship and project impact

CATEGORY

Fostering social entrepreneur-ship to drive community change

SUB-CATEGORIES AND DATA

Creating solutions and projects to address favela challenges

- Qualitative nodes
  - Fostering entrepreneurship
  - Idea for project/motivation
  - Based project on community needs
  - Project sought to lessen rivalry between communities
  - Engagement with other youth
- Survey findings
- Informational documents

Impacting lives and building stronger communities

- Qualitative nodes
  - Project impact
  - Population benefited from project
  - Stories of impact
- Survey findings
- Informational documents

5.1. "If I want to see change take place I need to become agent of this change:" engaging, embracing, and empowering communities

5.1.1. Recognizing the community as a place of potency

The concept of "sense of community" is a multifaceted one that encompasses different dimensions and definitions depending on the discipline or practice from which is taken on - although much of the literature tend to advance research related to the positive aspects of community life and engagement (Pretty et al., 2006). In the field of psychology, for example, one of the most influential definitions advanced by McMillan and Chavis (1986) conceptualize the term "sense of community" as "a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members will be met through their commitment of being together." (McMillan and Chavis, 1986, p. 9). Within this framework, the authors advance the combination of four main elements (membership, influence, integration and fulfilment of needs, and shared emotional connection), all of which incorporate different attributes concerning feelings and interactions (McMillan and Chavis, 1986).

Research has shown that, for young people, in particular, a sense of community is strongly tied to their residential neighbourhoods. These "social microcosms" represent important leaning spaces where youth are exposed to everyday experiences and interactions which help shape their identity, sense of belonging and support (Pretty et al., 2006). As for the favela youth, given the complexities and predicaments that are at the heart of these territories, it comes as no surprise that this relationship with the community presents some instability. For example, when asked to answer a few questions in regards to how they feel about and engage with other residents of their community, Agency youth provided mixed responses. While 48% of survey respondents agree or strongly agree that people in their community take advantage of others when given a chance and 35% claimed they generally do not trust them, 44% feel like they can count on their neighbours when needed and 35%

believe that many community residents care about them. The later statements are relevant to the kind of positive sense of community that Agency seeks to encourage, not only in relation to how youth feel about their fellow residents, but also in terms of helping them recognize the community as a place of potency, and identify ways in which they can tap into that potency to effect change.

The word "territory" represents a window of opportunities inside the Agency methodology - and that is reflected in how youth are invited to actively engage with their place of residence through the program. Notably, as part of developing their projects, participant youth make an inventory of territorial assets and establish partnerships with different actors inside their communities who cooperate with them in concretizing their ideas (I expand on this activity in chapter 6). For example, a young girl who wants to start a project in fashion is encouraged to make connections with local workers and businesses (seamstresses, clothes fabric, individual sellers, etc.), a step that not only serves to support this girl in projecting herself and advancing her interests, but that also help generate income for other community members. The premise is that, by investing in networks inside their communities, these young people can do more than just create a project; they have the potential to change their territory and contribute to reducing inequalities (Lisboa and Delfino, 2015). Agency rationalizes this element of the methodology as follows:

> The favela used to be seen as a place of absolute negation, where nothing could be done, where no value was recognized. Agency seeks to invert this logic and show the favela youth that that space offers fundamental elements for their projects. And that, being from the favela, they can indeed become creators in life and in the world, recognizing the territory from under the lens of the opportunities and potentiality it offers (Lisboa and Delfino, 2015, p. 69).

This kind of affirmative approach to one's territory that shed light on various forms of community wealth (Yosso, 2006) and promotes engagement has the potential to also impact youth's sense of community belonging, as noted by several participants during the

interviews. Cristiano - who moved to the Cidade de Deus favela at the age of eleven and spent the following years struggling to feel at home - discussed how Agency helped him develop a sense of belonging and community pride. He said:

> Being at Agency gave me this understanding, that from that moment that I moved to that community, that place became mine also. So, if I want to see change take place, I need to become agent of this change. It was also good in terms of expanding my understanding of the territory, so I could embrace it… I then started seeing the favela as a place that produces, that creates, that has ideas, that is filled with youth who want to be entrepreneurs and people who work hard, so that works needs to be valued.

As for Aline - whose project involved the production of a movie featuring youth from Batan telling the life stories of local residents through music - the community value she cultivated during her time in the program spread beyond her own individual experience. When asked to describe the kinds of changes that Agency prompted in how she relates with her community, Aline explained that on top of experiencing an improvement in the way she perceives and embraces the territory, her project also provoked residents who took part in the initiative to look at their community differently. She said:

> I didn't feel like a resident of Batan; I hated the place where I lived... I didn't have any kind of affection for it and I was ashamed to live there, to be honest. As my project developed, I was able to create a bond with that place, and I started noticing that other people felt the same way I did. I saw it in their eyes when they would say things like: 'Wow, there is all of that here? I had no idea. That is really cool!' So, from a view that only portrays that place from the aspect of violence, we were able to bring another perspective that changed the way people see their community.

Agency's effort to bring participants closer to their communities and engage them in the process of territorial transformation is palpable and has helped shaped new trajectories of youth participation and engagement. No small feat considering that over three quarters of Agency participants indicated they have never taken part in a social group, organization from the civil society or NGO present in their communities. According to Lucas - a 21-year-old from Cantagalo who created the largest urban dance festival taking place in a favela

today - Agency was fundamental is helping him comprehend his own responsibility in leading community action: "Agency awakened in me a desire to help people. Now, because of my project, I can see the problematics of my territory, and through it, I am able to help others somehow, the same way Agency did for me," he acknowledged. At the end of their time at Agency, 47% of participants claimed that they got together with friends or community residents to discuss problems and improvements for the territory, compared to 28% from when they first started the program.[45]

5.1.2. Investing in local culture and breaking social barriers

Agency's proposal to guide participants into perceiving their territory from its positive aspects and what it has to offer does more than encouraging them to tap into community potential to create their projects; this practice also opens a space for young people to showcase their own realities and knowledge of issues impacting their daily lives as well as that of residents of their communities. As understood and applied in the Agency methodology, the element of "biopractices" (or, simply, the act of practicing life) promotes the recognition of life elements as tools of expression and potency, inviting the favela youth to help create new narratives from the perspective of their own trajectories, personal references, and cultural capital (Lisboa and Delfino, 2015). As a result, 39% of survey respondents claimed that, while in the program, they used examples of their own lives to help develop a concept or idea frequently or very frequently (this number jumps to 75% if we include "sometimes" answers). In addition, after experiencing Agency, 58% of participants trust that they have enough knowledge of their communities to carry out a project that can benefit residents.

Fundamentally, this aspect of the methodology aims to rupture with the stigmatized

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[45] This question considered activities carried out by participants within three months prior to answering the survey.

view of the favela youth and create legitimate narratives that originate from the experiences and life stories of those who live in those spaces. The following quote expand on Agency's view about the importance of biopractices:

> To have an impact means to generate new imaginaries in the city, knocking down labels and clichés that limit the range of characters in favelas to types such as the bloodthirsty criminal, the needy who is naive and simple-minded, or the guy who overcame poverty and managed to become an artist or a soccer player. To create new characters, however, it is necessary that we impact the youth with the methodology, because, if they take that in, they will multiply this impact not only in their territories but also in the city (Lisboa and Delfino, 2015, p. 41).

Agency acknowledges that not all young people impacted by the program will absorb and embrace its social stimulus the same way, which is natural given they work with individuals from different walks of life. What is truly important, they note, is to alert young people to their social responsibility and to their central position in empowering their communities and building new narratives to depict them (Lisboa and Delfino, 2015). As in the case of Michelle, the local print newspaper she helped create in Rocinha - a favela of over 70,000 inhabitants recognized as one of the largest urban informal settlements in Latin America and a city in its own right - gives prominence to the good aspects of her community, which are clouded by the media's excessive, and oftentimes exclusive, coverage of violent issues. She explained:

> We address everything in our newspaper, from culture, which is our focus, to social problems, garbage collection, health, entertainment… basically everything we have in our community. Violence is the only theme we do not discuss simply because the media already does that. We want to display the other side, the good things, and there are plenty of good things in our community. That's what you see in our newspaper… it isn't even an effort to find these stories, they are everywhere. This way, we portray the residents for who they are, and not for what the TV says about them. And that has immense value to us.

Lucas, whose dance festival "Favela in Dance" mobilizes around 10,000 people per edition, also discussed the importance of helping create new narratives of representation of

Rio's favelas through culture. Talking about the excitement and enjoyment that follows whenever the *passinho* turns up in the event, he said:

> The *passinho battles* are the highest point of our festival, the moment that our audience look forward to the most. When it starts, everyone runs to watch it. It is impossible to stand still. That happens because the *passinho* is in our essence, it was born in the favela, it is part of that space, so everyone understands it. So, this is very important, not only for dance in itself but also to show that a culture is born in that place.

As they tap into in the vast potential of their communities, Agency youth are also working to break with the social barriers so visibly present in Rio de Janeiro, which still separate citizens who live in the poorest areas of the city from those who live in the more affluent neighbourhoods - or the "asphalt," as favela dwellers commonly refer to spaces extending beyond peripheral enclaves, as noted earlier. This physical and symbolic segregation creates a "parted city" that negatively impact citizen relations and stipulates the rights hundreds of thousands of people have access to and the kind of treatment from the government they are most likely to receive. Given this scenario, Agency seeks to rupture with the socially constructed borders that forcibly separate bodies and ideas while inviting young people - who were for so long dislocated - to experience the city in its richness and totality. Thainá explained how Agency impacted her in this regard: "I feel as if I have left my own little world to discover a world new wide world… there are so many new things, new networks, new people. It's such a good experience," she emphazised.

As Agency sees it, this "expansion of repertoire" represents an actualization of young people's right to enjoy and be an active part of the city. Yet, broadening one's right to the city goes beyond promoting access to restricted spaces, engagement with new groups of people, and expanding mobility (these elements are discussed with greater detail in chapter 6). Perhaps the most important proposal is to encourage youth to develop a critical view of their relationship with the city, exploring its differences, and recognizing their position in it as well as that of their communities (Lisboa and Delfino, 2015). As Cristiano pointed out:

"Agency made me understand that everyone has a right to the city."

The program translates the concept of "city dispute" into a concrete effort to have participant youth impact the political arena in Rio de Janeiro, expanding their rights not only as citizens but also as agents of social mobilization. This takes place through visits to various public meetings, conferences, and grassroots events throughout the city - an educational process by which youth learn to assume their "place for speech" in important discussions about issues impacting their lives. "The city is a central part of Agency, and the discussions revolve around our roles in it," said Isabela, a 22-year old from Borel who was inspired to study urban geography thanks to her experience in the program.

Whatever initiative participants chose to advance inside the methodology, the prospect is that they connect to this larger effort to promote a dispute for the city. That is, the few hundred youth who have been impacted by Agency's methodology should use their position to influence public policies aimed at benefiting the peripheral and favela youth of Rio de Janeiro at large. Raquel, a 25-yer-old college student from Cidade de Deus, explained that it wasn't until she entered Agency that she began to develop a critical view of power dynamics shaping the city and the role of favelas in helping change them. She said:

> Agency showed me that I needed to go back to the territory, and that the territory is a place of potency, of networks… then I started to understand things differently. I started to understand that the city isn't parted, the city is only one, and that the right to it needs to be diffused to all its citizens. If I had gone through university but had not experienced Agency I wouldn't know that the city is a place of dispute. Because our society isn't harmonious, we are always disputing, but we need to let go of the moralistic thinking that sees that as a bad thing. It is part of surviving… I come from a place where we are always fighting to have the most basic things.

One of the main demands this "city dispute" seeks to accomplish is the establishment of a space for representation and visibility for the favela youth to bring to light their plight and potentiality. As Aline pointed out, "Agency put us in a place we were, until then, unable to see. We become protagonist of our actions. And this changed me; it opened my mind to

new life paths I can take." Agency stands out from other provisions directed at favela dwellers for its commitment to produce presence in the city. In other words, in addition to presenting and representing what exist in favelas and how life unfold in these spaces, they open up a platform for young people to exercise their right to experimentation and protagonism (Lisboa and Delfino, 2015). Agency understands this effort as follows:

> These youth circulate in other spaces, amplify their perception of the real, and expand their imagination, then they return to create new concepts. They go from being subjects who need to be 'cared for' to assume a place of protagonism in the social game. This is no small feat, being the owner of one's own ideas, plan of action, and possibilities for transformation. To talk about poverty or portray the poor is easy, what is difficult is to conceive and allow poor people to command and give them the legitimacy of being creators (Lisboa and Delfino, 2015, p. 67).

By placing young people from poverty-stricken communities at the center of the developing process, Agency is helping generate an authentic and more inclusive narrative for the city of Rio de Janeiro. Still, this is no easy task considering the difficult social and political environment the city (and the country as a whole) has been under. Take Viviane, for example, who for the past five years have led a community poetry initiative in Cidade de Deus that, amongst other topics, discusses current political issues impacting favela dwellers, including police violence and militarized state interventions. Due to her high profile as an activist and political figure, Viviane - who ran for city council through the Brazilian Communist Party during the 2016 Rio municipal elections - has received death threats online for openly denouncing human rights violations taking place in her community - which is once again caught in a vortex of violence with regular shootouts and police operations. Highlighting the importance of having young people assume a position of advocacy and resistance in times of hardship, she said:

> Our 'place for speech' is decisive and important because the transformation will need to go through the peripheral youth… given the difficult and dangerous times we are living in, in which our democracy is being threatened, we must take this stance with much firmness and clarity… it is moments like this

> when I realize the importance of what we are doing at City of God… if we think about the dictatorship era, it was very dangerous to organized any kind of meeting. And so, when we bring together one hundred people to discuss politics in an environment where there is no democracy, then we will also be seen as the enemies by some… in this context, we are conscious of our role in defending the plurality of voices. An open microphone can be a political act.

5.2. "With one small action you can change a person's life:" fostering social entrepreneurship to drive community change

5.2.1. Creating solutions and projects to address favela challenges

The concept of social entrepreneurship, a sub-field within the field of entrepreneurship, has grown to become an innovative business approach for addressing social challenges and a channel through which to provide basic needs to poorest segments of the population, helping fill the gap left by public funding shortages (Peredo and McLean, 2006). There are different interpretations and conceptions as to the definition of entrepreneurship and the entrepreneurial role per se, as well as distinctive perspectives on the kinds of initiatives and approaches that constitute social entrepreneurship. However, the general consensus is that social entrepreneurship is concerned with exploring opportunities that promote social value in oppose to focusing in profit-making, as in the case of commercial entrepreneurship (Certo and Miller, 2008). Certo and Miller (2008) advance the following definition: "Social entrepreneurship involves the recognition, evaluation, and exploitation of opportunities that result in social value - the basic and long-standing needs of society - as opposed to personal or shareholder wealth" (Certo and Miller, 2008, p. 267).

Accordingly, social entrepreneurship is the instrument used by Agency to support participants in becoming agents of community change. Although the program emphasises that their focus is not necessarily to train new entrepreneurs, the process of guiding youth to mature their ideas, establish connections, create a project and execute its related activities on the ground may lead to a move towards that direction. As Agency notes: "It isn't our

intention, but it is natural that some participants turn into entrepreneurs with the desire to create something out of their work and what they experienced at Agency… practically all participants leave with a certain entrepreneurial spirit" (Lisboa and Delfino, 2015, p. 29). This is the case of Wladimir, whose first-hand experience producing a movie featuring local artists telling stories about Batan inspired him to, one day, build a platform to help pass on his knowledge to others in the community: "Agency opened my mind to having my own business. We would like to become a producing studio, a film school, and teach other people what we have learned," he said, enthusiastically.

Agency problematizes the social and political environment of the city and provides young people with instruments to carry out actions of social impact, but participants themselves define what to do and how to do it, with whom to work, and what public to direct their projects to - which serve to stimulate self-confidence and a sense of autonomy. Hence, each participant is given a "permanent possibility to choose," backed by proper orientation and an active support system (Lisboa and Delfino, 2015). A few weeks into the program, once the focus is directed towards project creation, participants are asked to fill out a questionnaire entitled "strategic planning," which forces them to think seriously about the mission and main objective of their projects, as well as their role in concretizing them. The document includes questions such as: "What issue impacting my territory my project seeks to address? What dreams motivate my project? What actions are necessary to develop my project? What kind of results I expect my project to have? amongst others.

Raquel explained that it was during this exercise that she had the idea to create her project "Providing in Favor of Life," a platform for teen pregnancy prevention and support which, as mentioned earlier, became its own NGO. She walked me through the evolution of the project inside the program:

> When I started at Agency I didn't know what project I wanted
> to create; I only knew I wanted to help my community. Then,

> throughout the cycle, I started to build an idea. A few years back, I helped a friend of mine who got pregnant and went through some difficulties. Once Agency started to ask me what I thought my community needed, I thought to myself: 'as it happened to my friend, I see a lot of girls in the community who get pregnant and have no support'… and that is how I started this involvement with pregnant teens and immersed myself in the project.

Through a project lens that incorporated the experiences of her close friend and other girls who grew up around her as well as her own first-hand exposure to motherhood at the age of 26, Raquel created an initiative of extreme relevance to her community: it is estimated that the incidence of teenage pregnancy in Rio favelas is five times higher compared to the city's high-income neighbourhoods (Portal Brasil, 2004).

When analyzing the over 180 original projects created by favela youth inside the Agency methodology in these five years of existence, it becomes clear that the ideas and motivation behind these social ventures are as varied as participants' backgrounds, life experiences, and personal interests; yet, they share an element of innovation and context-relevant transformation (see figure 10 for a breakdown of projects by category). Accordingly, 65% of survey respondents agree that a project is beneficial to the local population only if connected to people's necessities and realities.

From projects to support education, sports and leisure, health, and professional development to residents of all ages, to initiatives to promote black identity, favela beauty and fashion, arts and culture, which reach far beyond the scope of the community, these young people are making full use of their knowledge of the territory to create solutions to address critical challenges and the real needs of the population in those spaces - conditions that would be difficult for actors coming from the outside to fully recognize. This approach is based on the conviction that no owner is better positioned than a favela resident to say what the community needs the most. As Raquel pointed out in her book: "Many people bring ideas and actions to the favela, but those do not always reflect our needs" (Spinelli,

2014, p. 13).

For instance, the "Girls Moto-taxi," a project developed by four girls from João XXIII, sought to provide alternative transportation option for girls and women in the community. Many Rio favelas are located in steep mountains, making it difficult for residents to move in and out, particularly those living in the highest points of the territory. Access to and availability of public transportation such as buses and vans can be quite restricted, which makes moto-taxis ideal modes of transportation for their facility to squeeze into small streets and alleys. Although these moto-taxis offer a reliable (and cheap) transportation option for thousands of favela residents to get to and from their houses in addition to generating work (especially for young people) they do not enjoy legal status and are still very much criminalized. According to Marcus Faustini, this issue speak volumes to the city's inability to recognize the favela youth as potent individuals capable of creating important urban solutions. He said:

> "When we see something being done in the favela, a 'jerry-rig', we say that it is illegal, that it is informal. To me, 'jerry-rigs' are start-ups. These are ambitious people who did not have access to networks and repertoire close to them to keep up with their desires and inventive power… so what we want to do is to rupture with the invisibility of representation impacting these youth. Until this day, the moto-taxis, the greatest urban transportation solution that has ever been created in this city, has not been recognized because it originates from the favela youth" (Faustini, 2013).

To this extent, when these young girls from Santa Cruz used the Agency platform to pitch their project, they did not only offer a concrete option to improve public transportation in their community, but they also created an opening to address issues of gender equality and women's empowerment in favelas. Débora, the 19-year-old who led the project, rationalized her proposal during Agency's 2015 stimulus cycle: "I love motorcycles and I ride on my HondaBiz back and forth. But, I rarely see women doing it, so that's why I thought we should create a group of moto-taxi made up of girls only… I want women to feel safe when they

circulate in the community," she added (Agência de Redes Para Juventude, 2015).

