

Students' Experiences during Democratic Activities at a Canadian Free School: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

While the challenges of improving young people's civic engagement seem to lie in the hands of schools, studying alternative ways of teaching citizenship could benefit current educational systems. Free schools, guided by a philosophy aiming at engaging students civically through democratic activities, represent such an alternative and offer relatively unexplored grounds for research. The present inquiry is an ethnographic case study that draws upon complexity thinking. It aims at understanding students' citizenship education experiences during free school democratic activities. It describes such experiences as arising from a school operating democratically based on a consensus-model during class meetings and judicial committees. During these activities, students mostly experienced a combination of feelings while engaging in decision-making processes and modifying their conflict resolution skills and their participation in democratic assemblies. The study concludes that students can develop skills and attitudes associated to citizenship during these activities and become active from a citizenship perspective.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The particularity of free schools¹ lies in the egalitarian status that teachers and students enjoy in these schools (Neill & Fromm, 1961). Students and teachers largely possess the same rights and obligations in free schools. As a result, classes are optional for students and these schools operate democratically, whose meaning I will explore later. Consequently, democratic activities regulate free school social life. During these activities, students and teachers have an equal vote on every matter.

This dissertation will detail a research study about the experiences of students with respect to citizenship education during such activities in free schools. My own journey in post-secondary education institutions has motivated me to conduct this research project. In my second year in Cégep (*Collège d'Enseignement Général et Professionnel*, to refer to the public post-secondary education institutions in Quebec), I was looking for a career path that would give me the opportunity to contribute to the improvement of my community at the local and global levels. For this reason, the field of education compelled me. As a result, I entered Université Laval to complete a four-year degree in *Enseignement Secondaire: Univers Social* (a degree to learn how to teach history and geography in high school). During that period, I had the chance to complete four different practica in various public high schools.

During these practica, I taught different classes to students aged between 11 and 18 years old. At the beginning of these practica, I became quickly intrigued by the operational apparatus that ensured students' obedience and attendance in schools. As well, I found myself uncomfortable while teaching for reasons that I had not yet been able to identify. Interestingly, I felt at ease when coaching basketball as an extracurricular activity to children of the same age as those whom I was teaching in classrooms. During the fourth practica, reflections led me to

¹ Throughout the dissertation, I will use the expressions free school and democratic school interchangeably.

discover why I was uncomfortable in these classrooms and not in the gym. Laws derived from compulsory education forced students to attend my classes whereas the basketball players on my team showed up to the gym willingly. In this sense, the compulsory aspect of formal education dissatisfied me. The culmination of this uneasiness happened when I became aware that, as the teacher of a class of students aged between 16 and 18 years old, I was in charge of deciding on matters such as whether students could use the bathroom and, if so, when and how often they could. These students, despite being allowed—or being allowed soon- to vote in federal elections, were not trusted with such matters by the school system.

Frustrated by what this meant, I decided to explore educational philosophies that were critical of the use of coercion to ensure that children attend classes and carry out various educational tasks. During my studies, I began reading the writings of authors considered radical education critics such as J. Holt, I. Illich, P. Goodman, J. Taylor Gatto and R. Epstein. At one point, I learned about free schools and decided to try to inform people about this educational option. For this reason, I wanted to do a master's degree to examine free schools.

Multiple discussions with my supervisor and my committee members and readings about citizenship education have helped to delineate clearly the topic of my research. After a conversation with them about what I had observed during two visits of free schools, we felt that democratic activities represented a pervasive and key element of free schooling. Hence, I decided to look at students' experiences in relation to citizenship education during these activities.

Research Problem

The purpose of this study is to describe students' reported and observed citizenship education experiences during democratic activities at a Canadian free school. This inquiry took

the form of a case study using tools of ethnography. It sought to answer the following question: What are students' experiences with respect to citizenship education during free school democratic activities? In order to answer this question, I investigated how Canadian junior high school students talk about their experiences of attending democratic activities at a free school. Students' descriptions—and my own interpretation thereof—supplemented field observations of their participation in such activities.

Dissertation Structure

The second chapter shows how the topic of this inquiry has emerged from the review of studies about young people's citizenship engagement, about citizenship education and about free schools. In doing so, it demonstrates how exploring free school democratic activities as an alternative way to teach citizenship education could help educators in promoting civic engagement. In the process, Chapter 2 outlines what selected studies have said about free schools and the operation of these schools. Furthermore, it provides guidance that stemmed from the analysis of these studies on free schools for the completion of the current research project from a methodological perspective. As a result, it offers a rationale for the study and delineates the theoretical principles of complexity thinking that guided this inquiry.