Several Agency projects have also touched on the critical issue of violence, with young people taking the front seat in advancing creative ways to help mitigate rivalry between communities. As has been noted, since the boom of the cocaine trade in the early 1980's, Rio favelas have become contested spaces and hubs for turf wars protagonized by rival drug factions and militias over territorial control. In addition to placing the lives of thousands of residents who are "caught in between" at risk, this nonstop conflict also spawns estrangement and animosity amongst residents of different communities under the control of rival drug factions. Facing this complex social scenario, during the 2012 cycle, Fernando and three of his friends from Fumacê decided to use the Agency platform to create a space for community coexistence through dance.

"Mosaico" then emerged as an initiative that took place inside a public school located in the "border" between the historically rival communities of Fumacê and Batan, bringing together children and youth from the two territories under the same roof to take funk and hip hop lessons - an activity that most young people can relate to and enjoy, regardless of what favela they come from. Felipe, a 25-year-old dancer and choreographer, talked about the group's motivation to set up the project: "these communities were not very friendly towards one another. There was no dialogue, and we saw that difficulty… so we created this space for people to come together, dance, and have fun," he explained. Mosaico, which has been formalized as a small business, remains active and now takes place in the City of God favela thanks to additional funding from Agency as well as other cultural grants.

In a like manner, the project "Art Imitates Life" created by Milena - a 21-year-old from the Borel favela - uses theatre to unite young people from the next-door communities of Borel and Casa Branca, which are also divided by the organized crime. Milena explained that the idea to focus the project on fostering constructive community conciliation actually started

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inside Agency when it became clear that youth from Casa Branca were over-represented in their territorial nucleus. She said:

> In Borel, where I live, young people have a certain resistance towards the youth from Casa Branca because they are communities dominated by different drug factions. When I arrived to Agency and we started to form our group, I noticed that the majority of members were from Casa Branca, and they saw that too. I think it was only me and another girl who were from Borel. So, we decide to use this idea and create a project to attract youth from both communities.

Agency's effort to bring young people from different communities closer and experience the methodology together is reflected in participants' growing affinity to other favela youth as they experience the program. For instance, at the end of their stance at Agency, over two thirds of participants indicated that the more they meet youth around them, the more they realize how much they have in common. Maicon's account about his increased engagement with other youth and the awareness he took from this experience speaks to this point. He said:

> We come to this place and we engage with many different people. For example, on my first day at Agency there were 60 people in the room. You have to work on your own project, but you also exchange ideas with other people… you meet youth from various favelas, then you start seeing how different things are in the favelas of the South zone, in the favelas of the West zone, and that opens your mind… we get together, we mix up, and those who are smart take what is good from one another and keep going.

Figure 10. Agency projects. Total of 180 projects created inside the Agency methodology by main category including examples.

24%

- Arts, dance, & music

ConnectCult | Connect youth from schools and orphanages trough culture, having them collectively engage in theater, grafitti, and circus workshops.

11%

- Sports & leisure

CDD patina | Extend the recreational universe of CDD with the promotion of skating activities in public community squares to children aged 6-12 .

10%

- Social work & cmty support

Towards the future | Hold events and meetings between homeless people and community actors of interest who can provide them with some assistance.

7%

- Favela fashion & style

Stilizing | Barber shop and men's fashion spot providing customized hair cuts/clothes based on the original style coming out of Beco do Manassés in the Fumacê favela.

7%

- Environment & ecology

RecycleArt | Re-use of recycled materials for handicraft and arts production in Cantagalo.

7%

- Audiovisual culture

Cine Batan | cineclub focused on national cinema that holds movie sessions followed by debates in the homes of residents of Batan.

7%

- Professional development

Come on over | An incubator offering entrepreneurship opportunities for youth with courses and training in car washing, jewerly-making, English, and barbering.

6%

- Education

EDUZER | A network of local teachers in Compledo do Alemão who help children with their school homework.

5%

- Other

My Afro world | A suppport platform to Black young girls that in addition to conducting workshops on Afro braiding also offers support classes in Portuguese and mathematics.

4%

- Journalism & media

Maré sees it | Promote citizen participation in the generation of information and other contents (news, artistical expressions, etc.) for a community virtual portal.

3%

- Community tourism

From CDD to the world | Educational tourism for children focused on teaching and promoting the history of the Cidade de Deus favela.

3%

- Poetry & literature

Seeds | Educational space for children encouring them to develop a closer contact with books and to take part in interactive activities such as storytelling and film workshops.

3%

- Internet & gaming

One hand login another | Digital inclusion project focused on providing internet support to elderly people.

3%

- Food and culinary

Quentex | Homemade food sale and professional training aimed at supporting local street food vendors.

5.2.2. Impacting lives and building stronger communities

As has been explored, the cornerstone of Agency is found in its commitment to direct participant youth to lead transformation in their communities - a challenging task given that many of the projects developed are small-scale and run on limited funding. Nonetheless, the capacity of these young people to do much with little is palpable and demonstrate how much can be accomplished when individuals are given the incentive and opportunity to experiment together with the tools and support to create. As Veruska, one of Agency's senior methodology coordinators noted, a 'first push' does wonders when it comes to cultivating a social entrepreneurial spirit in participant youth: "Some youth are a little lost when they come in, and then, gradually, they start assuming their place for speech, their place as creators. I love it when they say: 'I am a coordinator of such project… I use such methodology in my project.' It is amazing to see how fast they process these codes."

When asked to discuss the main developments they believe their projects brought about, participants spoke with pride about the modest but significant impact they were able to drive in people's lives and their communities. Renan, for instance, who leads "Orchestra" - a project that offers music lessons to the lowest-performing students of a public school in Rio's North Zone - explained that by exposing young people to music inside their school environment and creating a space for them to be creative and perform, they contributed to improving students' academic performance and interest in other school subjects. He said:

> I've always known that music transforms people, but I could not have imagined the kind of impact this project would have. We work with the worst students in the school, so whenever the teachers come to the room where we are giving our lessons they joke: 'These cannot be the same students who are always disturbing my class.' A teacher even told me: 'These students are really changing. I am not sure what is going on but they are studying now.' One guy who was considered the worse student in the entire school was just approved to the second phase of a mathematics competition. Before, he would never go to class and did not study at all. So, Agency made that possible, and it also opened my mind to understanding that with one small action you can change a person's life.

Orchestra, which focuses on guitar and percussion education, remains active and attends approximately 50 students. In summer 2016, around the same time I was conducting fieldwork in Rio, a famous Brazilian singer named Sandra de Sá visited the school where the project runs and spent an afternoon singing and engaging with students, helping bring more visibility to the initiative. Renan explained that in addition to receiving comments from teachers on how much students have improved since joining the project, he is also constantly approached by parents who, noticing the benefits, ask him for tips on how to incentive their kids to continue taking classes and deepen their knowledge of music.

Another example of an Agency project that is ongoing and is also promoted as an extracurricular school activity is the "Smart Garden" - an initiative that involves the revitalization of a space in the Providência favela, where garbage is deposited, and the promotion of planting and gardening workshops for children aged 5-12 for a period of three months. During the interview, Hugo, one of the young people behind the project, shared an account of a student experience that impacted him deeply. He said:

> We work with children teaching them how to plant tomatoes, peppers, these kinds of basic crops. Recently, the mother of one of our students told us that her son spent weeks after the workshop taking such good care of the plant, and once it grew, he begged her to send a picture of it to all his cousins and aunts. The mother said that she cried out of happiness seeing her son wake up early every day to water the plan then got back to bed, and she felt thankful for having had the chance to experience the workshop with him… this is such a simple thing but it meant so much to the two of them at that moment.

In addition to benefiting dozens of students from a public school in Providência, Elisângela - a 19-year-old who founded the project back in 2014 - explained that Smart Garden now also takes place in a day care centre nearby, thanks to a personal request from the director. When asked to describe in what ways the experience leading a social project might have impacted her as a citizen, she said: "There are so many things I still have to do for the project. I want to multiply it, take it to other schools, and also develop other actions.

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As a resident, I have many ideas of things I can do for my community." In 2015, with financial support from Agency and the American Consulate in Rio de Janeiro, Elisângela took part in a study abroad program in Chicago promoted by the Green Star Movement, an NGO that inspires students and community members in the creation and revitalization of urban public art. "It was the best experience in the world. I had never been on a plane before," she said, referring to it as a trip of a lifetime (Agência de Redes Para Juventude, 2015).

Raquel is another Agency participant who has worked continuously to expand her project and increase its relevance in the community. Back in 2011, the inaugural year of the program, she created "Providing in Favour of Life" to assist teen moms in the Providência favela. The project, as previously stated, grew to became one of the most successful initiatives coming out of the Agency methodology to date. What began as a platform to offer emotional support, neonatal care education, and professional development to teenage moms - activities that are still ongoing - is now also a space dedicated to adult education, providing night classes in literacy training and GED courses to the broader community. Having attended over 200 pregnant girls and young mothers in its almost six years of existence (in addition to the more recent participants in the adult education courses) the project became a support mechanism for many in the community.

Their main priority, Raquel explained, is to inform young girls on their rights and responsibilities as mothers, and to offer them guidance through this important moment in life so they feel prepared and cared for. She expanded on some of the themes that are discussed in the informative workshops:

> Our workshops today are very rich. The girls learn about different philosophies of childbirth, such as humanized birth, so they can better plan their delivery. They leave that place knowing what is going to happen at the time of delivery; knowing what they want. We talk about their rights in terms of the delivery, the father's presence, what hospitals can and cannot do. Basically, they must know they don't have to obey the doctor blindly… they need to be able to express their preferences on how to give birth. So, we empower girls this

> way, in the recognition of their rights, and we also want to ensure they will have a good post-childbirth period with breastfeeding and everything else.

Considering that, in Rio de Janeiro, most women who die due to complications during childbirth are poor, low-educated and black (Silva, 2016), the significance of making initiatives of this kind available to young moms living in favelas and peripheries scattered throughout the city become even more apparent.

When asked to share an impact story that touched her, Raquel recalled a 19-year-old girl who was on her second unwanted pregnancy and felt depressed, which led her to nurture negative feelings towards her baby. "She would always cry and complaint about her situation," Raquel noted. During one of the breastfeeding classes, she persuaded the girl into convincing the father of the baby - who was absent and uninterested in learning about maternal and child health - to come along, an invitation that he accepted, although reluctantly. He ended up enjoying his experience in the class so much, mingling with other fathers-to-be and engaging in different activities, that he kept returning to take part in other workshops and even bought a cake for the organization's end-of-the-year party. "He loved the project and said he learned amazing things… the best part is that he understood his role in the pregnancy and is now more present in the girl's life," Raquel said, enthusiastically.

Throughout the years, several Agency participants have followed in Raquel's footsteps and created projects specifically dealing with teen pregnancy prevention and support. For instance, back in 2012, Carolina, a 21-year-old from Batan, developed "BatanFa," a space that was dedicated to offering much-needed psychological support to young moms in the community. Reflecting on the importance of the project, she said:

> These girls, the majority of whom were 14 and 15 years old, were missing this kind of support. Often times, they didn't have a present family or were single moms. So, our project helped fill that gap, with therapy sessions, pilates classes… we just wanted to exchange ideas with these girls and hear what they had to say.

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Although the project is no longer active, Carolina attributes her growing interest in social work to her experience at Agency: "there is a lack of social projects where I live, and although BatanFa has ended, I believe that projects of this kind should continue, because it looks like things only get worse, so I want to do my part and get involved in that again someday," she emphasized. If we take her academic progress as an indicator of her commitment to a continuous engagement with social justice issues, it is safe to say that Caroline in on the right path: she is currently enrolled at the Rural Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (RURAL) majoring in Social Sciences - an incredible achievement for anyone, but even more so for a young favela resident.

Adding to the inspiring accounts of young - but knowledgeable and strong females - who used the Agency platform to lead entrepreneurial social projects aimed at empowering and supporting girls and women in their communities, one of the focus of Ysabelly's project is to positively impact the lives of women living in the João XXIII favela in Santa Cruz. "Acting in Movement," a women's empowerment and professional development project, supports local micro businesses led by women, in addition to mapping and directing candidates to job vacancies and educational opportunities in the community and surrounding areas. Ysabelly explained the entrepreneurial segment of the project:

> We work with people who already have their small businesses, but for one reason or another, are unable to work to generate income for themselves. So, that is where we come in, helping them with a small amount so they can buy the materials they need to do their work and continue with their businesses, and that is helping them a lot. Then, they pay us back later, as per the contract.

It is important to highlight that providing small loans to micro business owners in João XXIII, one of the central aspects of the project, is also the main driver of problems and hostility given the climate of violence and intimidation that reigns in this particular community. Elisângela pointed out that members of the militia and loan sharks do not see with good eyes the fact she is lending money to women without their consent and are

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unhappy about the changing territorial dynamics a project like this entails. "They see everything as threatening. And our project, in one way or another, threatens them in the sense that it supports entrepreneurs, provide education, work… and it makes people circulate, brining people from the outside of the community in, and vice versa." In one instance, Elisângela talked to a member of the militia about renovating an abandoned lot in the community to hold job-market workshops and educational courses for residents, only to hear him reply that he would have the place demolished. "They do not want to see community improving," she noted. Despite all difficulties and the real dangers she faces Elisângela has persevered, supporting two entrepreneurial projects in addition to helping enrol 80 students in professional courses outside the favela.

Considering these stories of impact, it is clear that the "Agency effect" reaches way beyond individual participants, expanding to touch hundreds of residents of various Rio favelas and peripheries - accounts of transformation and resistance that could never fit or be comprehensively illustrated in this study. As pointed out by Ingrid - a 28-year-old from Cantagalo who is one of the coordinators of "Favela in Dance" - Agency gives young people the opportunity to share their accomplishments with their communities. Talking about some of the ways in which the festival mobilizes the community, she said.

> In the end, everyone who gets involved in the project succeeds somehow. The local businesses experience a peak in sales when the festival is taking place… performers, choreographers, and dance teachers from the community take part in the event, which gives them visibility… It's a win-win situation. Agency wins, the project wins, and the favela wins.

Interpretation and discussion of findings

Theme 1: Relationship with the community and the city

The second research question guiding the study moves beyond analyzing program impact at the individual level to explore Agency's role in promoting community development

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in Rio's favelas. Before that can be done, however, it is important to consider how the program may have helped shape participants' relationship with their communities. As discussed in chapter 1, favelas are complex territories displaying even more intricate sociability structures. Coupled with poverty and violence, decades of state neglect and the everyday dynamics of life under the control of criminal groups has weakened the social fabric in these territories, breeding solidarity and supportive systems, but also feelings of fear and mistrust. Thus, the relationship between the favela youth and the community is marked by instability, with participants demonstrating mixed feelings when describing their interactions with other residents: they claim their neighbours care about them and are helpful almost at the same rate as they not to trust them or feel like they tend to take advantage of others.

It is within this scenario that Agency works to help strengthen a sense of community, leading participants to recognize and approach the favela from a place of potency and opportunity. As part of the project development process, youth make an inventory of the various elements present in their territory that can help them concretize their ideas, including local actors and businesses they can potentially establish partnerships with. As a result, participants advance their own entrepreneurial pursuits while also creating income opportunities for other members of the community. This finding speaks to the potential of young people, with their energy and creativity, to help reduce inequalities when given the right tools. In the process of promoting community cultural wealth, participants become more connected to their territories and strengthen feelings of belonging and pride; in addition, by using their projects as a platform to highlight the positive aspects of favelas and countervail images of crime and violence - which are displayed overwhelmingly by the media - youth inspire residents to look at their communities differently.

My analysis has shown that Agency employ local culture as a weapon in the fight to

break through social barriers and place young people at the center of territorial transformation, helping them understand their crucial position in empowering their communities and building new narratives of representation. For instance, the number of youth who got together with other residents or friends to discuss problems and solutions for the community nearly doubled towards the end of their trajectory at Agency compared to when they first started the program. Although such increase in community engagement cannot be attribute exclusively to the program, this is an important result given that participants are not particularly prone to engage in social action (over three quarters have never been involved with an NGO or organization from the civil society) and not all embrace the methodology's social stimulus the same way.

For the most part, making use of elements of their daily lives and lived experiences as a tool of expression (biopractices), participants advance initiatives that originate from their knowledge of issues impacting their communities. The different voices and perspectives brought to light - which represent the plurality of characters present in those spaces - help generate new imaginaries in the city, from the perspective of favela youth's trajectories, personal references and cultural capital. In light of this, we may conclude that Agency brings out the "underground sociabilities" of favela youth, or, as Jovchelovitch and Priego-Hernández (2015) define, the hidden forms of social life which have been made invisible to the mainstream society by "geographical, economic, symbolic, behavioural and cultural barriers" (Jovchelovitch and Priego-Hernández, 2015).

By showcasing communities caught in a vortex of poverty and violence from their potential and inviting young residents to "dispute the city," assume their place for speech, and engage in social transformation, Agency help expand citizenship and political participation, while bringing a "parted city" defined by physical and symbolic segregation more close together. Through these actions, Agency joins the growing list of organizations

and social actors who are working to help rewrite the relationship between favela and the asphalt, mobilizing local resources and socio-cultural experiences to create positive practices of social regeneration and bottom-up responses to marginalization and exclusion (Jovchelovitch and Priego-Hernández, 2015).

Theme 2: Entrepreneurship and project impact

Another inquiry of this chapter is to explore precisely how these bottom-up responses are taking shape and the ways in which Agency participants have been able to impact their communities. Agency is an action-oriented educational methodology that not only seeks to deconstruct dominant discourses and problematize unequal social structures, but also provides young people with instruments to carry out actions of social impact. Making use of social entrepreneurship as a tool for community action, Agency is helping train a new generation of actors who are working to strengthen the cultural scene in favelas, while creating solutions to address critical challenges their communities face.

From platforms to promote women's empowerment and teen pregnancy prevention and support, to strategies to address education, work and urban transportation needs, and cultural initiatives meant to help mitigate conflict among youth from rival favelas and foster constructive community conciliation, results show that participants apply their knowledge of territorial resources, conditions and needs to advance development actions appropriate to - and respectful of - the favela context. The 180 original projects created inside the methodology vary in focus, objectives and target audience, but they all share an element of innovation and context-relevant transformation. In line with the 'for youth and by youth' mantra guiding the youth agenda of organizations such as UNESCO and Oxfam, Agency regards young people as essential actors in helping find solutions to the challenges they face, and not as mere beneficiaries of the work being carried out in their names (UNESCO, 2017).

Accordingly, in order to stimulate self-confidence and a sense of autonomy, the project creation process is built upon the 'permanent possibility of choice.' That is, with the help of activities that guide participants through the creation of a strategic planning to put their ideas into action, Agency orients and supports young people in maturing their projects, establishing connections, and executing related activities on the ground; however, participants themselves decide on which initiatives to develop, how to carry them out, with whom to collaborate and what public to focus on. Although projects are small-scale and run on limited funding, their impact is significant and reach beyond the individuals to include the communities at large, as the analysis has shown. In addition, one quarter of participants have successfully formalized their projects as businesses, increasing their relevance in the community and helping build local capacity.

The extent to which these strategies have reached community members from different favelas (at one point or another, several hundred people have been impacted by these projects), the diverse populations benefited (such as children, adult learners, jobseekers, local artists and businesses), and the various platforms that have served as catalysts for these actions (from public schools and community centers, to improvised auditoriums and residents' own homes), is a finding that exceeds expectations and highlights the potential of local actions to help build stronger communities, drawing from their own challenges and opportunities.

Tools for youth-led community transformation

These outcomes are consistent with positive youth development strategies that place young people at the heart of their own development, a key component in youth empowerment theory from the perspective of community psychology (Ledford, 2013; The Commonwealth, 2016). Within this framework, empowerment is identified as a multi-level process of social action that occurs at different levels, reaching individuals, families,

organizations and communities. That is, it involves young people becoming problem-solvers, decision-makers and owners of their own future, in addition to drivers of change in capacities that reach beyond their immediate lives, connecting well-being with the larger social and political environment. According to Marc Zimmerman (2000), as a collective force, empowerment has to do with processes and structures that promote skills enhancement, shared well-being, and support systems to effect chance, including the strengthening of networks and connections to improve the community quality of life (Jennings et.al., 2006; Ledford et.al., 2013; Zimmerman, 2000).

Relevant to this discussion is Agency's ability to not only provide participant youth with skills and tools for engagement that lead to personal development outcomes, but to also present them with entrepreneurial instruments so they can carry out actions of social impact. The numerous projects created inside the Agency platform in the past five years are born out of the experiences, references, knowledge and aspirations of favela youth and address what they believe to be the most pressing issues impacting their communities. Rather than imposing interventions based on generic approaches to local development, by simply asking individuals what they want, need, and aspire, while inviting them to actively contribute in helping bring about those changes, Agency is advancing strategies that are relevant to populations and context they seek to contribute to. Results show that hundreds of community members from all ages have taken part and benefited from these projects in various ways, including, but not limited to, enjoying new platforms of access to leisure, arts, sports and education, receiving support to expand their own businesses, exploring family planning and health strategies, or finding new income opportunities.

Given that empowerment, both at the individual and collective levels, is ultimately a process that takes place within a changing context that either enables or limits its materialization, these results, are, of course, subjected to a constant shift and must be

interpreted with caution (Jupp et.al, 2010). The fact that projects have limited funds and, for the most part, face difficulties surviving beyond Agency (roughly 34% of all projects funded are still active today) places limitations on the sustainability of these outcomes. Nonetheless, at a given point in time, within this particular social microcosm, the analysis has shown that these initiatives have indeed managed to reach the lifeworld of communities. Most importantly, although analyzed alongside other data sets (informational documents, social media content, staff interviews, observations), these accounts are described here as collectively empowering mainly in light of participants' perceptions about the significance of these projects on the ground and ways in which they have impacted them and the community at large.

Such interpretive and context-sensitive framework allow participants to develop on their own understandings of change, building upon their lived experiences and the meanings they have ascribed to processes of transformation within the context of their daily lives and realities. This aligns with innovative strategies to measuring empowerment that focuses on the views of community members themselves about what empowerment is and how it comes about as a mean to quantify qualitative assessments of impact. The very act of thinking and talking about this concept, Jupp et.al. argue, is in itself empowering to those engaged in such reflection (Jupp, et.al., 2010, p. 94).

Empowerment at the community level, the analysis reveals, is also manifested in the changing dynamics of favela representation stimulated through the deconstruction of dominant discourses and the problematization of the city's unequal social structures. Using local culture as a tool in the advancement of their projects, program participants showcase favelas from their potential and opportunities, validating the notion that there is much more to their communities than crime and violence. By bringing these positive illustrations of favela essence to light, Agency youth do not only inspire residents to look at the territory

differently and strengthen their own sense of community, but they also help rupture historical physical and symbolic barriers that separate favelas from the rest of the city.

Therefore, the kind of agency exercised by program participants - which challenges them to dispute their position in the city and assume their place for speech and participation - has a social transformation dimension that renders young people authorship of their mode of existence and development mechanisms, expanding awareness of their crucial position in empowering their communities (White and Wyn, 1998). This aligns with critical pedagogy's notion of empowerment as a process centered around the very individuals and groups that it seeks to benefit; a concept that embodies what people are able to express as they gain greater social and political space (Blackburn, 2000). As it will be discussed in chapter 6 in connection to emancipatory education, empowerment that leads to larger struggles for individual and societal transformation may also offer emancipatory possibilities.

Finally, these results offer relevant empirical contributions to critical youth empowerment (CYE) conceptual frameworks that integrate outcomes at the individual and collective levels. Drawing from interdisciplinary models of youth empowerment and participatory research, Jennings et.al. (2006) identify CYE as welcoming strategies established upon meaningful engagement and non-hierarchical knowledge sharing platforms that promote skills, leadership, and a critical reflection of power relations, as well as active community participation, leading to change in socio-political processes, structures, norms or images (Jennings et. al., 2006, p. 33). Given that young people living in marginalized and impoverished communities face significant limitations to meaningful participation in decision-making processes and social action, the tools for youth-led community transformation promoted by Agency emerge as particularly significant findings from this study.

Conclusion

In a context marked by poverty, violence and criminality, where, historically, the social fabric has been put at risk and social relations built upon mixed approaches of support and mistrust, Agency encourages favela youth to consider their territory from a place of potency and opportunity, helping strengthen their sense of belonging and community. In addition to advancing tools for critical analysis of dominant discourses and unequal social structures, the program provides young people with instruments to formulate and carry out concrete initiatives of social impact.

Regarding young people as essential actors in helping create solutions to the challenges their communities face, the program guides participants through the formulation of strategies that are relevant to the reality of favelas and that are based on their lived experiences and knowledge of territorial resources, conditions and needs. As they are placed at the center of local action, favela youth expand their social and political participation by disputing their right to the city, assuming their place for speech, and, perhaps most importantly, recognizing their crucial position in empowering their communities and actively engaging in the struggle for social transformation - a key aspect of emancipatory education.

The projects developed through this bottom-up approach are then used as a platform to highlight and promote the positive aspects of communities beyond geographical borders, helping build new narratives of representation and generating more authentic and comprehensive imaginaries in the city about favela and its residents. Culture is, therefore, used as a tool for expression and a weapon in the fight to rupture social barriers in a divided city. Although initiatives advanced through the program are small-scale and run on limited funding, their community impact is significant, reaching hundreds of residents in various capacities and through different platforms.

The fact that one quarter of all projects created have been formalized as businesses and

one third remain active today, highlights the potential of these localized actions to help build community capacity and promote context-relevant change, while reinforcing the essential role of non-formal grassroots educational provisions in opening a platform that allows for positive practices of social regeneration and inclusion to come to light.

CHAPTER 6

Critical Pedagogy as a Platform of Possibility

Introduction

Having investigated into the lifeworld and experience of participants in the Agency program and assessed impact at the individual and community level - with a focus in its capacity to spark empowering and emancipatory possibilities - the final chapter of the analysis aims at drawing lessons and insights from this particular case study to inform a discussion on the opportunities and limitations of employing emancipatory educational practices in youth education within the context of marginalized communities. It begins by building a bridge between theory and practice (6.1) with an introduction to Agency's educational instruments (6.1.1) and the establishment of a linkage between them and selected dimensions of critical pedagogy (6.1.2).

The second thematic tackles questions having to do with program relevance and barriers to implementation and sustainability (6.2), first in connection to the work of educators and their views about the importance of the methodology (6.2.1) and, finally, broader challenges related to social, political and operational constraints, which also draws from the perspectives of political players and practitioners working to advance the youth agenda in Rio de Janeiro and nationwide (6.2.2).

The figure below summarizes the data sets used to guide the analysis, shape the narrative, and establish the findings presented in this chapter.

Figure 11. Data matrix RQ3. Categories and sub-categories emerging from data sources used to address research question thematics.

THEME 1	THEME 2

THEME 1

| Linking Agency's educational instruments and critical pedagogy |

CATEGORY

Bridging critical pedagogy and practice in youth education

SUB-CATEGORIES AND DATA

An overview of Agency's educational instruments

- Qualitative nodes
  - Alphabet
  - Avatar
  - Compass
  - Inventory
  - Map
  - Overall instrument objectives
  - Stimulus cycle
- Informational documents

Identifying connections between critical pedagogy and the Agency program

- Qualitative nodes
  - Dialogue
  - Individualized learning
  - Relevant educational content
  - Political conscience/social critique
  - Foster entrepreneurship
- Informational documents

THEME 2

| Program relevance and limitations in implementation and sustainability |

CATEGORY

A look into program strengths and challenges

SUB-CATEGORIES AND DATA

Engaging educators for social responsibility

- Qualitative nodes
  - Personal trajectory to Agency
  - Personal trajectory to social work
  - Background and life story
  - Favorite projects and trajectories
  - Changes: youth's first day vs. last day at Agency
  - Program strengths and favorite aspects of Agency

Social, political and operational constraints

- Qualitative nodes
  - Scarcity of programs/support for youth
  - Constraints in education
  - Employment pressures/low-paying jobs
  - General political/economic constraints in the youth agenda
  - Advancements in the youth agenda
  - Exposure to violence
  - Overall negative perceptions of the police
  - Program main challenges
- Survey findings

6.1. "They put you to do things instead of just teaching:" bridging critical pedagogy and practice in youth education

6.1.1. An overview of Agency's educational instruments

Having introduced the Agency program, its leading objectives and overall structure in chapter 3, this sub-section will focus exclusively on exploring the guiding elements and pedagogical instruments used in the methodology, serving as the base for the analysis linking theory to practice carried out later. The discussion follows the official program chronology and present the various elements and instruments as they are introduced to participant youth. The program starts with - and spends quite some time on - the **stimulus cycle**, which is when young people are exposed to various methods, narratives, concepts and tools for expression that will guide them towards concretizing their desire and creating a project stemming from their own experiences and abilities, with the central goal of impacting the territory (Rizzo, 2017).

The different phases and pace of the stimulus cycle are meant to keep participants interested and to expand their creative capacities and repertoire, bringing them closer to their everyday experiences and individual aspirations from a more critical stance. The goal is to help them visualize and access new fields of expression, perception and opportunities so they can advance their own notions and proposals. Moreover, the instruments are introduced with utmost respect for the cognitive and emotional disposition of young people under a "knowledge sharing" platform that discourages the educator from trying to assume a position of hierarchy.

In a context where the "right to experimentation" of young people living in poverty are often times controlled and repressed - that is, they find themselves constrained to living life according to the boundaries their social conditions have set for them - Agency's stimulus cycle attempts to create a space outside the formal system of education and the everyday routines of favela youth that encourages them to use their imagination and to create, rather

than simply receive and retain pre-packaged information (Rizzo, 2017).

I will now expand on the eight instruments that comprise the stimulus cycle and then summarize the elements that are introduced in the final stages of the program. The bulk of these educational activities take place on weekly Saturday **meetings** led by Agency's coordination team. Making use of interactive activities and aspects of dramaturgy in addition to displaying lots of energy, the educators direct the meetings around four main acts: 1) a playful introduction, a game that help spark a discussion of concepts related to the instrument; 2) the concept display, a concrete example of how the instrument has been applied in real life; 3) the experimentation and product presentation, an initial application of the instrument by youth in light of their project idea and the presentation of results to the rest of the group; and finally 4) the ending exercise, a reflection of the activities youth took part in that day, their purpose, and what they learned from it (Rizzo, 2017). It is important to note that every meeting during the stimulus cycle follows the sequence of these four acts so as to establish a method that is clear to both educators and students and that can maximize learning objectives.

1) The **compass**, the very first instrument introduced in the methodology, is a visualization of young peoples' ideas and it is used to guide each one of them in the program. Participants are given creative material to work with (paper, coloured pencils, crayons, beads, etc.) and are asked to present their ideas as directions in a compass, which includes: 1) to the north, a description of the project idea, as raw as it may be 2) to the south, a description of what motivated the idea, how that connects to their lived experiences, and what resources and abilities are needed to put them into practice, 3) to the east, the forms of expression that will be used to concretize the idea, and finally, 4) to the west, the territory and populations that will be impacted. The idea - or "desire," as Agency likes to put it - is now on its way to becoming reality. As a reminder of their personal connection to it and the meaning that it

holds, youth carry their compass close throughout their entire time at Agency (Lisboa and Delfino, 2015; Rizzo, 2017).

Ysabelly explained that she used the compass exercise to make a reflection of her own life beyond project creation: "the compass is the instrument that touched me the most… for each direction, I thought about what they represented in my life: my husband, my siblings, my father, my mother holding my hand, and God, above me to the north." Ana Paula - who has closely accompanied the creation of many compasses throughout her years at Agency - highlighted that each participant has a different experience with the instrument and that for some, like in Ysabelly's case, they assume a much deeper meaning.

> Sometimes, particularly when it comes to the more debilitated youth we work with, those who are out of schools, who suffered violence, to them, the compass is the most important instrument because it gives them a path. Some youth cannot visualize how their lives will be tomorrow, so when we talk about their own desires for the future they say: "wow, is that a real thing?"

2) The **alphabet** instrument invites young people to construct their own concepts and actively engage with their future projects using elements of their territories and lifeworld. It involves the activity of writing down words in a piece of paper related to their project ideas from A to Z. Through each word, they describe the knowledge, external references and experiences that have inspired their entrepreneurial aspirations and that may be used further to advance them, including different people, objects, places, affective relations and individual motivations.

The goal of the alphabet exercise is to help young people systematize their thoughts and strengthen their imaginary, while placing focus on the way they make use of their territory and lived experiences to talk about themselves and express their understanding of the world (Lisboa and Delfino, 2015; Rizzo, 2017). As Sara Rizzo - a 27-year-old graduate student at LSE who was responsible for the systematization of the methodology and conducted extensive ethnographic work in Rio - points out: "it stimulates young people to

express their ideas in a more complex way, from their sources of inspiration, the values they hold and the changes they hope to bring about."

3) During the **ideas fair** program participants present their initial project ideas to others with the end goal of creating groups connecting members who present similar interests and that would be willing to work together in the development of one single project. The name "fair" says it all; it is a dynamic exercise of public negotiation that allows youth to exchange ideas and intervene freely in the conversation, which requires them to visualize and present the desire that is driving their entrepreneurial ambitions. This specific instrument gives participants the chance to engage with expressing themselves effectively and convincingly in order to sell their ideas, but it also serves the purpose of showing them the importance of compromising and letting go of individual preferences for the "greater good" of the projects (Lisboa and Delfino, 2015; Rizzo, 2017). The goal is to help form strong groups that will maximize the potential for realization while bringing young people together in dialogue.

4) The **map** instrument encourages participants to become more connected to their communities, discovering aspects of it they did not know about and exploring resources they can tap into - which increases their interest and capacity to recognize the potency present in those spaces. In what relates to project creation, specifically, the map entails an understanding of the population the projects seeks to benefit, including information on profile, needs and expectations. This analysis is an important step in identifying the places and approaches that can give a strong flow to the project (Rizzo, 2017). For example, if a group wants to set up a soccer event for children in the community they need to survey not only physical spaces available, but also where to find the highest concentration of young people who are not engaged in sports, so as to maximize the project's reach and impact.

In practical terms, each group writes down a list of at least 10 characteristics that

describe their target population in as much detail as they can. Renan, who considers himself the kind of guy who "keeps it to himself," credits the map instrument for helping get him out of his shell, particularly in how he engages with other residents of his community. "I lived in a place where I did not know anybody and rarely hang out on the street. I knew my immediate neighbours, but that's it. Then, with the map, I had to get out there and talk to people. Now, when I walk by everyone greets me. So, it forced me to socialize," he explained.

5) Aligned with the map exercise, the **inventory** instrument invites participants to survey their territories in search of elements which can be useful to the development of their ideas. It entails observing, collecting and organizing information and experiences that already exist inside their communities and that are relevant to their project of choice. As an artistic tool that seeks to boost the creative process, the inventory is expressed by young people in the form of drawings, collages, pictures, objects and testimonials (Lisboa and Delfino, 2015). Within the Agency methodology, youth make use of this instrument to list project needs as well as the partnerships they can potentially establish - which gives them the chance to visualize opportunities for the realization of their ideas that are close to them rather than relying on external networks.

More specifically, they lay out 1) the partnership options they already have access to within their immediate groups of friends and family, 2) a list of partners they see as important but have yet to establish contact with, and 3) the abilities (of organization, administration and communication, for instance) they believe their group members need in order to successfully advance the project (Rizzo, 2017). One of the important aspects of the inventory is that it places value in the various elements of everyday life these young people are exposed to in their communities and the opportunities for growth it may offer them – which is a step towards breaking with the denial that some favela dwellers sustain in relation

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to their own territory (Lisboa and Delfino, 2015; Rizzo, 2017).

6) The **challenge** instrument marks the rupture of the stimulus cycle and the recapitulation of all instruments introduced up until this point. The aim is to analyze young people's understandings of the concepts they have been engaging with, as well as their ability to present their projects in public using clear and convincing language. In this simulation examination, groups have five minutes to present their ideas to other participants and convey three specific points: 1) the project's main proposed actions, 2) the project rationale, with special attention given to the desires that inspired the idea and the impact it hopes to make in the territory, 3) the functions each member of the team will take on and how that connects to the abilities they already possess or might need.

One of the most important aspects of the challenge instrument is that it engages all participants collectively. That is, those who are presenting must work through dominating key elements of their projects, as for the youth in the audience, the very fact of listening to someone else's ideas and asking questions stimulates an evaluation of their own strategies for action (Rizzo, 2017).

7) The **avatar**, arguably the most popular instrument in the Agency methodology, help young people find their place and role inside their projects. The concept is an attempt to reflect the different behaviours people assume in everyday situations and emphasize the need for flexibility when working with others (Rizzo, 2017). Through an activity that combine elements of theatre, storytelling and a discussion of representative images, participants identify themselves within six different types of avatars.

They are as follows: 1) the pioneer, is intuitive and an opportunity taker; this person drives the group forward even though he/she may not fully dominate the project repertoire and thematic just yet; 2) the executor, is strategic and goal-oriented, he/she understands

what kind of tools and abilities are needed in order for the project to succeed and either possesses some of them or knows where to find them; 3) the collaborator, is a team-player who contributes to the execution of different tasks; 4) the happy one, brings positivity and good energy to the group; he/she is good at conflict mediation and help alleviate tensions that may arise; 5) the inquirer, is the person who constantly asks questions and make suggestions, stimulating other group members to improve the overall project action plan; and finally, 6) the neutral, is the person who assumes whatever role is needed given the particular conditions of the project (Rizzo, 2017).

Although these categories are pre-determined they are not fixed, meaning that participants can take on different avatars throughout the various program phases, guaranteeing their freedom to change their minds and grow along with their projects (Lisboa and Delfino, 2015). Essentially the avatar is a strategy to organize and distribute tasks within groups, with each member understanding his/her contribution and responsibilities as well as the benefit that different functions and abilities brings to the table. Furthermore, it reminds young people that particular situations, spaces, social groups and networks will require them to carry themselves in a certain way.

For example, amongst friends it is acceptable to talk and laugh out loud, however, at a job interview, it is necessary to adopt a less playful posture. Elaine's comment pertains to this added feature of the avatar instrument: "It is a fun way to help you understand your role inside the project… but it also helps in life. Like, you can't go around acting goofy all the time, but neither should you always act annoyed. Each situation is a situation and you need to be able to position yourself," she emphasized.

8) **One day in the life of my project** entails an actual preview of the project in action. It symbolizes a sort of "inauguration day" that help bring credibility and confidence to the groups. The eight-hour event must have well defined beginning, middle and end activities

that clearly transmit the overall message and values of the project. For each planned hour of event, the groups must prepare a list detailing what they will be doing, what results they expect to get, and who will be responsible for what (Rizzo, 2017). An important objective of this particular instrument is to directly engage youth groups with their target audiences on the ground and to get them thinking about strategies to keep the public involved and interested on what they have to offer - which may be shaped as part of a collective process with the community itself.

Following these eight instruments is a series of elements and activities meant to prepare participants to present their projects in front of a jury as part of the funding competition and to effectively implement them in the territory, if awarded the funding. I will now discuss them briefly. The **aesthetics of presentation** exercise help groups create and rehearse their presentation to the examination board. In addition to preparing a talk and power point slides, groups must write a report elaborating on their projects incorporating contents from the different instruments (mobilization strategies, role of each group member, schedule and budget, continuity strategies, etc.) (Rizzo, 2017). The **event**,[46] which takes place in Rio every year, provides a space for Agency youth from different communities to get to know each other and also serve as a platform to connect participants with individuals, institutions, and organizations of interest from Brazil and abroad.

The **examination board** follows the event and, for many, it represents the most crucial step inside the methodology, after which the desire can truly become a reality. The board in

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[46] In October 2015, I had the opportunity to attend and speak at the Agency annual event in Pavuna, Rio de Janeiro, which was entitled NOW - International Meeting of Culture and Youth. The event brought together over 300 Agency participants from different cycles as well as local and international actors (politicians, policy-makers, academics, etc.) to discuss important themes in the youth agenda as well as participant experience in the program under an atmosphere filled with excitement and passion. The event consists of several group dynamics, presentations and roundtables that are used as platforms to shed light on the knowledge, potential and proposals of young people from favelas and peripheries. One of the most memorable moments of the event is the "baptism," which is when each participant youth receives a necklace that symbolizes belonging and their place in the articulation of a shared identity in the city.

each territory is constituted by two or three suitable members (cultural producers, policy-makers, entrepreneurs, state agents, activists, journalists, etc.) who not only understand how the proposed projects may benefit the city, but are also able to recognize their significance to participants. Once the presentations are concluded, the board makes their decision on what groups will be awarded the R$10,000 funding and move on to the next program phase. The groups who are unable to secure funding receive recommendations on how to vialibilize their ideas otherwise and may also develop a "plan B" with the support of board members themselves (Rizzo, 2017).