Chapter 3 details the ramifications of carrying out a case study using tools of ethnography to examine students' experiences during free school democratic activities. Moreover, this chapter talks about the research site, *Canadian Free School* (a pseudonym), a free school located within a Canadian urban environment and about the participants of the research, 22 students and four educators. The chapter depicts the data collection, notably the use of multiple forms of data sources and the prolonged period of time spent in the field. Lastly, it delves into how I have created and used conceptual maps to analyze the data.

Chapter 4 represents a detailed description of the research findings. It pictures students' experiences in two democratic activities at *Canadian Free School*, class meetings and judicial committees. It presents them as possibilities part of a repertoire of experiences that can occur in free school democratic activities. To accomplish this, it first situates students' experiences within the operations of *Canadian Free School* and the democratic activities. Then, the chapter portrays these experiences by depicting students' feelings, engagement and evolution in decision-making and conflict resolution processes during these activities.

In light of the research findings, Chapter 5 elaborates on the significance of these experiences for citizenship education while alluding back to the literature review. It argues that free school democratic activities represent a viable alternative way to teach citizenship education. To support this, it shows how these activities can teach about democracy democratically. It also demonstrates that the development of aptitudes associated to an active citizenship on the part of students is a key possibility during these activities. Moreover, it illustrates how students, like those of *Canadian Free School*, can engage civically when participating in these activities.

The last chapter summarizes the study and its conclusions. To discuss these conclusions, it goes over the limitations of the inquiry. Then, it shows how new venues for the field of research in education emerge from these limitations and from the conclusions of the study. Finally, it provides concrete examples of how these conclusions can be put into practices in conventional school settings.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this part of the dissertation is to justify carrying out a research project about students' experiences in relation to citizenship education during free school democratic activities. This chapter will show that academic knowledge about citizenship education and free schools can benefit from learning more about these experiences with the purpose of improving citizenship education in schools. It presents a review of selected studies about the current situation of citizenship-related issues in education and, as a result, goes to show the potential of investigating free school democratic activities for citizenship education.

Free Schools within Citizenship-Related Issues

The object of this research study, being about students' experiences in relation to citizenship education during free school democratic activities, deals with citizenship-related issues. This segment aims at situating the object of the inquiry within the reality of young North Americans with regard to citizenship issues and ultimately justifies the exploration of alternative ways of teaching citizenship education. To provide a definition of citizenship, it will start by analyzing studies about citizenship issues concerning these young North Americans. Then, this definition will guide an inquiry of young North American's current level of citizenship engagement. Going over this topic will allow the examination of the role of North American schools with respect to citizenship engagement. Because schools fulfil this role through citizenship education, this section will examine the described state of citizenship education in North America. This will lead to a presentation of the potential of investigating alternative ways of teaching citizenship education.

Defining Citizenship

For Tupper (2009), the notion of citizenship is a contested concept. Many researchers in the field of citizenship education warned about the potential consequences that a definition of citizenship can generate (Kennelly, 2006; Tupper, 2009; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Nevertheless, the findings of their studies will help defining citizenship responsibly by identifying similitude between available definitions of citizenship. Tupper (2009) tried to find out how citizenship is embedded in curricular discourses. To achieve this, she analyzed several citizenship education curricula used in North America. Her findings show that most of these curricula construct citizenship definitions around concepts such as democracy, equality and universality, where universality implies an equal treatment under the law for every citizen. They establish that the idea of a full membership in a community assuring equality under the law as well as rights and duties is a key component of the definitions examined. In light of these findings, Tupper (2009) deplored that such definitions disregard inequities and differences experienced by several citizens. To support this claim, she depicted the treatments of Islamic Americans in airports and of First Nation people by the Canadian government. According to her, they demonstrate that not all citizens are equal under the law. Hence, an appropriate definition of citizenship should make reference to the inequities and differences experienced by individuals in a given community.

Kennelly (2006), relying on historical and contemporary scholarships on Canadian citizenship education, carried out a review of how citizenship education in Canada articulates the notion of citizenship. She discovered that Canadian citizenship education provides a normative construction of citizenship by portraying a model citizen. As a result, this normative construction of citizenship excludes members of Canadian society who do not possess the quality that

characterizes this model citizen. Thus, for Kennelly (2006), a definition of citizenship should reflect the plurality that qualifies Canadian society.