The last elements of the methodology have to do with strategies for contact expansion and project execution. Agency help participants establish important **networks** with people of interest inside their territories as well as in the city, who can offer them advice and assistance in many fronts, from professional and educational stimulus to emotional support and project-related articulations. Having in mind the necessities of each young person who goes through Agency and each project designed, the coordination team creates an exclusive map of opportunities to participant groups (including those who did not pass the examination board) which includes at least three networks pertinent to the project and three contacts connected to the particular desires of group members.

Finally, it is in the **pre-incubator** phase (the step before the execution stage) that participants build an overall action strategy for the project, including a detailed schedule, budget, business plan and visual identity. Once all components have been approved by Agency's coordination team, the groups are ready to receive the funding and officially start their projects, which is closely monitored and supervised to ensure positive outcomes. During this stage, there is also an important element introduced that involves the educational and professional development of participants as well as strategies for project sustainability beyond Agency (Rizzo, 2017). It is important to note that although most

participants leave Agency after the examination board, they may continue to benefit from having been a part of the program long after the cycle is over. This is exemplified by the fact that Agency keeps them in the loop regarding events, networks, job and educational opportunities of interest, in addition to becoming a support system for youth when needed.

In my roughly four years of accompanying Agency's work, I have met several young people who took part in the first cycles of the program (as early as 2011) but that are still very much active within the network and continue to access different opportunities through them. As Ana Paula once said to me when I requested information about a specific participant who had "left" the program in 2013: "they never leave… they are with us for life." This commitment to embracing the young people they work with is also reflected in Fernando's comment about Agency's supportive culture. He said:

> I've always liked to produce, to invent and make things happen, but I did not have instruments to help me accomplish what I wanted, at least not with aptitude and focus. I was often unable to achieve the goals I set for myself. Then Agency came in, with all the instruments and the support, not only in terms of funding and teaching us how to concretize a project, but in terms of being a true partner, a sustaining pillar.

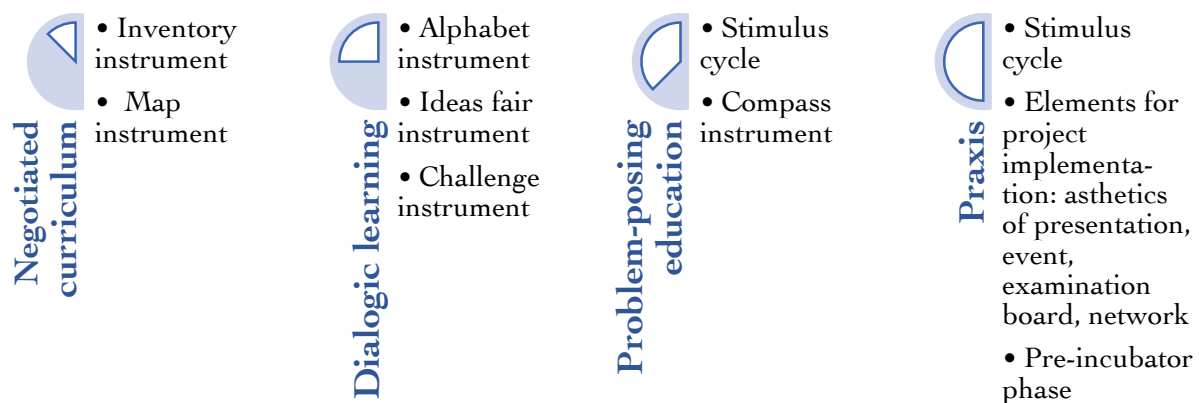## 6.2. Identifying connections between critical pedagogy and the Agency program

The exercise of connecting critical pedagogy to specific curriculum aspects of a non-formal educational provision is a daunting one, in particular due to issues concerning the complexity, scope and actual practicability of the proposed theory. Nonetheless, that is precisely what I attempt to do in the discussion that follows. My strategy consisted in analyzing and comparing a number of practical elements of Freire's pedagogy (negotiated curriculum, problem-posing education, dialogic learning, and praxis, specifically) to some of the instruments applied in the Agency methodology (see figure 12).

It is important to note that, although I link elements of theory and practice in a particular way, it is not my intention to impose a specific analytical framework upon each

Agency instrument discussed or convey that these are the only connections to theory possible. That is, much like the different objectives and practices in critical pedagogy, instruments and elements used in the Agency methodology are interchangeable, standing on their own as much as they feed into one another - which makes it hard to "box" them. Also, in order to clarify the connections I am trying to establish, I will bring back concepts and ideas that have been touched upon previously in the related theory sections (chapter 2) as well as information from the overview of Agency instruments just discussed.

Figure 12. Theory vis-à-vis practice. Linkage between selected Agency instruments and critical pedagogy's educational elements.

Negotiated curriculum
- Inventory instrument
- Map instrument

Dialogic learning
- Alphabet instrument
- Ideas fair instrument
- Challenge instrument

Problem-posing education
- Stimulus cycle
- Compass instrument

Praxis
- Stimulus cycle
- Elements for project implementation: asthetics of presentation, event, examination board, network
- Pre-incubator phase

Linkage to a negotiated curriculum

Critical pedagogy's negotiated curriculum derive out of the expressions, needs, life situations and experiences of students. Teaching and learning, thus, aims to broaden student's understanding of themselves and the world around them, while helping them identify possible pathways towards transformative action they might not have yet considered. Unlike the traditional hidden curriculum which does not serve the interests of marginalized groups, a negotiated curriculum values the different cultures and practices that students bring to the classroom, incorporating those subjectivities to the educational process. It is possible to connect this proposal to Agency's inventory instrument, an

educational activity that revolves around the territorial elements that participant youth actively survey and bring back for deeper analysis.

In this particular approach, the main objective of scrutinizing the territory is to facilitate the establishment of partnerships for project creation, however, the instrument serves a much deeper purpose. By requiring young people to observe what their communities have to offer and the social practices that are relevant to their entrepreneurial ideas - as well as to express what they have seen and learned - the inventory leads them to recognize territorial potency and the significance of their own knowledge and experiences. Similarly, the map instrument - which involves participants investigating the needs and expectations of residents in order to detect a suitable target population for their projects - is also tied to expanding territorial recognition of worth, but in such a way that move participants beyond their individual selves and interests, allowing them to see their hopes and fears from the perspectives of other community members.

These instruments reflect a negotiated curriculum in the sense that they are entrenched in an individualized educational approach that, although directed towards project creation, is contextualized in and stems from the lifeworld experiences of favela youth, which allows them to create content and proposals that are relevant to their realities and that can help transform them. As Fernando points out, the focus that Agency places on the needs and aspirations of student is what differentiates them from formal schooling. He said:

> In school, they just force you to do things; it is a method for the masses. And that is what I like about Agency, they get to know you before they teach you anything and they prepare you to do whatever it is that you want to do… it is a more centralized teaching method, I think… they also put you to do things instead of just teaching.

A negotiated curriculum, thus, entails the use of relevant educational content that not only help young people find their place (and succeed) in today's world, but that also expose them to mechanisms and repertoires that are applicable to and draw from their lifeworld,

which keeps them engaged and brings them closer to the educational process. As students grow increasingly connected to the teaching materials they are being introduced to, they begin to critically reflect on what different subject matters represent in their lives and how they are manifested. Elaine explained that such a context-sensitive and person-centered educational approach is what is missing from traditional classrooms. She said:

> I understand the importance of formal schooling, but placing locks in the school gates so kids won't try to leave is not the way to do things. So, I think Agency help change our minds in this sense… I still think that everyone needs to go to school, but they should not be obligated to do and say what the teacher wants… I think there should be more attention placed on individuals themselves, and Agency works with this relevant content.

Linkage to problem-posing education

Countering a banking model of education which main purpose is to deposit content in students as if they were empty containers only waiting to be filled with knowledge, Freire's problem-posing lead students to create information, solve problems, reflect on practice and intervene in the world as makers and transformers of their own realities. In order to promote such learning outcomes, it requires that teachers and students engage in the co-production of knowledge through listening, critical dialogue and action. Similarly, the Agency methodology is not concerned with the transmission of content per se, but with the developing of forms of creation, expression and production that situate young people as protagonists. In particular, my analysis has shown that Agency's stimulus cycle promotes a problem-posing education in three main ways.

First, the different elements introduced are meant to expand the creative capacity of participants and help them identify - and think critically about - new terrains of expression and possibilities within their own communities and everyday life experiences. Second, it promotes a non-authoritarian teaching approach that is based on respect and learning exchange, breaking with the traditional relationship between teacher and student while

encouraging participants to engage with the educational instrument actively and critically, rather than simply consuming information in a passive way. Finally, Agency recognizes participants as conscious agents and creators who have a right to experimentation. The program does not presume to become a turning-point in the trajectory of participants with a fixed impact timeframe; rather, the goal is to demonstrate to young people - and hope they always remember - that they have a right to experiment with new tools, possibilities and forms of engagement with the world. Cristiano noted that he now lives by this assumption:

> Agency taught me that the favela youth also has the power to experiment. And that would be my advice to other young people: 'experiment.' You might not be able to get what you want, or you might just get it all, but you must experiment, because we cannot live our lives on the basis of 'ifs'… if I did, if I could, if I was… we have to get out in the world, persist, and see what happens.

There are also grounds for comparison between Agency's compass instrument and the five steps involved in the process of problem-posing education, as identified in the literature. In the act of creating a visual representation of their entrepreneurial projects in form of a compass, participants present 1) a description of their overall idea, which connects to "describing the content of the discussion" in problem-posing, 2) a description of what motivated the project, how it connects to the lived experiences of youth, what resources are needed and what forms of expression will be employed, which is similar to the elements of "identifying and personalizing the problem," and finally, 3) a description of the territory and populations that will benefit from the project, which align with problem-posing components of "creating a debate around the problem and identifying alternatives to solving it."

Linkage to dialogic learning

An education that is based on dialogic learning encourage student to become "active investigators of society," analyzing the larger societal structures that shape their individual lives and communities. Similar to the map and inventory exercises, Agency's alphabet

instrument also serves the purpose of helping youth become critical examiners of their experience and territorial conditions, building an "epistemological relationship to reality," as Freire would put it. As young people use elements of their communities and lifeworld to construct a list from A to Z that describes the knowledge, experiences and references that inspired their project ideas, we may say they are engaging in critical pedagogy's process of creating "generative themes."

Such familiar words, situations, relationships and experiences are representative of the most central issues in people's lives, thus, approaching them from a more systematized way can facilitate a critical dialogue that may lead to emancipation. The fact that Agency requires participants to continually revisit and discuss those themes with other youth throughout the stimulus cycle and beyond is reminiscent of their focus in dialectic activities. The ideas fair and challenge instruments, for instance, are dynamics and engaging exercises that encourage participants to share perspectives and reflections, ask and respond questions, make suggestions and learn to adapt.

Furthermore, during the Saturday meetings, participants connect and engage with other young people from across the city who share similar dreams, discussing themes related to the city, culture, and a series of other issues that impact the favela youth. As Viviane noted, one of the essential aspects of Agency is that is helps young people develop a political conscience and social critique in a context where such inquiries are usually discouraged. She said:

> The most important thing is to help the youth to think for themselves. And to do that, we need to deconstruct in order to reconstruct. The opportunities are few, but still, we have to learn to be critical in choosing which ones to take. We need an education of 'whys.' The initiatives that are most present are embedded in a mediocre model of education, like, they are not discussed with the youth beforehand. We want to choose now. It isn't about what you want to give me or what you think I need anymore.

Similar to problem-posing, it is also possible to directly link some of the foundational practices of critical pedagogy identified in the literature - in this case, the principles leading to dialogic learning - to several Agency instruments and the program's overall objectives. For example, 1) the advancement of a form of curriculum that is relevant to the lifeworld of participants and the recognition of young people as protagonists and creators may be connected to the principle of "respect for student's linguistic, voices, identities and values" in dialogic learning, 2) Agency's non-authoritative educational approach employed throughout the stimulus cycle connects to the "co-creation of knowledge between teacher and students," 3) the alphabet exercise shares great similarity with "the use of generative themes from the physical and social world," which is meant to help students gain an understanding of their reality, and finally, 4) The adoption of diverse dialogic activities during the meetings and the use of instruments that, not only spark engaging discussions about issues favela residents and youth themselves face but that also leads to the creation of projects that can impact communities, is directly related to the "the use of dialogue and reflective practices that leads to social action" in a Freirean dialogical education.

Linkage to praxis

As a final point, it is essential to discuss critical pedagogy's elements of praxis in light of Agency's methodology. It can be argued that promoting youth-led community action and social change is the leading objective of the program, thus, a Freirean understanding of praxis - which entails informed action - is at the core of what Agency is all about. Praxis for social change requires individuals to connect experience, understanding, sense-making and action, and reflect continuously upon these elements. As a process concerned with knowledge that is relevant to struggles for social justice, praxis seeks to help bridge the gap between theoretical concepts and actual practice that serve a larger transformative purpose.

Making use of original educational tools that integrate training and action, Agency's

methodology is directed towards guiding participants through the creative process so they can bring forth their very own proposals for change, rather than imposing pre-determined concepts based on particular ideological or moral understanding of who the favela youth is, how they should act, and what they should do. From the instruments comprising the stimulus cycle to the elements introduced later in the methodology that are meant to take participants further down in the process of project creation, implementation, evaluation and sustainability, each educational "device" Agency advances complement and support each other in providing young people with grounds for critical engagement, creative expression and transformative social action.

As Carolina noted, "Agency gave me the instrumentation that enabled me to effectively get my project up and running." Agency's educational methodology, therefore, aligns with the practical elements of critical praxis which, according to the literature, involve the identification and analysis of a problem, the creation and implementation of a plan of action to address the problem, and the engagement in critical reflection regarding the actions carried out.

6.2. "Agency turned everything I knew about youth programs upside down:" a look into program strengths and challenges

6.2.1. Engaging educators for social responsibility

The passionate and dedicated individuals who comprise the coordinating team and support staff at Agency are key figures in the learning process. These young educators and mentors are responsible for guiding young people through the methodology, providing them with competencies and useful knowledge for the development of their project as well as for life. They offer continuous support and encouragement to all participants equally, striving to build a relationship of trust and affection with them (Rizzo, 2017). Working with youth from an individualized educational approach entails getting to know each student

independently, understanding their strengths and weaknesses so as to better provide them with the mentorship and tools they need to thrive.

While Agency's team respect youth's decision-making autonomy, stimulating them to think freely, they also believe that offering criticism and alternatives when needed is essential in the process of co-creating knowledge which guarantees the continuous activity of reflection and inquiry (Rizzo, 2017). On the subject of educators, as I explore Agency's importance and relevance given the context in which the program operates, I would like to open up a space to also briefly talk about the experiences and reflections of some of these professionals whom, according to Freire, are at central to an emancipatory education. In addition, to further the discussion, I bring insights from political players and practitioners helping advance the youth agenda locally in Rio de Janeiro as well as at the national level.

The personal trajectories and motivations that attracted young professionals to work at Agency are quite varied and, contrary to expectation, not all are tied to an explicit background and/or interest in education, social activism and youth problematics in favelas. Many of them, either due to their professional experiences or relationship with Marcus Faustini, were hand-picked to hold certain key positions as the program started taking shape in 2011 and others were selected on the basis of their knowledge of different favelas and established contact base. Yet, there are some professionals who were brought into the fold "by chance." Take Karina, for example, a 28-year-old social scientist who, although born and raised in a periphery of Rio de Janeiro, did not frequent other spaces outside her immediate circle prior to Agency and, thus, held biased opinions about other populations and ways of living. She credits the program for having changed her outlook:

> When I got to Agency I started to access the favela more, and understanding this universe was very important so I could see people differently. I confess I was even prejudicial, like, looking at the favela youth from a negative light. But Agency changed my way of viewing things, it brought me this experience, to approach these places from another perspective.

Other young professionals who first joined Agency in the capacity of university students, many of whom, like Karina, were looking for a paid internship opportunity to help advance their professional profile, found in Agency a pillar for individual engagement in social responsibility. Marina - a 25-year-old university graduate in cinema and audio-visual who acts as Agency's communication coordinator - noted that, although she had been engaged in audio-visual productions from an early age, Agency gave further direction to her professional aspirations as she continued to advance new narratives and forms of expression through communication, now, with even greater impact. She said:

> Agency impacted my life not only in the academic and professional sense but as a whole. I did not expect it would change my life as much it did. I grew so much, so did my self-confidence in my potential for realization. Agency adds so much, not only in terms of networks, but also when it comes to helping influence another scene in the city.

It is important to highlight these different trajectories as they demonstrate that good educators and social justice professionals aren't born, rather, they evolve as they gain experience and immerse themselves in local community life and practice. Furthermore, it shows that Agency's impact reaches beyond participant youth and communities to also influence and inspire educators and professionals working in different program capacities.

When asked to share some of the most memorable stories of change they witnessed through their work, Agency staff provided no shortage of narratives of individuals and projects. As an illustration, Veruska spoke with great pleasure about Thainá's process of growth not only in terms of project development but also as a person. Veruska explained that when Thainá arrived to Agency back in 2014, only 15 years of age then, she only wanted to work with cinema but did not display a particularly relevant profile, nor she was attempting to build upon a previous interest or experience - meaning that her road to project creation and implementation would be a challenging one. What was initially a traveling home theatre that took place inside the homes of residents of the Batan favela and local

public spaces (community association, soccer fields, etc.), CineBatan grew to become a cultural activity that is now also being implemented in public schools.

Drawing attention to the importance of supporting youth projects that can bring new forms of knowledge to schools, which are crucial sites for creating change, Veruska said: "I place my trust in elements that can be incorporated into formal schooling and that can help us change the traditional curriculum, which is poor, and does not value young people's creative potential. The fact that CineBatan is now in schools is an important step forward." Veruska also noted that Thainá was the person who took the initiative to talk to school directors and scale up the project.

Acknowledging that, given the many obstacles she had to face inside and outside the program, the assumption was that Thainá would eventually decide to "throw in the towel," Veruska noted that her perseverance led her to exceed all expectations - which reflects Agency's commitment to encourage and support youth every step of the way. For Tainá, that is precisely what made the difference: "I have thought about giving up many times throughout this journey, but thanks to God and Agency, I am here today doing what I love. I thank Veruska for all the times she stopped whatever she was doing to talk to me and convince me not to leave" (Agência de Redes Para Juventude, 2016).

Tainá is far from being the only example of a participant who matured right in front of their eyes. As they recall how youth carried themselves when they first arrived to Agency and compare it to their "last" day in the program (or their last day participating in the formal methodology, that is), Agency staff highlighted several areas in which participants tend to display noticeable change, from young people learning to fight for their own space for free expression and positioning themselves as entrepreneurs, to being able to use at least one of the instruments introduced by Agency in others aspects of their lives.

As Sara noted: "they look back and realize that, although it was hard to carry out the

instruments, they learned much from them, which includes learning more about themselves. They remember how much these instruments helped encourage them and recognize they can be used for other purposes." Also, both Sara and Karina talked about youth's initial struggles to speak in public and how Agency helps them develop confidence in themselves along the way - as participants noted in chapter 4. "Often times during the stimulus cycle, you see youth dying of embarrassment and shyness, having a hard time just to say their names... then, by the end of it are they are able to speak in public, express themselves, talk to different players in the city. To me, that is truly incredible," Karina said, with pleasure.