Westheimer and Kahne (2004) conducted a research study that intended to determine what kind of citizens education programs in the United States want to develop. To achieve this, they used a mixed method research design to study for two years ten educative programs that aspired to advance democracy in the United States. They collected and analyzed documents that structured these programs and used pre-tests and post-tests to see how each program affected students' citizenship engagement. They concluded that each of these programs promoted in general one of three kinds of citizens: personally responsible, participatory or justice-oriented. They described a personally responsible citizen as a person who acts responsibly in the community, who works and pays taxes, who obeys the laws and who volunteers in times of crisis; a participatory citizen as an active member of community organizations who initiates community efforts for those in needs, and who knows strategies for accomplishing collective tasks and how the government works; and a justice-oriented citizen as a person who assesses critically socioeconomic structures to see beyond surface causes, who addresses areas of injustice and who knows how to effect systemic changes. For example, while a personally responsible citizen would contribute to a food drive, a participatory citizen would help organize the food drive and the justice-oriented citizen would explore why people are hungry and act on the root causes. Based on these distinctions between these three kinds of citizens, Westheimer and Kahne (2004) contended that the choice that education programs made among these kinds of citizenship reflected political agenda and had political consequences. For instance, they found that programs that supported participatory citizenship were successful in developing participatory citizens, though that they faced difficulties fostering students' abilities to identify

the root causes of socioeconomic problems, while programs that used the justice-oriented citizen model succeeded in preparing citizens to identify such root causes, though struggled in encouraging students' involvement in the community.

Hence, Westheimer and Kahne's investigation, as well as those of Tupper (2009) and Kennelly (2006), forefronted difficulties associated with defining citizenship. These authors showed that an appropriate definition of citizenship would entail expressing experienced inequities and differences, offering a pluralistic perspective and being aware of the consequences of the kind of citizenship espoused. Their articles exposed recurrent patterns between definitions of citizenship. Indeed, in all of these readings, the notions of legal status, rights (e.g. freedom of speech and of assembly, right to vote), responsibilities (e.g. to obey the law, to pay taxes) and equality under the law are frequent. For the purpose of the present research project, all these notions of citizenship will be incorporated. Therefore, citizenship is defined throughout this study as an ideal legal status that entails rights, responsibilities, and equity under the law, status possessed equally by every member of a society that acknowledges its plurality.

The Current State of Young North Americans' Citizenship Engagement

Based on this definition, this section looks at how young North Americans currently engage their citizenship by exercising their rights and fulfilling their responsibilities. For Hennessy (2006), the non-fulfillment of these responsibilities by citizens can be detrimental to the political, economical and social-democratic health of any free systems of government, like that of Canada. Such democratic systems feed off civic initiatives enabled by the rights granted to citizens. Such initiatives can take many forms such as voting, attending a public meeting, protesting, getting involved in the community by volunteering or participating in community

organizations. Without these initiatives, the whole organization of society can become unmanageable and chaotic.

Drawing on recent studies, Cook and Westheimer (2006) argued that the future of North American democracies depends on youth citizenship engagement. They revealed that there has been a decline in young Canadians' voter turnout in the last four decades. In 2000, the voter turnout for the Canadian federal election of people aged between 18 and 21 years old reached only 22% (Elections Canada, 2005). For the 2004 Canadian federal elections, an estimate of 37% of Canadians aged between 18 and 24 years old went to the polls while 60% of Canadians voted during the same election (Elections Canada, 2005). Young Canadians' voter turnouts are lower for provincial and local elections across the country. They are significant for other forms of citizenship engagement. Indeed, Cook and Westheimer (2006) contended that there is a strong correlation between voting and other forms of this engagement such as protesting and partaking in community organizations. They argued that many indicators of civic engagement other than voter turnouts were down.

The situation is very similar in the United States. Feldmann (2007) conducted a research study on American students' involvement in civic issues. He asked all teachers from three high schools of different regions of the United States to complete an open-ended questionnaire on their perception on this matter. The overwhelming majority of these teachers answered that students in their school lack in terms of attitude and of participation as far as involvement in civic issues is concerned.

Galston's (2004) analysis of multiple nation-wide surveys on the same topic complements Feldmann's portrayal of young Americans' citizenship engagement. His argument started by describing the findings of a study conducted by the Center for Information and

Research on Civic Learning and Engagement. It forefronts how young people's participation in national elections dropped significantly from 50% in the 70s to 33% in 2000. It also presents the findings of a study involving a quarter million matriculating college first-year undergraduates each year since the 1960s. This study used several indicators to monitor participants' citizenship engagement. It points out that only 34% of freshmen believe that keeping up with politics is important, down from 60% in 1966. It also notices an important decline in the percentage of freshmen who claim to discuss politics frequently. In addition, Galston (2004) affirmed that young people's volunteering rates decreases sharply once they reach their mid-twenties. He overtly qualified this situation as alarming.

Galston (2004), Cook and Westheimer (2006) and Feldmann (2007), in their respective articles, after having described young people's level of civic engagement, all pointed to schools as key venues to fix the situation. However, what is the role of schools and of policy makers as far as citizenship engagement is concerned?

The Role of Schools and Policy-Makers

If defining citizenship is difficult, creating a space for students to learn about citizenship can be harder. The role of policy makers is to design curricula to set up such a space in schools. This section will demonstrate that policy makers are concerned with the alarming situation of young people's level of citizenship engagement.

A great deal of inquiries has examined the issue of citizenship engagement in the Canadian context. Sears (1996) completed a study whose goal was to depict the situation of citizenship education across Canada. One of the key components that he explored has been that of the place granted in curricula to citizenship education by educational jurisdictions as an indicator of policy-makers' commitment to improving youth citizenship engagement. To

accomplish this, he realized an extensive review of the research on the topic. His findings establish that the orientation towards citizenship education in Canadian curricula seeks to prepare students for an active citizenship. They also suggest that citizenship with multiculturalism, bilingualism, human rights, regional accommodations and global awareness as focal points is a major objective in all Canadian educational jurisdictions.

Bickmore (2006) also investigated the role of schools with respect to citizenship engagement in Canada. Her approach was to analyze in detail curricula of three provinces. She looked for references to citizenship in the health, language arts and social science curricula of one Atlantic province, of one central province and of one Western province. She concluded that each of these curricula reflects provincial will in relation to citizenship and with respect to providing teachers with more resources for this matter. She also affirmed that each of the curricula provided many potential opportunities for democratic social cohesion.

Tupper (2009) carried out an inquiry similar to that of Bickmore (2006). However, she limited her focus to Western Canada. She examined thoroughly the civics curriculum of both Alberta and Manitoba. Based on this, she asserted that these curricula stress responsible citizenship as a goal and that recent initiatives led to the inclusion of French and Aboriginal perspectives in these curricula.

Such findings are not limited to English Canada. Levasseur (2006) probed into the recent educational reform in Quebec. After having conducted a comprehensive analysis of the civics curriculum, he argued that citizenship education became a major focus in education in Quebec. The number of classes that used to be dedicated to history now belongs to citizenship education and, through great emphasis across every subject matter, citizenship engagement has come to be a privileged goal in the Quebec education system.

Policy makers have taken other initiatives to promote citizenship education. According to Winton (2008), one of these initiatives takes the form of the incorporation of character education in curricula to complement citizenship education. Drawing on contemporary scholarships, she stated that a significant numbers of school boards across Canada made this incorporation. To understand better the implications of character education for citizenship education, she analyzed more than 180 documents used and produced by a school board in Ontario to co-ordinate character education. Her analysis considers that character education encourages students to acquire specific civic values, behaviours and interpersonal skills in a pluralistic perspective by recommending students to participate in school committees and students' councils. She held that including character education to curricula exemplified policy makers' commitment to citizenship education.

Feldmann (2007), in his qualitative study about American teachers' perceptions of students' involvement with civic issues, questioned teachers about the role of the civics curriculum in fostering this involvement. A recurring theme in the answers to his numerous questionnaires was that this curriculum presented citizenship engagement as an important component. Feldmann (2007) underscored how the attacks of September 11th 2001 contributed to the promotion of the place of citizenship education in educational programs. For him, almost overnight, more attention was given in curricula to issues of international relations and of homeland security.

Similarly, Westheimer and Kahne (2004) carried out a study about the efficacy of educational programs aiming at promoting citizenship engagement. Their analysis of ten of these programs in the United States revealed that educators and policy makers' commitment to finding ways to improve democracy through civic education has been increasing sharply.