Furthermore, Agency staff shared aspects of the methodology they like the most and discussed what they believe to be the program's greatest strengths, based on their experiences working directly with young people and following their progress throughout the years. For example, Diego - a journalist and researcher from the Borel favela who acted as a local producer at Agency - noted that his involvement in the initial recruitment marathons (which requires knocking on people's doors, surveying the territory and getting to know it in more depth) gave him the opportunity to engage with youth in Borel in a way he had not done before. A professional with a long trajectory fighting for the rights of young people in Rio having also been involved with the National Counsel of Youth, Diego credits Agency for having changed the way he understands public policies within the context of favelas, as they offer an entire "new logic" for working with young people. He said:

> Basically, Agency turned everything I knew about youth programs upside down... I was acting as a link between the program and young people, and at the same time, I got the chance to see them actively engaging in that process, having so much to offer, things that are impossible to imagine at first glance ... it was a fascinating experience.

As for Sara - who is now in conversation with an NGO to replicate the methodology in her hometown of Palermo, Italy - the possibility to generate a concrete impact in the lives of young people, particularly in terms of stimulating those who never believed in their own

capacities and abilities to find themselves in - and lead - the transformation process - is what makes Agency unique. She said: "through Agency, youth access the opportunities and start building up the self-confidence to express themselves and to generate change in the territory as well as in their lives… they realize that they have the right and the capacity to become the owners of their own choices."

Given that favelas have historically been at the receiving end of strategies for social control and political opportunism disguised under traditional social welfare programs, it does not come as a surprise that youth have a hard time trusting the intentions and authenticity of provisions that promise to "change their lives" - which is a genuine concern Agency tries to address. According to Ana Paula - who recently moved to Angola to work with cultural production in peripheral territories in Luanda - one of the most important aspects of the methodology is that it places much effort into building an authentic relationship of trust with participant youth. She notes:

> I think it is really cool when the youth believe in us… this aspect of mistrust is a cultural thing, as many projects arrive to the territory and use the youth as a commodity, they are only there to pose for a nice picture so the organization can receive some funding and there is no actual benefit for them. It is a different situation with Agency… they see that we really want them to develop as individuals.

These accounts help us understand the distinct dimensions of Agency's work and their commitment to promoting dialogue, youth participation and social action in all stages of the program. The methodology is well known to several important political actors and practitioners acting in different civil society and government capacities in Brazil - which highlights its potential to inform other state and federal public policies directed at young people. For instance, Angela Guimarães - former National Sub-Secretary of Youth and President of the Brazilian National Youth Council who now leads UNEGRO (Union of Black People Against Inequality) - praised the program for being able to articulate education, knowledge creation, autonomy and emancipation while ensuring young people's

right to exercise their subjectivity. She explained:

> What impacted me the most is their relationship with - and treatment of - young people as a potent force who display a set of skills and repertoires that only need to be further elaborated so they can develop into strategies for community intervention in areas which are sadly marked by violence and economic disruption.

Junior Purim, founder of the long-standing social project "Grow and Live Circus" who was appointed Rio de Janeiro's Municipal Secretary of Culture in May of 2016, shares a similar viewpoint. In his opinion, what makes Agency a methodology like no other is precisely their approach to working with young people which starts from a recognition of the knowledge and agency they possess. He said:

> To me, Agency is singular. They manage to dialogue with the desires of every single youth they mobilize. They believe these young people are bearer of an intelligence that has been developed along their path. They invest to qualify realities and working to overcome their problems. In all honesty, Agency is the most innovative project directed at the peripheral and favela youth that I have ever seen.

Figure 13. **Word cloud.** Compilation of words participants and Agency's coordinating team chose to define Agency.

6.2.2. Social, political and operational constraints

Despite its real potential to generate impact at the individual and community level and its capacity to engage young people as change-makers through a methodology that is structured, and yet flexible and inviting, Agency faces several barriers to program implementation and sustainability, particularly in relation to social, political and operational constraints. I explore some of these difficulties in this section.

Essentially, it is impossible to talk about youth in Brazil without contextualizing the current political situation in the country - which has seemingly embarked on a non-stop roller coaster ride since 2013 when widespread demonstrations against hikes in transportation fares filled the streets of every major Brazilian city. Simply put, according to Veruska, young people are still not a priority for the government, whether at the municipal, state or federal level - an argument that is also shared by Junior Perim: "while some social indicators have improved in the country in the past fifteen years, the public policies in the different areas and functions of the government did not engage and/or were committed to young people," he noted.

Indeed, starting with the re-democratization of the country in 1988, small but significant advancements in the youth agenda started to take shape (i.e. right to vote at 16) and young people also benefited from important social gains in areas such as income generation, education and health promoted and expanded under the 13-year-long administration of Brazil's leftist Workers Party (PT) (2003-2016). The establishment of the Federal Statute of Youth in 2013 - the results of a 10-year conjoint effort between the National Secretary of Youth and the National Council of Youth to define the principles and guidelines for the strengthening and organization of youth policies in the country - also marked an important step in this area of interest, as young people in Brazil were finally deemed "subjects of rights," which demands the creation of specific public policies to meet

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their demands (Secretaria Nacional de Juventude, 2014).

However, these promising advancements have suffered a retrocession given the turmoil of recent times. As will be discussed, the current political and economic crisis, coupled with a reduction or suspension of investment in important social programs, has further cramped access to networks and formative opportunities to young people, particularly those who already experienced great vulnerabilities. Emphasizing the negative effect a limited opportunity foundation can have in the lives of young people living in poor and violent communities, Elenice said:

> There should be more programs like Agency in favelas and other places… like, very few things get to Santa Cruz where I live. I always say that if good things don't arrive in the territory, the wrong ones will. So, young people who don't have anything good going for them or are easily influenced end up being taken by the wrong things … as my mother used to say: 'an empty mind is the devil's workshop.'

To Perim, the favela youth carry anguishes similar to that of young people living in the major urban centers in Brazil today. "On a general level, they have insecurities about their future, they lack opportunities for a proper formation, and they are met with little faith from society and the state in their desires and ways to invent life," he explained. Notably, during my interviews with Agency's coordination team and external practitioners working in the political arena, the severe pressures this particular population faces in education and work-life arose as a major concerns - which does not come as a surprise. As noted in chapter 2, it is estimated that 28% of Brazilian youth aged 15-29 have not completed a high school education and 22,5% are neither in school nor working (IBGE, 2016; OECD, 2017).

As for Gabriel Medina - former National Secretary of Youth and a professional with a long participation trajectory in Brazil's youth movements - a poor educational system that does not value its teachers, does not attempt to "educate for life," and fails to involve young people in decision-making is to blame for creating a disconnect that drives individuals away from the educational process. "Young people are not treated as subjects and their voices are

not included in discussions that affect them directly," he noted. Both Gabriel and Angela - who regard Michel Temer's recently-established presidency as illegitimate and Dilma Roussef's condemnation as a "coup" disguised under the banner of impeachment - were particularly critical of several proposals recently put into place under the right-wing government in office since October 2016.

Amongst them is the approval of PEC 55 (241) (a controversial amendment that places a strict cap on federal expenditures in crucial components of society's safety net, such as education and health, to the rate of inflation over the next twenty years) as well as the high school reform which, amongst other revisions, extends school hours and proposes a national curriculum base that allows for flexibility in curriculum selection while removing the requirement for students to complete several important courses such as philosophy, sociology and physical education (De Jesus, 2017; Garcia, 2016).

According to Angela, by making classes that are fundamental to the holistic formation of the student optional, the reform weakens even more the link between education and the future life choices of students. "It contributes to the formation of functional illiterates in an even larger scale," she affirmed. One of the main arguments against the reform - which was met with great resistance, particularly from the younger generations - maintains that the government formulated, proposed and sneakily passed the policy without holding a proper discussion with teachers, students and the society at large.

In addition, Angela noted that important educational programs implemented under PT which were intended to universalize basic education, democratize university access and expand work opportunities to vulnerable populations and young people (PROUNI, ProJovem, Science Without Borders) have suffered a tremendous setback under the new administration. "Structural and focal programs which are essential were reduced in scale, had their funds cut or simply no longer exist," she explained. Other important social

programs such as "My House, My Life" and "Bolsa Família," the apple of PT's eye, were also impacted. Likewise, the sudden government shift has accelerated changes in the labour market, which, interviewees noted, are certain to make an already debilitated employment scenario even more precarious for young populations in the years to come.

Also under Temer, Brazil's senate passed an unpopular labour market reform that looses existing labor regulations dating back to Brazil's federal constitution of 1988, which represented a milestone in the country's transition to democracy following a 21-year-long military dictatorship. In particular, the law reduces costs for businesses and allows employers flexibility to negotiate contracts with employees, while giving them extensive leeway to hire workers under part-time and temporary terms (BBC, 2017). Pointing out its clear benefits to employers, critics argue that such conditions will greatly jeopardize job security, add difficulties for workers to pursuit labour disputes, and increase exploitation in the workplace (Welle, 2017). This difficult situation is exacerbated by a proposal to reform the pension system which would raise the retirement age in efforts to meet fiscal adjustment targets.

To Angela, these recent events mark nothing short of a disastrous setback to labour rights in Brazil, which have severe consequences to the young people and vulnerable populations. She said:

> In light of this terrifying scenario, aggravated by the measures recently approved by Temer's administration, the perspectives for young people are the worst possible. For example, the unrestricted labour outsourcing further preconizes the world of work, especially to youth, women and black people.

Facing an unemployment rate of roughly 26% as of late 2016,[47] which is over two times the national average of 11,8% (an increase of 6,5% since the same period in 2015) (Vettorazzo, 2017), Brazilian youth make use of much creativity and innovation in efforts

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[47] This figure considers young people aged 18-24. For those between the ages of 14 and 17, the unemployment rate reached as much as 40%.

to secure an income. Considering 2013 data, the International Labour Organization estimates that 38% of young people aged 15-29 in the country work in the informal market, a figure that saw significant changes in little over 10 years (in 2001 the rate was 55%) (ILO, 2015). This scenario is similar for Agency participants. For instance, close to half of respondents reported having an income (amongst those, 60% make one minimum salary ($245) or less per month) and only 14% have a formal employment, with the majority working informally or autonomously (39%) (see tables 19 and 20).

In addition, when asked to share their perceptions about the labour market, 75% of Agency youth agree that it is hard to find a job with no experience and 62% think that there are few work opportunities inside the favela. To some, racial and social standing also play a role in their employment outcomes: 19% and 13% of survey respondents agree that, when trying to find a job, they suffer discrimination due to their skin color and condition as a favela resident, respectively. As mentioned in chapter 4, the economic difficulties experienced by large portions of the favela and peripheral youth forces them to look for work at a very early age, taking up the enormous responsibility of helping sustain their families, often relying in the informal market (see figure 13).

Both Ana Paula and Karina talked about the challenge that is ensuring that participants will remain in - and dedicate time to - the program (which is only able to offer them with a symbolic support of roughly $32 per month) when they have other immediate necessities to meet. Karina explained:

> We are left with no argument when participants tell us they need to work because they live in a house with five people and everyone is unemployed. What are we supposed to say to them? Stay with us so you can make 100BRL per month and help out at home? It is a very difficult scenario and sometimes it is very challenging for this youth to conciliate work and the program… we definitely lose a lot of participants due to this kind of economic of pressure.

Table 19. Participant's monthly income per minimum salary (approximately $245):

Number of minimum salaries	%
No income	47%
One or less	32%
Between one and two	17%
Between two and three	4%
Four or more	<1%

Table 20. Participant's employment status:

Form of employment	%
Formal employment	14%
Irregular informal employment	19%
Regular informal employment	12%
Self-employed/business owner	8%
Unemployed looking for work	36%
Unemployed not looking for work	8%

Working effectively with young people in poverty-stricken and complex territories such as favelas, or any marginalized community, require professionals to identify, recognize and help denounce the critical issues residents face day-to-day, developing awareness and understanding as to how they shape individuals, trajectories and actions. As discussed previously, apart from disadvantages in education, employment and the poor prospects for economic prosperity, exposure to violence is another major issue favela youth must face constantly. A shocking example of how ingrained violence is in their daily lives is the fact that half of Agency participants reported shootouts taking place in their community sometimes or frequently and 61% revealed that civilians (not connected to the police or military) walk around carrying guns in their communities at the same rate (see table 21). In addition, in the last three months prior to responding the survey alone, 19% of respondents

were involved in a serious conflict or fight and 7% were victim of armed robbery.

In Angela's words, the high mortality rate amongst youth - particularly back males, as has been laid bare by the statistics provided early on in the study - is nothing short of a "chronic social issue." To her, violence and criminality, coupled with Brazil's rapidly rising rate of young people incarcerated, are critical structural challenges that must be dealt with if we are to provide the Brazilian youth with any concrete opportunities to have a future. Essentially, amongst so many other deprivations, young people living in poverty across the country are being denied of their fundamental right to life. Having worked together at the National Secretary of Youth, both Gabriel and Angela share the opinion that the current government has also hindered efforts in the youth agenda in this department.

For instance, the 2014 campaign "Youth Alive: Prevention Plan for Violence Against Youth" - which brought together a series of preventive actions aimed at reducing youth vulnerability to violence (in particular black males with low education) and creating opportunities for autonomy and social inclusion - symbolized a federal pact that, for the first time in such scale, discussed, prioritized and sought to create conditions to overcome the roots causes of the issue (it involved 11 Ministries in the articulation of 44 programs present in 96 Brazilian municipalities) (Secretaria Nacional de Juventude, 2014). And yet, the campaign was completely dismounted under the current administration. To Gabriel, hard-earned gains are being eroded at an alarming pace, and the Brazilian youth is now faced with a government that shows a complete disregard for their well-being. He denounced:

> In the current political scenario, nobody cares about the young people who are dying. We have examples of this every day. We began the year with rebellions in jails which cost the lives of dozens of youth… the government is fine with people killing themselves so they can advance the discourse on prison privatization, and it is also a way to help do a "clean up" on criminals. We also had the case of four youth who were killed by the police in a school in Rio's North zone, not to mention the problematic concerning the reduction of the age for criminal responsibility… these are enormous setbacks to human rights.

Table 21. Frequency of violent incidents taking place in participants' communities:

Incidents	% Rarely or never	% Sometimes	% Frequently or very frequently
Shootouts	49%	25%	25%
Civilians carrying guns (who do not belong to the police or military)	39%	25%	36%
Curfews	69%	20%	11%
Strong presence of drug traffickers	54%	18%	28%
Police stop and frisk residents	52%	22%	26%

Needless to say, initiatives and professionals committed to advancing life opportunities to populations experiencing such hostile environments and conditions are themselves confronted with various challenges. In addition to being exposed to situations that may lead to, for instance, physical (accessing dangerous territories) and/or emotional distress (losing a participant to homicide or crime), working with young people in places of violence also present struggles related to the everyday operations of the program, as noted during the interviews. Veruska recalls that back in 2011, when Agency introduced its first cycle, their main worry was entering favelas at the same time the Pacification policy was being rolled out. "At that time, we had to be extremely careful with how we chose to deal with the security situation in the city," she noted. No trivial concern given that police sought to monitor resident's mobility (i.e. stop and frisk, blitz) as well as any kind of major public gatherings, which remains true today.

As Eduardo - a cultural producer from the Mangueira favela who had a couple of funk parties he promoted through Agency being shut down by the police - points out, "the UPP assumes a position that isn't theirs," he said, referring to their attempt to organize (or control) the events that had already been taking place in the territory long before they arrived - which fuels police-youth conflict. In fact, 61% of Agency participants agree that the police acts disrespectfully and violently towards the youth and 37% think the UPP has

become an abusive force inside the community and should come to an end.

Furthermore, as some participants expressed in chapter 5, while bringing young people from different communities together under one same roof helps build a sense of community and closeness, establishing this "bridge" is not devoid of complications, particularly because Agency also work with young people from communities marked by drug trafficking rivalry - which have shaped relationships (or lack thereof) for decades. Rebecca - a 24-year-old from Batan who acted as a local producer at Agency - noted that, back in 2011, when trying to recruit youth from her community to join Agency she was met with great resistance from potential participants (and even from their parents) when saying that the project would also involve the Fumacê favela - a rival community. "The animosity is so entrenched… it is crazy to see because everyone is on the same boat," she added.

When it comes to operational and methodological issues, Agency staff did not shy away from identifying and sharing main areas of concern for the program. Veruska, for instance, talked about the difficulty in properly training professionals to carry out activities with the level of efficiency and flexibility that is expected. Usually, the program team spends only a few hours preparing and receiving instruction before the beginning of a new course. The bulk of the formation takes place during weekly meetings that are held concurrently with the stimulus cycle, thus, the staff basically "learn as they go" - which can be challenging for incoming members who do not yet have a deep knowledge of the methodology.

Ana explains: "the biggest challenge in the work we do is learning how to cope with the unexpected, and that can be hard for the novices… what I tell them is that they should not focus on what goes wrong, but on being ready to address the problems that emerge." According to Veruska, a good alternative would be to hold a month-long intensive training to all participant staff before the cycle even begins, offering them theoretical knowledge which could facilitate practice. Similarly, for Sara, providing a course that would allow staff

to improve their strategic planning and deal with problems of performance and control more effectively is essential in improving the methodology.

However, the fact that the program is fast-paced (each cycle lasts between 4 and 6 months) and operates with limited funding presents logistical difficulties to making such training possible. In addition, Veruska points out that one of the distinctive aspects of the methodology is precisely that it gives staff the opportunity to deal with issues and concerns as they are happening and to be dynamic. "Every meeting the team brings new examples of things that happened in the week prior, so, this allow us to formulate recommendations and think about what needs to be changed… if we didn't have this, we would no longer be Agency," she said.

Given the value Agency places in staying true to the environment they are inserted in and seek to benefit, getting to know the students and communities they work with and adapting their methodology to their specific needs and capacities, another issue has to do with maintaining such an individualized educational method. Veruska explained the rationale behind their approach:

> When people talk about favelas they tend to think about them as blocks [of people]… us, who work inside these places, who experience it, who know the people, we know that each territory is a territory. The youth from Santa Cruz is completely different from the youth from City of God, so, we have a methodology, but this methodology needs to have gaps to allow for these crossings… we do not work with "blocks of youth," we work with individuals.

When discussing possibilities for scaling up, Sara points out that one of Agency's greatest features can also be one of its greatest limitations. "The concern is that, with an expansion of the project and the addition of greatest numbers of youth, the program stops paying attention to the individualities and loses the flexibility to customize their strategies and adjust the methodology based on the necessities that emerge," she explained. Furthermore, Sara identified structural issues related to program systematization and

execution as well as inadequacies in the supervision of group dynamics.

For instance, she called attention to a lack of planning in the pre-incubator phase, which does not dispose of methodical instruments such as the stimulus cycle and, thus, tends to be much looser and poorly monitored. "These problems have not been properly faced and continue to reoccur, particularly because there has not been a moment to stop, reflect, and correct these things before moving forward," she advised. As for classroom management, Sara believes the program should invest in conflict resolution strategies to mitigate disputes that may occur during the creative process and also provide some form of professional psychological support to participants in need. "There are always some youth who require more attention, and that might generate jealousy and misunderstandings by other participants… so I think the program should have a professional present at all times to deal with these interpersonal matters and conflicts," she added.

Finally, considering the various issues the program grapples with, perhaps the most prominent challenge to its sustainability is funding. Initially supported by a private company (Petrobrás) subsequently attaining a multi-year financial package from Rio de Janeiro's municipal government, Agency has enjoyed a kind of intellectual and methodological freedom most programs could only dream of. Their ability to strengthen partnerships and assert their relevance without having to necessarily quantify their outcomes in terms that are generally most attractive to youth policy mainstream frameworks (a rise in employment and education outcomes, reduction of violence, etc.) has ensured the survival of their unique approach to youth education despite difficult times. And yet, an over-dependence on public funding in periods of political change and instability can prove disastrous.

Not only Rio de Janeiro declared a state of bankruptcy only a couple of months before hosting the 2016 Summer Olympics, but a recent change in the city's political leadership (Marcelo Crivella, a bishop in the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God and nephew of

the Church's founder, was elected the city's mayor in October 2016) has also impacted the funding scenario for youth programs like Agency. Ana Paula mentioned: "I joke that we have always lived in a crisis, but never one of this scale." And she isn't blowing things out of proportion. Early this year, the program was at great risk of closing its doors for good.

Thanks to the legacy of youth empowerment they were able to build in their seven years of existence, as well as the personal contact base they have established with relevant actors working in the youth agenda in Brazil and internationally, Agency recently signed a collaboration agreement with the Ford Foundation, securing the continuity of their activities for at least three more years. The clear message here is that Agency's trajectory would have been much different in case they had decided to rely solely on public support and underestimate the importance of seeking out private funding. That is to say, regardless of how innovative a particular program is and how much change it can actually generate on the ground, there can be no long-lasting impact without financial stability - which, more often than not, particularly in the case of developing countries, can best be obtained beyond the bounds of the state.

Figure 14. Informal employment snapshot. Examples of informal and seasonal work performed by Agency youth.

Food delivery boy

Manicure and pedicure

Bakery manager

Tattoo designer

Photographer

Musician

Street performer (living statue)

Grocery store cashier

Food seller at the beach

Mason helper

Cigarette and candy seller at funk parties

Event producer

Zumba teacher

Administrative assistant

Logging worker

Nanny

Hairdresser

Club bartender

Party waiter

Janitor

Bird hunter

Cafeteria attendant

Cook

Car wash staff

Door-to-door clothing seller

Food seller in school

Scrap yard assistant

Interpretation and discussion of findings

Theme 1: Linking Agency's educational instruments and critical pedagogy

A strong criticism of the critical pedagogy framework brings attention to the difficulty (or impracticality) of attempting to apply critical, reflexive, and action-oriented methods in the theory and practice of teaching inside classrooms or other organized educational settings engulfed in inequalities, which reflect our own societies (Saleebey and Scanlon, 2005). With this important and genuine tension in mind, perhaps the major objective of this study is to illustrate, as faithful to the real-world process as possible, how some of the underlying dimensions of critical pedagogy may serve to inspire and guide, rather than dictate or fabricate, emancipatory educational practices oriented towards individual and community transformation. Accordingly, drawing from lessons from the Agency program, the third and final research question tackled in the study look into the actual application of critical pedagogy in youth education practice within marginalized communities.

The first segment of the investigation sought to analyze the extent to which elements of critical pedagogy are reflected in the program's educational model. In order to establish a connection between theory and practice, I started by delving into the original instruments, methods and elements comprising the agency methodology, listing their respective activities, introducing their main objectives, and building a bridge to participant experience. In sum, the analysis of these tools for experimentation and expression show young people taking part in a dynamic and interactive process of project creation aimed at territorial transformation that draws from the knowledge and lived experiences they bring with them.

This learning space outside the classroom - which is rooted in a pedagogical method that involves the introduction, display, application and reflection of the various concepts being discussed - invites young people to become active participants in the educational process instead of mere objects of it. Consciously striving to foster knowledge sharing and

learning under a platform that recognizes the value of each person's abilities and experiences, Agency educators stimulate participants to approach their surrounding and social history in a more critical way, to reflect on themselves and their aspirations, as well as to envision and access new platforms of opportunities. These are important findings given that advancing educational structures that promote critical thinking, self-reflection and imagination - which create conditions for individuals to engage in a continuous discovery and analysis of themselves and the world despite various social limitations - is the driving force behind critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2010).

Each Agency instrument is comprised of different exercises that expose participants to various concepts and elements that not only advance project creation, but also help foster personal development and community engagement. The multi-faceted educational outcomes promoted by these activities may be summarized as follows:

- Participants identify the motivation, experiences, abilities, resources, forms of expression and population inspiring and sustaining their projects;

- Participants create original concepts and express ideas based on their own values and the changes they would like to see in the territory;

- Participants engage in dialogue with young people from different communities about their projects but also discuss proposals to increase visibility and support for the favela youth, which help improve their ability to express themselves effectively and maximize their potential for realization as part of a collective effort;

- Participants explore their communities and create a profile of needs and expectations of the project target population, discovering new aspects of the territory and resources they can tap into;

- Participants survey into the various elements, actors and businesses already present in their territories, being exposed to new opportunities for realization and community

assets which help rupture negative stereotypes of favelas they may have internalized;

- Participants assume a negotiated role and take up responsibilities within their projects, exercising flexibility and direction in their actions and behaviour;

- Participants reflect on the instruments they have been exposed to inside the methodology and carry out a critical evaluation of their own projects;

- Participants engage with the project's target population on the ground, introducing the objectives of the initiative and mobilizing them to get involved, making it a collective strategy that takes place alongside the community;

- Participants receive training on how to present, execute and sustain their projects beyond Agency, maximizing their potential to win external funding competitions and successfully carry out their initiatives;

- Participants are introduced to organizations and people of interest who can provide them with project-related advice and support as well as emotional, educational and professional guidance;

- Participants receive recommendations for educational and professional programs, and continue to access networks and contacts developed inside Agency after leaving the program.

In light of these findings, the most relevant linkages between critical pedagogy and Agency's educational methodology identified in the analysis are related to the concepts of negotiated curriculum, problem-posing education, dialogic learning and praxis. In the discussion that follows, I would like to reiterate some of these insights and further connect them with the literature. A negotiated curriculum draws from teaching and learning that place students' knowledge, needs, voices, and ways of seeing the world at the center of the educational process, guiding them towards creating change and finding solutions to community problems impacting their lives and that of those around them (Aliakbari and

Faraji, 2011; Giroux and McLaren, 1992; Tarlau, 2014).

By applying a context-sensitive educational approach to project creation that promotes territorial potency, and that builds from the lived experiences and knowledge of participants, Agency creates a space for young people to advance concrete initiatives that are relevant and beneficial to their communities. A negotiated curriculum, in this case, is reflected in content that is applicable to the realities of young people, resulting, as the analysis have shown, in participants taking a more active interest in the educational process and reflecting on the meaning of the pedagogical material in their daily lives. In addition, the emphasis on local culture sustaining much of Agency's methodology, can be understood as a form of "cultural politics" within the negotiated curriculum framework, as it brings to light popular favela culture in its essence and everyday practices, opposing the traditional hidden curriculum that only affirms the worldviews and values of those considered to have a "higher" cultural and social capital (McLaren, 2009; Nouri and Sajjadi, 2014).

Agency recognizes young people as conscious, potent, and active agents who have a right to experimenting new possibilities beyond their immediate lives, and who possess the capacity to intervene in the world as change-makers. Rather than being expected to simply retain and repeat information, they are invited to co-create knowledge alongside educators in a non-authoritative approach based on respect, and to engage in a critical analysis of the "whats, whys, hows, and whos" shaping their life conditions, as they explore new terrains of expression and opportunities inside their communities (Fritze, n/d; Shor, 1993). This problem-posing approach to education manifested in some of the activities for project creation carried out in the program, also provoke participants to identify, describe, personalize, debate and suggest solutions to real problems impacting the territories in which they live (Aliakbari and Faraji, 2011; Kaliban, 1999).

As a learning platform for self and community change, Agency challenges banking

approaches to education that separate students from their ontological vocation of actively participating in the world and working to transform it (Freire, 2004; Frymer, 2005; McInnerney, 2009). In a like manner, as part of their efforts to stimulate young people to critically examine their lifeworld and the society around them aimed at inspiring transformative action, Agency engages participants and educators in dialogic learning, helping humanize pedagogy. Such process of interaction and collaboration involves, amongst other activities, the identification and systematization of generative themes representative of the most familiar words, experiences and references in young people's lives, the participation in discussions about thematics and issues directly impacting the youth population in favelas, and the sharing of perspectives, reflections, questions and knowledge.

Through the facilitation of dialogue and reflective practices, the program help participants gain a better understanding of the nature of their social realities and expand their political conscience and social critique, while bringing together reflection and action - an exercise which lies at the heart of praxis and emancipatory learning (Galloway, 2012). As the analysis has shown, the fundamental objective inspiring the work carried out by Agency alongside the favela youth is precisely to advance a meaningful and purposeful education - combined with the provision of tools for leading social initiatives - that allows young people to positively intervene in their communities. Drawing insights from the critical pedagogy literature as it relates to the concept of praxis, we may conclude that Agency is a platform that strives to connect experience, knowledge sharing, sense-making and informed action as part of larger struggle for social transformation (Fyrmer, 2005; McLaren, 1999).

The extent to which Agency's instruments and overall program objectives interface with some of the chief elements of critical pedagogy exceeds initial hypothesis, an interesting outcome given that the creators of the methodology did not explicitly borrow from a Freirean framework (although their work is influenced by his important contributions to

Brazilian education). This aligns with Barroso's (2002) study of the opportunities and challenges of applying Freire's ideas on community empowerment and participation in the work of Southern NGOs, in which she concluded that NGO managers "followed Freire not following him." That is, they took inspiration from some of his proposals but did not take his theory and methodology literally.

Theme 2: Program relevance and limitations in implementation and sustainability

Bringing insights from educators and relevant political actors, the second research thematic of this chapter investigates aspects of Agency which makes it an important youth provision in Rio's favelas and consider limitations to program implementation and sustainability given its operating context. The dedicated and passionate educators who put in the time to get to know each participant and offer them the necessary support so they can flourish in the methodology are an embodiment of program strength. Coming mainly from peripheral territories themselves and displaying diverse professional trajectories, these professionals dialogue with the individual desires of every participant and attempt to build an authentic relationship of trust with them, stimulating young people to think for themselves and make their own decisions, while offering them with incentive and criticism to continuously foment reflection and inquiry - all of which are essential practices in the process of co-creating knowledge.

These results are relevant to a Freirean dialogic approach to education that require educators to work collaboratively with students from a non-authoritarian stance and in recognition of the knowledge and agency they possess (Barroso, 2002; Lissovoy, 2010). The stories of change shared by members of Agency's coordinating team (participants maturing, becoming more confident and excelling, adopting elements of the methodology in their lives, etc.) highlight the program's capacity to impact personal trajectories in a significant way. Furthermore, as they immerse themselves further in local community life and practice,

educators too are touched and inspired by the experiences they encounter. By incorporating knowledge sharing, project creation and autonomy to the educational process, while ensuring youth's right to exercise their subjectivity and cultural identity, Agency not only help fill the gaps left by a largely deficient public educational system - that, for the most part, fails to incorporate young people's creative potential, knowledge and lived experiences in its curriculum - but also invite participants to take part in changing education as they know it.

Recognizing the significance of schools as sites for fostering change, particularly for young people, an important element of Agency identified in the analysis is their commitment to support the expansion of youth-led projects in classrooms, creating a bridge between non-formal and formal education. Another aspect which help demonstrate the significance of their work is their mission to guide young people in the creation and implementation of initiatives that seek to bring about change to communities marked by inequalities and violence, doing so from a perspective of territorial and individual affirmation.

Educational processes that aim to bring educators and students together in dialogue, inspired by a commitment to social justice and affirmative feelings of hope, courage, tolerance, trust and faith, are at the heart of a Freirean pedagogy of love that leads to greater humanization and emancipation (Darder, 2002; Mayo, 2004; Lissovoy, 2010). Although this may seem like an ambitious project, my analysis of Agency has shown that, at the very least, it is possible for educators to commit themselves to entering a relationship of solidarity with students that is based on respect and affection, as they collectively take an active role, however delimited, in the larger struggle for social change through education (Darder, 2002; Mayo, 2004).

Finally, as for overall barriers to program sustainability, the main difficulties brought to light are related to political, social and operational constraints, with insights and implications relevant to Agency and other provisions in Rio's favelas, but also reminiscent

of the general state of the youth agenda in the country as a whole. Agency staff, political players and practitioners spoke of a genuine political crisis in Brazil, aggravated by the undemocratic introduction of a highly unpopular right-wing government, regarded by many as illegitimate, that has put in jeopardy essential and long-standing social policies advanced by the Worker's Party in the last decade. Largely benefiting the most impoverished segments of the population, many of these programs advancing income redistribution, education, culture, housing and employment have either been reduced or suspended. Moreover, recent changes in the labour market and pension scheme are expected to debilitate an already precarious employment and income scenario even more.

That is, overall social gains in Brazil in addition to hard-earned development in terms of youth representation in public policies have been seriously compromised, further limiting access to formative opportunities and pathways to a prosperous future for young people facing the challenges of a financial crisis. Similar to the state of the youth agenda at a global scale - that is, despite the continuous advancement of policy schemes and action plans, they are considered insufficient given the peak in the world's youth population and their crucial position in any nation's progress (ECLAC, 2016) - in Brazil, the youth life stage is not prioritized, whether at the municipal, federal or state level.

The fact that young people in Brazil and beyond are disproportionately affected by exclusion and marginalization (OECD, 2017; The Commonwealth, 2016), steering through various social challenges is a natural difficulty when working with this particular group, particularly in poverty-stricken and violent communities. The most significant barriers to youth development in favelas (and nationwide) identified in the study are mainly connected to education, employment and violence, an evident trend across the urban world (ILO, 2012; International Youth Foundation, 2012; OECD, 2017; UNESCO, 2015, WHO, 2011). In education, the analysis has shown that young Brazilians dependent on public schools are

faced with a poor educational system that place little value in the work of teachers, fail to educate for life, and does not seek to incorporate student voice into decision-making that directly concerns them - which only serves to disengage youth from the educational process and further weaken the link between schooling and future life choices.

Displaying an unemployment rate at least twice as high as the national average, the working life of young people in Brazil (as well as that of Agency participants) is marked by informality and low participation in the formal job market - a result that aligns with the scenario for the Latin American region where one-fifth of young people are informal workers (OECD, 2017). Relevant to this discussion, the pressure to make money and help support their families can force young people to abandon educational pursuits to meet more immediate needs, a real barrier Agency must face to ensuring that participants can remain in the program. An interesting finding is that young people show great creativity and attitude when it comes to securing job opportunities, doing the most varied kinds of work and coming up with original ideas for income-generation. Another finding that stood out related to employment - although much less encouraging - is the extent to which favela youth find it hard to get a job when lacking experience (over two thirds) and feel discriminated in the job market due to their appearance and/or place of residence (less than one-fifth).

As for exposure to violence - perhaps where the most poignant conclusions drawn from the overall analysis of the life conditions of young people living in favelas and throughout Brazil lies - the phenomenon is deeply ingrained in the daily lives of young people (SNJ, 2013). Program participants frequently experience incidents in the favelas and peripheries where they live which are characteristic of chronic community violence, including shootouts, curfews, exposure to guns, drug-trafficking groups and police repression. In Brazil, black male youth are strikingly prone to suffer lethal violence, the loss of their young lives making up almost half of the average 60,000 homicides committed

annual in the country (Waiselfisz, 2015).

When it comes to Rio's most impoverished territories, young people are further endangered by historical patterns of drug trafficking violence and police brutality, being at the receiving end of most police killings committed in the city (Human Rights Watch, 2016; Souza e Silva, 2014). The analysis has also shed light on the feelings of mistrust and resistance that shape the police-youth relationship, with the emergence of new aggravating factors in light of the Pacification security policy and the state's attempt to control socio-cultural events in favelas (Smadja, 2013). All in all, participants' accounts of their encounters with everyday violence are, unfortunately, nothing but a reflection of a brutal reality of crime exposure and victimization, which - coupled with social instability and legitimate uncertainties about the future - only narrow young people's access to opportunity structures to scape vulnerability and build a better future.

Lastly, the analysis of program operational and methodological constraints reveal areas of concern for staff presently, but also considering future proposals for scaling up and replicating the methodology. These include investing in the proper training of professionals, maintaining an individualized approach to working with youth, strengthening the systematization and execution of educational instruments used in the program, investing in psychological support and conflict resolution mechanisms and securing financial support. The last point is particularly relevant given that, at a time when the program depended on public support, Agency almost closed its doors as a result of the recent political turmoil in the country. In sum, as a primarily privately-funded platform enjoying much intellectual freedom to create and execute a methodology that reflects the progressive ideals and lived experiences of its founder, Agency is certainly the exception and not the rule in the world of non-formal educational programs, meaning that lessons and findings in opportunities and constraints drawn from this analysis should be taken with caution.

Tools for a youth-centered emancipatory education

I would now like to connect some of the most salient results of this discussion to theoretical insights that can help us explore tools for a youth-centered emancipatory education in light of Agency's methodology. As examined in chapters 4 and 5, empowerment can act both as an individual and collective force. The former has to do with bolstering elements of agency and self-control impacting various spheres of life, from attitudes and feelings, cognitive and non-cognitive skills to critical reflection, while the later concerns capacity-building to strengthen support systems, networks, and resources that also serve the needs of the community at large (Jennings, et.al., 2006; Zimmerman, 2000).

The concept of the empowerment-emancipation spectrum illuminates the prospect of linking well-being with larger social change even further. That is, empowerment which is concerned with emancipatory possibilities place focus on individuals transforming the system rather than just functioning to become more powerful within the present social order (Inglis, 1997). If we consider that some outcomes are empowering if they remain at the individual or interpersonal level (which is essential even if it does not lead to systematic chance) and emancipatory if they cross over to the institutional and societal levels (Crowther, 2013), then Agency's work with young people and communities can be seen as a juxtapose of these two frameworks for change.

For example, Crowther's (2013) analysis of the work carried out by different community organizations that sought to explore how individuals exercise empowerment and emancipation in the face of different powers revealed that, in order to transform attitudes, beliefs and perceptions shaped by ideological power which lead people to act willingly against their most basic interests (the third dimension in Steven Lukes' analysis of power), attempts to change power relations ought to involve strategies that promote a shift in people's opinions about themselves, attitudes and outlook in life, but in a way that leads

them to influence change as part of a group, communicating ideas to others, and engaging in building a shared understanding of how to effect change (Crowther, 2013; Lukes, 1974).

Central to readjusting power relations at a collective and structural level and unlocking the potential of emancipatory possibilities lies, therefore, the process of uncovering power dynamics and encouraging bottom-up social and culture practices, which may help alter the advantage position of the less-powerful (Crowther, 2013). Some of these larger objectives are reflected in the work carried out by Agency in the sense that participants engage in dialogue and reflective exercises which stimulate them to gain a better understanding of the nature of their social realities and structures delimitating the lives and experiences of young people in favelas - which help expand their political conscience and social critique.

In addition, the educational practices used in the program are not restricted to promoting avenues for independence, autonomy and self-reflection; rather, the knowledge that is created through the exchange of experiences and critical analysis has the central objective of helping advance participatory strategies for tangible action on the ground. That is, as is characteristic of a Freirean-oriented emancipatory education, Agency cultivates teaching and learning that encourage participants to explore new platforms of expression amd opportunities, and to consider alternatives to changing their realities and social conditions rather than simply accepting the status-quo, with positive ramifications for community life (Biesta, 2010; Van der Merwe and Albert, 2009).

Linking education and social action - a goal also manifested in the adult education tradition - the focus is placed on individual and collective practices that lead to a reflection of common struggles and the building of solidarity, with personal development taking place within the context of social change (Inglis, 1997; Thompson, 2000). As Freire would put it, liberation is a social act and a process of social illumination that, in order to move beyond individual empowerment to integrate collective and structural domains, requires those who

have acquired new freedoms and capabilities to use their expanded agency to support others in achieving the same (Shor and Freire, 1987).

Engaging with instruments and exercises that seek to distil similar outcomes and aspirations from the educational process, Agency participants identify, describe, personalize, debate and create solutions to real issues impacting their communities, drawing from their knowledge and elements from their physical and social world to advance relevant initiatives that are contextualized in the struggles of their everyday lives and territorial needs. The implication of these findings to critical pedagogy and, particularly, emancipatory education, are further illustrated in the use of participants' lived experiences as a valuable resource in education, as it allows young people to relate the learning content to their own narratives, social relations and history, being that, in order to be critical and transformative, pedagogy must first be meaningful. Young people learn, therefore, that knowledge is meant to be challenged, actively transformed, and related to the self (Freire, 1993; Giroux, 2010).

In the Freirean tradition, the work of educators is a key aspect of pedagogical practices which seek to bring about social transformation, facilitating the progression from individual learning to emancipatory education (Inglis, 1997). Here, it is important to note the word "facilitation," as it highlights the role of educators as guides and mentors who support students in the process of connecting experience and knowledge, inquiry and sense-making, cultural identity and expression, critical reflection and informed action, rather than "liberators" who fail to recognize the capacity of individuals to enact their own emancipatory pathways.