Hence, the results of research in both the United States and Canada concur in suggesting that citizenship engagement concerns policy makers. Indeed, policy makers are trying, through curricula and other initiatives, to exploit the civic roles of schools to encourage citizenship engagement in North America.

The Current State of Citizenship Education

Schools largely rely on citizenship education and its curricula to foster citizenship engagement. Despite the growing importance given to citizenship education by policy makers, many researchers criticized citizenship education. This part of the second chapter will depict the state of citizenship education by going over research on the results of citizenship education and, then, on the strategies implemented to teach about citizenship.

Researchers have been critical of the results of citizenship education. Some went as far as to claim that citizenship education is failing in North America (Galston, 2004; Hennessy, 2006; 2008). In his book, Hennessy (2006) discussed numerous contemporary and historical studies. The author conducted a good portion of them. They comprise both quantitative and qualitative studies with scopes varying from small to large addressing citizenship education issues such as voter turnouts, hidden curriculum, issues of control, of freedom and of democracy in classrooms, standardized testing, youth literacy, learning, suicide among teenagers, psychostimulant drugs in schools, teaching, and the influence of businesses in schools. Supported by these studies, Hennessy (2006, p. 231) established that North American kids learn in school about:

[C]ompliance, conformity, rewards for winners, rejection of losers, penalties for unorthodoxy and the prime importance of marks in the scramble for jobs. Thus, the immediate and sometimes long-term effects of schooling have little if any relationship to ethics of democracy, which emphasize trust among citizens and an active commitment to the common good (p.231).

For this reason, Hennessy (2006) concluded that North American schools do not prepare children well for life in a democracy.

In the same perspective, Galston (2004) grounded on a different argument his claim that citizenship education is failing in the United States. This argument stems from the results of tests similar to national examinations. The National Assessment of Educational Progress administered these tests to evaluate the level of proficiency of students in civics. The results have suggested that three quarters of twelfth graders are below the level of proficiency, half of whom tested below the basic level indicating near-total civic ignorance. Meier (2003) also raised concerns about what citizenship education accomplishes the United States. She asserted that most schools would fail if they were tested in relation to the percentage of their graduates who vote and who go to jail as well as in relation to how these schools contribute to the reduction of inequity between rich and poor. Consistent with this last claim, Kennelly (2006) reviewed scholarships on what citizenship education teaches in Canada. In the end, she inferred that students learn to be patriotic in citizenship classes and that these classes reinforce the social exclusion of bad testers.

Lastly, Chakera and Sears (2006) completed an investigation about high school students' conceptions and intentions with respect to citizenship. They interviewed 40 Canadian students for a phenomenological study. Their results establish that students believe voting is a duty, an essential element of democratic societies and a hard won right. However, most students expressed that they did not intend to vote because they do not see the impact of their vote and because they distrust politicians. As a result, the two researchers claimed that civic education has work to do to improve students' conception of the impact of voting and of the image of politicians.

Chakera and Sears (2006), Hennessy (2006), Galston (2004), Meier (2003) and Kennelly (2006) reaffirmed that schools are taking steps to improve citizenship education, that students construct certain useful conceptions of civic issues, though that schools could benefit from improvements with respect to citizenship education.

Numerous researchers attempted to identify what impedes the success of citizenship education (Chakera & Sears, 2006; Hennessy, 2006; Holt, 1982; Raby & Domitrek, 2007). The combination of many factors is contributing to the emergence of the difficulties facing citizenship education. This section will explore what research tells about these factors: the paradox of teaching about democracy undemocratically, the roles and tasks of students in class, the actions of teachers and policy makers. Ladson-Billing (2005) as well as others articulated this paradox. Supported by anthropological scholarships on education and studies on the sense of alienation felt by students, she raised the question of how teachers can, using a language of compliance, of control and of authority, teach about an active democratic life to students who are required to be passive. Rosenberg (2003) shared a similar worry. Renowned for his work on nonviolent communication in the field of psychology, he developed a theoretical framework to identify and address violent communicative ways. Based on this theoretical framework, he asserted that, in most educational settings, the language of wrongness, *should*, and *have to*, is perfectly suited for the purpose of educating the masses in a way that renders them slavish in mentality. He added that such language corresponds to life-alienating communication that “stresses humans’ innate evil and deficiency, and a need for education to control our inherently undesirable nature” (p.371). This prompted Rosenberg to ask if the violence and the harm suffered by students that emerges from this communicative approach are worth the learning that this approach generates.