Dialoguing with the unique desires of each young person who joins the program and using their lived experiences as fuel to their teaching, Agency educators attempt to build an authentic relationship of trust with participants based on support, affection, and faith in the educational process, as they collaborate in co-creating knowledge that help advance context-

sensitive actions of social impact in communities historically characterized for their shortages, and not for their potency. By stimulating young people to look critically at the world and act upon it, translating their hopes, fears and aspirations into project ideas that bring out popular favela culture in its essence and everyday practices, the program engages in cultural action for freedom, involving participants in the struggle over cultural affirmation, representation and social justice (Freire, 2000; McLaren, 2009).

Finally, the program is undisguised in their commitment to helping change the politics of representation of favelas, presenting its young residents as conscious, potent, and active agents capable of intervening in the world as change-makers, thus, exercising education as a political act. With the understanding that no education is neutral and devoid of a political agenda, as critical theorists believe (Freire, 1993), the ambition of this program in particular is to radicalize democracy by providing young favela youth with tools so they can broaden their active participation in society, one project at a time. By virtue of raising this flag, Agency carries the weight of an enormous responsibility given the context in which the program operates. Brazil is a country in political turmoil, debilitating hard-earned social developments at an alarmingly fast face. Young people in Rio favelas and nationwide face serious social and economic challenges, being more likely to be unemployed and to find themselves at the receiving end of urban violence than any other group, for instance.

Given this scenario, the advancement of grassroots educational practices centered on the lifeworld and cultural identities of young people provide an enormous possibility for relevant, adaptable, and effective youth policy-making. As discussed in the literature and displayed in some of the findings from this study, investing in youth development through arts and culture can contribute significantly to young people's social development and skills enhancement, helping unleash their interest, creative potential and energy. More importantly, however, is the decisive role culture plays in channelling resources and

conditions for young citizens to develop a critical understanding of their presence in the world, conquer the right to speak their words, be themselves, create knowledge from experience, and assume the direction of their own destiny - which are fundamental aspects of emancipatory theory and practice (Freire, 2000).

Much to the contrary of offering a silver bullet to eliminating oppression, borrowing from Lissovoy (2010), the emancipatory education framework focuses on celebrating the small victories people make on a daily basis, taking actions to challenge oppressive structures, make their voices heard and transform their realities - efforts which take place whether or not people have been engaged in a formal process of emancipatory learning. That is, individuals exercise agency through small acts of resistance despite starting from a position of inequality; emancipatory learning only seeks to propagate and further direct those acts so they touch the lives of increasingly more people and, overtime, help wear down dominant structures of power (Scott, 1985).

Conclusion

Each instrument applied in the Agency methodology is comprised of a series of exercises meant to expose the favela youth to various concepts and principles of project creation which, concurrently, help foster personal development and community transformation through collective inquiry, reflection, and experimentation - sharing many similarities with the theory and practice of critical pedagogy and a Freirean emancipatory education. The program promotes learning and knowledge exchange under a dynamic and interactive platform that values the abilities and experiences of each participant, encouraging them to draw from their background, social history and lived experiences to advance context-sensitive initiatives that are relevant and beneficial to their communities. In this approach, teaching and learning is directed towards stimulating participants to more critically reflect on their life conditions and on the meaning of the learning content in their

daily lives, as they explore new platforms of interaction, expression and opportunities.

Elements of a negotiated curriculum are, thus, found in the introduction of educational tools that reflect the realities, interests and needs of young people. By placing local culture at the center of its educational process, Agency exercises a form of 'cultural politics' that showcase popular favela culture in its essence and everyday practices. Rejecting uncritical and non-participatory components from a conventional 'banking model' of education, the program approaches young people as conscious, potent, and active agents capable of intervening in the world as change-makers, inviting them to actively participate in the educational process instead of simply retaining and repeating information passively. More specifically, aligned with a 'problem-posing approach' to education, participants take part in activities that provoke them to identify, describe, personalize, debate and develop solutions to real issues impacting their communities.

As for guiding pedagogical strategies, educators engage with participants in the co-creation of knowledge from a non-authoritarian stance and with utmost respect for the dispositions and capacities of favela youth. They attempt to communicate with the distinctive desires of every participant and build an authentic relationship of trust with them based on affection and faith in the educational process, as they work collaboratively in the advancement of actions of social impact, helping build a 'pedagogy of love.' Acting as facilitators of critical dialogue and reflective exercises, these young mentors - many of whom come from peripheral communities themselves - guide participants through practices that stimulate them to develop a better understanding of the nature of their social realities and to expand their political conscience and social critique - which is central to any process of emancipatory learning.

Notably, engaging with mechanisms of 'dialogic learning,' young people are encouraged to share their perspectives and reflections with others, to identify and

systematize 'generative themes' from their physical and social world, and to take part in discussions about thematics directly impacting their lives and communities. As a 'praxis'-oriented educational platform concerned with reflection and participation, Agency connects experience, knowledge-sharing, sense-making and informed action as part of larger struggle for social transformation. Another example of program strength is evidenced in Agency's effort to bridge non-formal and formal education by creating a space for young people, most of whom attend public schools, to exercise their subjectivity and cultural identity - an important complement to an educational system that tends to suppress student voice - in addition to investing in the implementation of youth-led projects in classrooms.

Given Brazil's current scenario of political turmoil and social setbacks, initiatives like Agency are essential vehicles to help foster the meaningful inclusion of young people in the social, political and economic life of their communities, in Rio de Janeiro and throughout the country. Much concerning, crucial social programs implemented in the past decade by the PT have been seriously compromised and newly introduced right-leaning policies are expected to weaken social protections schemes, with negative consequences for the formative opportunities of future generations. Similar to young people nationwide, favela youth face great barriers to accessing a quality education and decent work opportunities, and are, to an alarming extent, stripped of their right for safe living.

Violence is deeply ingrained in the daily routines of program participants, with a significant proportion of them frequently experiencing incidents characteristic of territories displaying security instability, including shootouts, exposure to guns, a strong presence of drug-trafficking groups and commonplace police repression. In addition to the everyday intricacies of operating under such a complex social context (entering dangerous zones, dealing with the police, etc.), Agency has to grapple with a series of operational and methodological constraints. Amongst the most critical ones are issues related to the proper

training of professionals and the systematization of educational instruments, the difficulty in sustaining an individualized approach to working with youth in the possible event of a scale-up, the need for classroom support mechanisms to help alleviate internal conflicts, as well as obstacles in securing funding.

Nonetheless, despite its limitations, Agency enjoys ideological freedom to set their own agenda, intellectual autonomy to formulate their own methodology, and private support to compensate for the unreliability of state funding - an uncommon set of conditions considering the status of non-formal education in Latin America. That is, although essential in advancing flexible and relevant bottom-up practices, these strategies are still largely invisible within the framework for practice and policy in comparison to formal educational structures, which, at their end, also do not receive the support they deserve and require.

CONCLUSION

Key takeaways

Building upon the accounts, experiences, and meaning-making of favela youth, this study set out to investigate into the opportunities and constraints of applying elements of a Freirean emancipatory education in youth-oriented programs operating beyond the formal system of education as an instrument to advance individual and community transformation in communities at the margin. Using critical pedagogy as a theoretical point of departure and a qualitative case study approach as the foundation of a research journey aimed at building an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question, the study draw from original qualitative and quantitative data sets, and contextualize the literature on youth as well as processes of empowerment and emancipation, to develop a conceptualization of research, theory and practice in emancipatory learning.

More specifically, it explores and systematizes theories, processes, methods and experiences that contribute to a further understanding of the application of critical and emancipatory pedagogy as a platform of possibility for young people in poverty-stricken territories. Responding to the central research aim and corresponding guiding questions, the findings emerging from the analysis connect to broader opportunity schemes in youth empowerment, youth-led community transformation, and a youth-centered emancipatory education. Together, these practical tools for youth capacity building, protagonism and social participation, illustrate the Agency program as a transformative educational platform helping form, engage, and enable young favela dwellers to create the change they want to see in their lives and in their communities.

Much like its Latin American counterparts, the lifeworld of favela and peripheral youth is filled with barriers that prevents their full participation in society, from poverty to

lack of decent work opportunities to high victimization and marginalization, a scenario further aggravated by the pervasiveness of crime and violence. Despite having more years of schooling than their parents overall - which is associated with a global trend in the expansion of public education - obstacles in the educational pipeline, including access to higher learning, are commonplace, and so are traditional paradigms of teaching and learning.

In Brazil and beyond, education, the most important force for social change, is strongly tied to a neoliberal orientation towards strengthening human capital rather than processes of building critical and active citizenship. Considering a context where the state has failed to create policies and structures to guarantee a safe and decent living to large portions of the population - and where a low-quality public education system is reluctant to incorporate shared experiences, local voices and ways of knowing into the learning process - the work of grassroots organizations and NGOs can become a source of empowering and emancipatory possibilities, as this study has demonstrated.

As a platform for promoting individual empowerment, Agency supports mostly black and low-income youth in strengthening life skills crucial to their personal development, technical competencies for project creation and implementation, as well as a series of channels to advance employment, educational, cultural and entrepreneurship opportunities - which includes an expansion of city mobility, repertoires, frames of reference, networks and tools for engagement this population traditionally lacked access to. Nonetheless, given the scope of this study, perhaps their most significant efforts in youth empowerment is manifested in their commitment to stimulate young favela youth to challenge and change social issues that are important to them and that are central to their community life through the expression of their identities and culture.

Drawing from the study main findings, three broader aspects of Agency's work are

particularly reminiscent of a contemporary platform for emancipatory education - an analysis which help us explore and expand Freirean pedagogical models as they are implemented in reality. The first involves situating participants as agents of community transformation. Approaching young people as conscious, potent, and active agents capable of intervening in the world as protagonists of change, the program provides participants with instruments to formulate and carry out initiatives that bear a potential territorial impact, placing them at the heart of local development processes in favelas.

The result is an assembling of multithemed and multifaceted projects that, despite small in scope and short on funding, manage to reach hundreds of residents through different platforms and in different domains, from education to employment, health and leisure, to arts and culture. These localized actions are not only concrete examples of youth-led responses to community challenges, but they are also mechanisms of positive social regeneration that help create a counter-narrative to dominant discourses about favelas - and the favela youth, in particular - within the context of a "parted city."

Agency's development rationale is, therefore, connected to a larger struggle to build more authentic and positive narratives of peripheral representation, highlighting the central role these spaces and its residents must play in processes of inclusive and meaningful urban transformation. As participants are encouraged to fight social exclusion by embracing their identity and culture, disputing their right to the city, unleashing their voice, and assuming their crucial position in empowering and bringing change to their communities, they take further steps in the journey towards self-confidence, self-discovery, self-acceptance and community belonging.

The program's bottom-up approach to community development bring us to its second emancipatory education-related dimension of contextualized learning and praxis. The educational instruments and exercizes applied in the methodology integrate the interests,

realities and demands of young people, creating a dynamic and interactive platform that attract participants to join the learning process as active subjects rather than passive objects. It is by first contextualizing education to the lifeworld of young people and respecting their dispositions and abilities that Agency can successfully stimulate participants to draw from their background, social history, and lived experiences to advance context-sensitive initiatives that are based on community needs, conditions, resources, culture and everyday practices.

The third and final broader linkage to emancipatory education has to do with the adoption of an educational model based on reflective practices and critical dialogue. Teaching and learning under the Agency platform stimulate participants to think critically about their place in the world, their life conditions, as well as different issues and discourses impacting their communities. The advancement of tools that promote a critical analysis of dominant discourses and unequal social structures is, however, meant to go beyond supporting young people in the process of broadening their political conscience and social critique, to encourage them to use that reflection to realize their potential for social engagement. That is, participants not only identify, describe, personalize and debate these issues, but they effectively come up with solutions for them. The way these young people understand their political grounding and social reality may be elementary in their intellectual and critical scope, but they are truth to how they experience these processes in real life and transformative in their own right as a steppingstone to emancipatory learning and further critical analysis of the world.

The work of educators is central to this pedagogical approach; they act as facilitators of dialogic learning and reflective exercises, while helping create an inviting non-traditional classroom environment for young people to explore new avenues to interact with others, new ways to express themselves, and opportunities for growth inside and outside their

communities. Guiding participants to use generative themes from their physical and social world to build their ideas for action, reflect on the meaning of the learning content in their daily lives, and illustrate their perspectives to others, these mentors strive to engage with youth in knowledge co-creation and sharing from a non-authoritarian, respectful, and encouraging stance. Their goal is to build an authentic relationship of trust with the favela youth based on affection and faith in the educational process, as they work, collaboratively, in the advancement of projects of territorial impact.

Given these points, as a platform promoting collective inquiry, reflection, experimentation and participation, we may conclude that Agency is, in all its emancipatory possibilities, a catalyst of change linking experience, knowledge-sharing, sense-making and informed organized action inspired by favela potency and driven by a larger struggle for social transformation. One of the program's main contributions to critical pedagogy and emancipatory education practices lie in its relevance as a vehicle for exploring ways to create institutional and community-based strategies to support young people in places of violence from an approach that celebrates popular knowledge and promotes cultural action first and foremost.

Territories at the margin are "urban innovation hubs" filled with creative entrepreneurial activities, authenticity, cultural richness and context-sensitive development mechanisms; thus, it is fundamental that development initiatives in education or any other social sector borrow from and incorporate local knowledge and bottom-up practices into policymaking. Another important lesson we can draw from Agency's work - which is relevant to theoretical and practical frameworks found at the intersection between emancipatory education and youth development - is related to the program's capacitation of young people to become active participants in setting up the framework for change to take place inside their communities and in their own lives.

The various elements and instruments comprising the Agency methodology engage participants in reflective exercises and hands-on activities that emboldens them to think for themselves, act upon their thoughts, build presence in institutional dialogue, and find a space for their voices to be heard. This reflection and participation sphere is then strengthened by mechanisms to expand young people's repertoire and scope for action - that is, ideas, skills, mobility, contacts, networks, space, and supportive systems to allows them to exercise their agency more fully through their projects. A platform for "bringing together the different" and radicalizing democracy starting from those at the economic and social margins, Agency invites favela youth to view and act upon the world beyond the limiting geographical and symbolic borders that have historically compactuated to define what they can do and become.

Recommendations

Conclusions drawn from my analysis of the Agency program can help inform theoretical and practical recommendations in two central aspects of what I have defined as a youth-centered emancipatory education framework. These are related to the importance of situating the lifeworld of young people in any processes of empowerment and the central position of non-formal educational platforms in emancipatory learning, hence, its need to walk hand in hand with formal education. The methodological framework adopted in this study reflects my impulse to conduct research with ethnographic sensitivity. By situating participants' perceptions and meaning-making within the broader social, cultural and political context that shape their experiences and realities, with an initial understanding of its nuances and complexities, I attempt to incorporate contextualized observations and understandings into arguments about processes of empowerment and emancipation.

Young people living in poverty-stricken territories are trapped in historical circumstances and they struggle to, in a Bourdieusian sense, both use and gain access to

valued forms of capital to exercise greater power in society. In their everyday battle to survive and live a decent life, people activate different kinds of capital and resources to move ahead and climb a ladder away from marginalization in ways that are relevant to their social world - which connects to the notion that the value of different capitals is tied to the context in which they are found. Exploring this array of local skills, abilities, knowledge and actions, while contextualizing their practices, is thus essential to understanding how individuals in marginalized communities move beyond the limitations of their opportunity structures to expand their agency.

The various means Agency youth find to make a living, the creative responses they come up with to address important territorial challenges, and the resilience they display in the face of violence and repression by state and non-state actors, are only but a few examples of context-relevant strategies young favela residents build to navigate through, and make small victories against, social and structural inequalities. In line with this - and similar to a contextual approach to exploring youth social agency - my first proposal is that any process of youth education that is concerned with cultivating and bringing to light empowering and emancipatory possibilities, must be directly connected to the lifeworld of young people and located within the struggles of their everyday lives and territorial needs. This approach also allows for the co-construction of a negotiated curriculum alongside youth incorporating themes, experiences and situations that are relevant to their social reality.

Unpacking the second recommendation, as we explore opportunities to maximize the empowering and democratic potential of education, it is important to develop an argument for the advancement of learning platforms with a critical component beyond the scope of formal education. Given the inflexibility of hierarchical and highly structured school systems, they take longer to adapt their educational methods and content to the emerging demands of youth populations and to the new ways they construct their worldviews - which

is increasingly more participatory and dynamic thanks to the expansion in access to social media platforms and communication technologies.

Enjoying a greater level of intellectual freedom and being mostly grounded in knowledge sharing and co-production that is connected to the realities and interests of peoples and communities, non-formal education provides greater possibility to best accommodate youth's most intimate issues and necessities, attracting them to the learning process with more ease. Thus, they are ideal sites for promoting educational practices that inspire individuals to become more critical and take an active role in transforming their lives and social surroundings, as well as essential platforms that help pick up the pieces left behind by deficient formal education systems. There are, of course, limitations to the potential reach and impact of non-formal education, which varies depending on the societal context at the receiving end of these provisions. Perhaps the biggest challenge within the scope of this study and Latin America is to strengthen and expand the role of educational programs - which now struggle in isolation at the margin of the formal system - as an important complement of formal learning, as they are mutually beneficial.

Emancipatory education enables people to develop a more critical understanding of their social realities and the root causes of their life conditions, so they can develop strategies to change them; however, as Ranciere and Freire agreed on, its practice cannot be systematized within a formal system. At the same time, without formal education that guarantees the minimum knowledge and skills qualifications, people have little chances to succeed in life, being more likely to face poverty and exclusion, and to remain in that state. Education may open a window of opportunities to a good and productive life, but critical education is the door to societal transformation.

Limitations

Before introducing the research limitations and suggesting directions for future work,

I want to briefly discuss constraints related to program practice and outcomes drawing from a more in-depth understanding of Agency's methods and challenges that have been identified along the study as well as new insights - an analysis useful in helping us conceptualize a youth-oriented emancipatory education as an incrementalist strategy. With an eye towards the future, let us first briefly look into history. The birthplace of Paulo Freire and popular education, Brazil has a long and rich history of social and grassroots movements; those began to take force in the 1960s with the spread of liberation theology ideas promoted by the Catholic Church, but suffered persecution and setbacks almost simultaneously and throughout the over twenty years of dictatorship to follow.

These popular traditions played a central role in the creation of important social movements which are still active today (such as the MST) and in the establishment of the Worker's Party, whose 13-year-long ruling came crashing down in corruption scandals - a factor that, for the opposition, overshadow its important contributions to helping build a less unequal country. Now governed by a right-leaning party that was not fairly democratically elected and displaying the most conservative congress in decades, Brazil grapples with a scenario of dangerous political polarization, aversion to leftist ideals, economic crisis and social setbacks - which hit poor people the hardest.

As has been discussed, the shifting political climate has brought about changes in social and labour market policies that compromise the future of older and younger generations alike. That is to say that, one of the main limitations to the advancement and survival of emancipatory strategies such as Agency in favelas is precisely the current political environment the country finds itself in. Difficulty securing public funding, for instance, is a glaring reminder that regardless of how much transformative power a particular initiative may have, they can be swiftly scratched out due to political apathy and neglect.

The social context under which programs with an emancipatory agenda normally

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operate can also introduce challenges. The urban poor struggle to maintain their households and must work long hours at low paying jobs in order to barely make ends meet, meaning that pursuing educational goals (and less so, participating in non-formal educational platforms) becomes of secondary importance when there are more immediate life pressures to be addressed - which is also a predicament for Agency in terms of keeping young people enrolled in the program, as noted.

Let us rapidly unpack this dilemma. While it is true that amongst the roughly 20% of participants who leave the program every cycle some may do so due to financial and other personal reasons (they live too far, have responsibilities at home, cannot leave work in time to get to classes, etc.), there are other more complex challenges limiting the full engagement of Agency's main beneficiary population. Although a weakness of my sampling strategy is that it does not incorporate the experiences, frustrations and opinions of participants who dropped out of the program - which would have helped give a more balanced reading to the analysis - I have gathered information and overall insights on what some of the sources of this disconnect might be.[48]

The issue is twofold. First, several participants who have a history of engagement in entrepreneurship and social action approach the program solely as a channel to financing. They arrive with their projects ready to go only to later realize that the process involves stimulus phases, instruments, knowledge sharing, co-creation and experimentation. Secondly, older participants who, being adults with work and family responsibilities - struggles that, generally, 15 and 16 year olds have not yet faced - have a hard time engaging with and taking Agency's central element of "enchantment" seriously (enchantment as it relates to their perception of the territory and of themselves as individuals with self-

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[48] Further limitation insights discussed here were provided by Veruska Delfino - one of the most knowledgeable people of Agency's methodology - during a follow-up interview in December 2017.

development capabilities). In the meantime, they view the methodology as dull, too basic or even silly, losing their motivation and interest.

This bring us to a central program limitation having to do with the considerable age difference between participants. Even though one of Agency's goals is to provoke a dialogue between adolescents as young as 15 and young adults as old as 29, in practice, this interaction can be extremely difficult to establish and maintain; that is, there are generational and cultural differences that even the best mediation team can have trouble managing. And yet, this contrast in life history and characteristics extend well beyond age. For example, while some participants have been too sheltered by their parents or do not have worries beyond themselves, others are young parents or have been in jail. Thus, the question of how to best engage young people from similar communities, but who exhibit a multiplicity of worldviews and experiences, remains one that Agency confronts constantly.

Connecting back to program operational difficulties given its embedding social context, the elements of crime and violence, so prominent in poverty-stricken communities, also add to the complexity of doing youth work in favelas. For instance, it is not uncommon that programs functioning in these territories must ask permission either to criminal groups (militias, drug traffickers) or the police in order to hold events and/or carry out their activities. Although emancipatory education alone cannot save youth and is not the answer to violence, the advancement of platforms that dialogue with dimensions of critical learning, together with investments in programs and policies to benefit young people in different capacities (career-related training, sports, arts and culture, etc.), can help strengthen the social fabric in territories beaten-down by poverty, systemic inequality, and crime.[49]

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[49] In November 2017, President Temer announced the launching of a R$157 million federal emergency program for social action aimed at stimulating the participation of Rio's favela youngsters in sports, cultural and technology-related programs. The initiative - which promises to impact 50,000 children and adolescents aged 6-17 within the next year - was introduced as a crime prevention strategy and is meant to complement the military occupations that have recently been carried out in these territories. Only time will tell whether state-led oppression will subside to give room for hope.

Another challenging problematic pertinent not only to Agency but to the study as a whole has to do with the very limitations of processes of empowerment and emancipation. As previously discussed, progress in these complex and multifaceted dimensions are asymmetrical and non-linear, meaning they do not occur simultaneously in different spheres of life (empowerment in one domain of life does not guarantee empowerment in another) and they do not move in a straight forward line, as they are strongly subjected to setbacks depending on changes in a person's environment, life situation, or connection to platforms that further triggered such processes.

Nonetheless, these intricacies do not diminish the potential of empowering and emancipatory pedagogies and actions to help enact real transformation in a particular setting at a particular point in time, especially when accounts of change (and the meaning of those changes) are coming from those experiencing these processes first hand. Moreover, we may understand empowerment and emancipation outcomes in relation to youth participation in the process of creating projects as protagonists of change rather than as an exclusive result of the projects themselves.

Finally, it is also important to point out the limitations pertaining to the conclusions drawn from the analysis and the extent to which they can be generalized. First, although it allows for the focused study of a single unit and the understanding of a phenomenon in all its complexity, the qualitative case study method presents generalizability issues, the extent to which being a source of much debate. Given the aim of this particular case study was to explore and reconstruct the subjective experiences and meaning-making of individuals within time and context-specific boundaries, generalization was not a direct goal. Rather, situated within an instrumental approach, the research is about experience enriching, theory expansion, and knowledge building that facilitate our understanding of a youth-oriented emancipatory education in practice.

With that being said, what we have learned from this particular case study can offer useful insights to research and practice of emancipatory pedagogy in other impoverished and violent urban communities in Latin America and beyond, which display some of the same challenges Rio favelas do but that are surely home to the same potential for change.

Directions for future research

To conclude, I would like to offer some directions for future research which may help further our understanding of the linkages between youth education, critical pedagogy, and community transformation. This study sought to advance empirical knowledge on the theoretical and practical opportunities of applying dimensions of emancipatory education in learning beyond formal classroom contexts - but we need much more of it.

Embracing the notion that that there are no simple answers to complex phenomenons, researchers must continue to make use of the ideological, epistemological, and methodological richness of case studies and qualitative approaches to shed light on real-world practices and processes that adopt education as a weapon against marginalization and inequality - but from a perspective that is centered on the human experience. Relevantly, it is important to further explore the connection between formal schooling and non-formal educational platforms operating in different contexts, with a focus on strategies, methods, and observations useful in illustrating how critical teaching and learning practices are exercized in out-of-school spaces and how they can be transferred to the formal classroom.

Furthermore, additional research is needed to give more in-depth insight into the dynamics of youth-led community action in marginalized communities. In my analysis of Agency, for instance, it would have been valuable to further investigate into internal processes and activities in terms of race, gender, religious and geographical differences, how these variables interplay, and the extent to which they play a role in project effectiveness and individual engagement. Also, my study is limited to exploring project-led territorial

impact from the perspective of educators and young people at the forefront of those strategies; thus, the results are based on outcomes participants themselves experienced and their reflection on how the community was affected - and these are powerful accounts standing on their own.

Nonetheless, around 93 projects were financed by Agency, each one targeting a particular population in different spaces across dozens of communities, so imagine how much more we could grasp if we looked into those strategies individually and also integrated community perceptions into the analysis? Understanding how these localized bottom-up practices take shape, how they lift up our youth, how they bring hope to poverty and violence stricken territories, and how they make a difference in people's lives, can help restore our faith in the power of collective action to transform societies as they highlight the importance of furthering communitarianism in a neoliberal world that has undermined social justice commons and our sense of collectiveness.

In all their possibilities and constraints, programs like Agency are vital platforms for advancing local-capacity building that empower individuals and communities to engage in their own development processes, allowing them to strengthen their central role in shaping the contemporary social, economic, political and cultural urban experience. Therefore, a youth-oriented emancipatory education may only be a small seed of hope, but it holds the potential to grow into a tree of transformative possibilities, with young people leading the way forward through cultural action for freedom.

Appendix 1. Study Participants. List of participants who took part in in-depth interviews and focus groups conducted by me (total of 26: program participants coded as 'A,' staff and political players/practitioners as 'B') as well as supplementary radio interviews administered by Agency (total of 31: program participants coded as 'A,' staff as 'B').

No.	Name	Gender	Age	Community	Program Affiliation	Data source
1.	Aline	F	26	Batan	Participant	Focus group (A)
2.	Clara	F	18	Pavuna	Participant	In-depth interview (A) Agency radio interview (C)
3.	Elaine	F	27	Pavuna	Participant	Focus group (A) Agency radio interview (C)
4.	Elenice	F	22	Santa Cruz	Participant	In-depth interview (A)
5.	Fernando	M	24	Fumacê	Participant	In-depth interview (A) Agency radio interview (C)
6.	Gabriel	M	20	Batan	Participant	In-depth interview (A)
7.	Hugo	M	18	Providência	Participant	Focus group (A)
8.	Jéssica	F	27	Centro	Participant	Focus group (A)
9.	Maicon	M	28	Santa Cruz	Participant	Focus group (A)
10.	Naiara	F	23	Cidade de Deus	Participant	In-depth interview (A)
11.	Raquel	F	31	Providência	Participant	In-depth interview (A) Agency radio interview (C)
12.	Renan	M	28	Santa Cruz	Participant	Focus group (A)
13.	Tainá	F	19	Batan	Participant	In-depth interview (A)
14.	Thaiane	F	16	Jacarézinho	Participant	In-depth interview (A)
15.	Wladimir	M	23	Batan	Participant	Focus group (A)
16.	Ysabelly	F	19	Santa Cruz	Participant	In-depth interview (A)
17.	Adany	M	33	Cidade de Deus	Participant	Agency radio interview (A)
18.	Anna Paula	F	19	Salgueiro	Participant	Agency radio interview (C)
19.	Camila	F	26	Santa Cruz	Participant	Agency radio interview (C)

No.	Name	Gender	Age	Community	Program Affiliation	Data source
20.	Carlos Eduardo	M	25	Borel	Participant	Agency radio interview (C)
21.	Carolaine	F	17	Pavuna	Participant	Agency radio interview (C)
22.	Carolina	F	21	Batan	Participant	Agency radio interview (C)
23.	Cintia	F	30	Providência	Participant	Agency radio interview (C)
24.	Cristiano	M	26	Cidade de Deus	Participant	Agency radio interview (C)
25.	Denise	F	28	Fallet-Fogueteiro	Participant	Agency radio interview (C)
26.	Eduardo	M	30	Mangueira	Participant	Agency radio interview (C)
27.	Elisângela	F	19	Providência	Participant	Agency radio interview (C)
28.	Felipe	M	25	Fumacê	Participant	Agency radio interview (C)
29.	Guilherme	M	31	Favela do Zinco	Participant	Agency radio interview (C)
30.	Igor	M	23	Cidade de Deus	Participant	Agency radio interview (C)
31.	Ingrid	F	28	Cantagalo	Participant	Agency radio interview (C)
32.	Isabela	F	22	Borel	Participant	Agency radio interview (C)
33.	Jade	F	21	Cidade de Deus	Participant	Agency radio interview (C)
34.	João	M	23	Providência	Participant	Agency radio interview (C)
35.	Larissa	F	19	Batan	Participant	Agency radio interview (C)
36.	Lucas	M	21	Cantagalo	Participant	Agency radio interview (C)
37.	Luna	F	21	Pavuna	Participant	Agency radio interview (C)
38.	Michelle	F	27	Rocinha	Participant	Agency radio interview (C)
39.	Milena	F	21	Borel	Participant	Agency radio interview (C)

No.	Name	Gender	Age	Community	Program Affiliation	Data source
40.	Miriam	F	21	Rocinha	Participant	Agency radio interview (C)
41.	Viviane	F	26	Cidade de Deus	Participant	In-depth interview (A) Agency radio interview (C)
42.	Wylliana	F	26	Providência	Participant	Agency radio interview (C)
43.	Veruska	F	28	Centro	Staff	Focus group (B) Agency radio interview (D)
44.	Ana Paula	F	27	Maré	Staff	Focus group (B) Agency radio interview (D)
45.	Karina	F	28	São João de Meriti	Staff	Focus group (B) Agency radio interview (D)
46.	Diego	M	28	Borel	Staff	Agency radio interview (D)
47.	Hanier	M	26	Nova Iguacú	Staff	In-depth interview (B) Agency radio interview (D)
48.	Jorge	M	33	Queimados	Staff	Agency radio interview (D)
49.	Joseany	F	27	São Gonçalo	Staff	Agency radio interview (D)
50.	Marina	F	24	Centro	Staff	Agency radio interview (D)
51.	Raquel	F	25	Cidade de Deus	Staff	Agency radio interview (D)
52.	Rebecca	F	24	Batan	Staff	Agency radio interview (D)
53.	Sara	F	26	Foreigner	Staff	In-depth interview (B)
No.	Name	Actors of interest and relevant position (s)				Data source
54.	Marcus Faustini	Agency Founder and Director				Informal interview (B)
55.	Angela Guimarães	Former Brazilian National Sub-Secretary of Youth, Former President of the Brazilian National Youth Council, President of UNEGRO				Long-distance interview (B)
56.	Gabriel Medina	Former Brazilian National Secretary of Youth				Long-distance interview (B)
57.	Junior Perin	Municipal Secretary of Culture of the city of Rio de Janeiro				Long-distance interview (B)

Appendix 2. List of nodes. Nodes generated from qualitative data during second cycle coding distributed into their respective thematical folders (total of 123 nodes and 11 folders).

Thematical folders and description	Nodes, number of references, and qualitative source from where data originated (see figure10 for more info on data sources)		
(1). Background and childhood Participants share personal stories about their background, family structure, and experiences growing up.	Community violence/could not play on the street	6	A,C
	Dysfunctional family structures	3	A,C
	Experienced physical violence at home	4	A
	Experienced financial difficulties	8	A,C
	Grew up in a favela	9	A
	Had a family member killed	3	A
	Had a good childhood	9	A
	Lost mother or father	4	A
	Parents not present/worked long hours	5	A
	Raised by both parents	5	A
	Raised by single mom or grandparents	7	A
	Suffered from psychological issues	2	A,C
	Took up responsibility from an early age	9	A,C
(2). Educational experiences: past and present Participants talk about their overall experiences in primary and secondary school, their relationship with education from an early age, their family's involvement in their education, and also share their aspirations for college/experience in university.	Was just a regular student	5	A
	Did well in school/got good grades	9	A
	Made trouble in school	5	A
	Suffered bullying/racial discrimination	3	A,C
	Mother was involved in education	4	A
	Pressure from parents to attend university	9	A,C
	Educational references/relatives who went to university	11	A,C
	Dreams of attending university	9	A,C
	Difficulty pursuing desired major/getting into university	8	A
	Experienced higher education	8	A,C
	Takes short educational programs in lieu of university	4	A
	Views on formal education	6	A
(3). Views on the pacification and public security Participants share their perceptions on the pacification and discuss current public security issues in their communities.	Overall negative view of the police	10	A,B
	Pacification: a make-up policy	4	A.B
	Limited to a first impact only	2	A
	Drug trafficking persists	5	A,C

Thematical folders and description	Nodes, number of references, and qualitative source from which data originated		
	Violence remained the same or increased	8	A,C
	Positive aspects of the traffic	6	A
(4). Agency instruments Participants and staff members discuss their favorite instruments inside the Agency methodology and tell stories about their learning experiences.	Alphabet	1	B
	Avatar	8	A,B
	Board of examination	3	A
	Compass	6	A,B
	Copy and paste	1	B
	Inventory	6	A,B
	Map	5	A,B
	One day in my project's life	1	B
	Stimulus cycle	3	C
	Pre-incubator period	1	B
	Comments on overall instruments	3	B,C
(5). Agency proposals An overview of Agency's educational method, approach, and main proposals coming out of the perspectives and views of participants and staff members.	A concrete opportunity for the favela youth	6	A,C
	Dialogue	4	A,C
	Education to prepare for life	2	A,C
	Fostering entrepreneurship	16	A,C
	Hands on knowledge	4	A,C
	Individualized learning	2	A
	Mentorship and guidance	7	A,C
	Youth as potency	8	A,C,D
	Relevant educational content	3	A,C,D
	Representation and visibility	7	C
(6). Projects created through Agency Participants describe the various projects they created inside the Agency methodology, explain the rationale behind their initiatives, talk about their experiences with the overall project development process, and assess community impact.	Agency's first contact/what attracted	9	C
	Aspects of working with art and culture	5	C
	Based project on community needs	4	C
	Must deal with the police for project	4	A,C,D
	Feeling when winning the project prize	3	A,C
	Idea for project/motivation	28	A,C
	Mobilize community to take part in project	3	C
	Population benefited from project	27	A,B,C
	Project details	37	A,C,D

Thematical folders and description	Nodes, number of references, and qualitative source from which data originated		
	Project impact	16	A,C
	Project category: arts and culture	18	A,C,D
	Project category: black fashion and style	3	C,D
	Project category: children's play and leisure	4	A,C
	Project category: cultural tourism	1	A
	Project category: education	9	A,C,D
	Project category: health	3	A,C
	Project category: journalism and media	4	A,C
	Project category: LGBT oriented	1	D
	Project category: women's empowerment	4	A,C,D
	Project sought to lessen rivalry between communities	5	A,C
	Project challenges due to violence	3	A
	Project received additional funding	4	C
	Stories of impact	3	C
	Tap into community's potential	6	C
(7). Skills and abilities Participants reflect on their trajectory in the program and discuss some of the skills they believed to have developed inside Agency.	Build networks/contacts	9	A,C
	Eagerness to learn	3	A,C
	Leadership	10	A,C,D
	Learn to focus	4	C
	Maturity/responsibility	11	A,C,D
	Professionalism	3	A,C
	Provision of skills to develop/implement projects	8	C
	Public speaking/express ideas clearly	7	A,C
(8). Views and experiences: Agency coordinating team Staff members' background, work performed at Agency, and views on some of the program's main strengths and limitations.	Background and life story	8	B,D
	Changes: youth's first day vs. last day in the program	4	B
	Favorite stories/youth trajectories	12	B,D
	Generating a new city narrative	3	C,D
	Help create new entrepreneurs	3	B,D
	Individualized education	2	B
	Personal trajectory to Agency	15	B,D
	Personal trajectory to social work	6	B,D
	Position the youth in a place of protagonism	6	B,D

Thematical folders and description	Nodes, number of references, and qualitative source from which data originated		
	Program main challenges	10	B,D
	Program strengths and favorite aspects of Agency	9	B,D
	Role at Agency	5	D
(9) Community life and mobility Participants discuss changes in their relationship with the community and the city after experiencing Agency.	Community belonging	2	C,D
	Community engagement	13	A,C,D
	Community value	8	A,C,D
	Engagement with other youth	7	A,C,D
	Expanding mobility/right to the city	14	A,C,D
(10) Youth development An overview of Agency's contributions to youth development based on the perceptions of participants about their experience in the program and the benefits they received. Also, includes the views of Agency coordinating team and political players/practitioners about recent development in the youth agenda in Rio de Janeiro and Brazil.	A broaden worldview	8	A,C,D
	A sense of agency	11	C,D
	Advancements in the youth agenda	6	B
	Concretize a dream or desire	6	C
	Critical thinking	8	A
	Investments in youth education provisions	3	D
	Involvement in activism	3	C,D
	New work/educational paths	10	A,C
	Personal development	11	A,C
	Political conscience/social critique	10	A,C,D
	Professional development	5	A,C
	Self-confidence	10	A,C,D
(11). Youth problematics Participants, Agency coordinating team and political players/practitioners give insights into the main problems facing young people in Rio de Janeiro and Brazil today.	Constraints in education	10	A,B
	Disconnect: education for a job and for life	1	B
	Employment pressures/low-paying jobs	14	B
	Experience of the favela youth in higher education spaces	4	D
	Exposure to violence	12	B,C,D
	General political/economic constraints in the youth agenda	11	B
	Limited repertoire and networks	4	A,B,D
	Prejudice	2	A
	Scarcity of programs/support for youth	8	A
	Youth disempowerment	2	B

Appendix 3. Interview protocol. List of themes and issues informing the conversation during semi-structured interviews and focus groups.

Program participants

- Background, family dynamics and childhood experiences;

- Relationship with school, educational trajectory and aspirations;

- Contrast between the Agency program and school;

- Most liked aspects and instruments of the Agency program; lessons/competencies learned;

- Changes, if any, in ways of seeing the world and thinking critically (examples);

- Comparative between Agency and other educational programs available to young people in favelas and peripheries;

- Project developed and perspectives about the creative process;

- Project greatest impact in the community;

- Agency's great impact in life;

- Perceptions about the Pacification process and the relationship between the police and the favela youth;

- Availability of programs and access to opportunities in work, culture and education;

- Biggest challenges facing the favela and peripheral youth.

Program staff

- Educational and professional background; trajectory to Agency;

- Interest in working with youth and social issues;

- Most liked aspects of the job/program;

- Most effective aspects of the program;

- Main instruments of the methodology and their functions;

- Program main limitations;

- Challenges to scaling up as public policy;

- Most inspiring youth stories/trajectories in the program;

- State of projects formalization;

- Most liked projects and their impact in the territory;

- The current scenario for young people in Rio favelas and peripheries in terms of access to education, work and cultural opportunities;

- Agency's distinctiveness in comparison to other provisions available to favela and peripheral youth;

- Participants on their first day versus their last day in the program.

Political actors and practitioners
- The advancement of public policies and initiatives for young people given the current political scenario in Brazil;

- Main setbacks and advancements of the current government in relation to the youth agenda at the federal and state levels;

- The current scenario for young people in Rio/Brazil in terms of access to education, work and cultural opportunities;

- The main challenges the Carioca/Brazilian youth face today;

- The importance of investing in youth provisions outside the formal system of education and the practices such programs should advance;

- The role of Agency as a youth development program in Rio de Janeiro favelas.

Appendix 4. IRB approval. Snapshot of UCLA webIRB screen.

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