The research carried out by Bickmore (2006) not only discussed the place of citizenship education in Canadian curricula, but also highlighted the contradiction between democracy and human rights in classrooms. She questioned how a degree of coercion (talking about compulsory education) can contribute to democratic self-determination. Raby and Domitrek (2007) used different words to bring to light the same issue. They suggested that large parts of school codes of conduct are incompatible with the development of democratic citizenry. Thus, there is an underlying tension between the goal of citizenship education and the compulsory and coercive aspects of schooling.

Even though some scholars are in favor of a degree of coercion to teach citizenship, many are in disagreement with this position considering this coercion as a problem confronting citizenship education and stand against reliance on extrinsic motivation to educate students about citizenship. Gutmann (1987) is one of these researchers who advocated in favor of a degree of coercion to teach citizenship education. She wrote a very influential philosophical book about democratic education. One of her major aims has been to determine who should decide what kind of character to develop in children in a democratic society. To answer this question, she utilized a dialectical approach to compare the educational publications of Plato, Locke and Stuart Mill. This approach served the purpose of generating a theory of education that would combine the strengths of these publications while avoiding their weaknesses. As a result, the author rejected a more democratic theory of education while asserting that educators along with parents and citizens should decide what kind of character to nurture in children. Her assertion excludes children from this decision process. Defining a democracy as the rule of the people, she went on to say that the best way for children to learn to rule is to be ruled.

Miller (2002) realized a review of the work of a good number of acclaimed authors in the field of education on the topic grappled by Gutmann (1987). Behind this review, he labeled as socially democratic the educational theories advocated by John Dewey, Benjamin Barber, Amy Gutmann and Richard Battistoni. The purpose of his qualification has been to categorize these theories as supporting a degree of coercion to teach about democracy and citizenship.

Despite the weight of theories that advocate for the benefits of coercion, various researchers in education have held that the use of coercive methods to teach citizenship education is problematic. Epstein (2007) is at the forefront of this group. Resorting to a mixed method design and alarmed by data that described what he called the immaturity of today's youth in Western countries, he first explored the level of coercion to which teenagers are subjected in comparison to that with which prisoners have to deal on a daily basis. Surveys collected information about the quantity of coercion to which both groups are exposed daily. Their results indicate that teenagers are subjected to twice as many restrictions than inmates are. The author followed this with multiple case studies about the upbringing of people who had not been compelled to attend school. His findings reveal that these people considered that being responsible of their own education has empowered them, benefited their self-esteem and made them more responsible. As a result, Epstein (2007) concluded that the coercion confronting students in school causes the difficulties inherent to most students' struggle to become responsible citizens. In addition, he argued that trusting students with the responsibility of their own education would make them more responsible citizens.

Hennessy (2006) made several statements congruent with Epstein's (2007) conclusion. Based on his analysis, he declared that most schools deprive students of rights such as freedoms of speech, of assembly, and of thought, and such as the right to a fair hearing and to be presumed

innocent, for instance, when it comes to getting detention. He expressed that, without being able to experience these freedoms and these rights in schools, students will hardly be able to use adequately such rights in society.

Congruent with this conclusion, Raby and Domitrek (2007) made an investigation on high school students' perceptions and experiences with school codes of conduct. They carried out focus-group interviews with Ontario high school students to obtain information on the subject. Their research study showed evidence that students do not challenge important safety rules, though are frustrated by smaller rules. According to these researchers, these frustrations are fostering hypocrisy in students and are giving rise to rule breaking and resistance exerted by students. As well, these teenagers feel powerless in relation to the rules that govern them. Consequently, Raby and Domitrek (2007) argued that students, in spite of their challenge of minor rules, have little sense of themselves as potential social actors and are already caught up in the dominant language framed by the rules and their top down applications. The authors judged that the large majority of minor rules prevent students from learning to be participatory citizens and that petty policy wastes time on discipline.

These findings as well as those of Hennessy (2006) and of Epstein (2007) contradict the perspective of those in favor of a degree of coercion to teach citizenship. They also raise concerns about how students' citizenship engagement and motivations emerge from this coercion. The degree of coercion defended by Gutmann (1987) and by those called social democrats by Miller (2002) fulfills the purpose of motivating students to learn about citizenship and education. Because the source of this motivation is initiated by students, this motivation is considered extrinsic.

Greenberg (1995), Tardif (1997) as well as Cheng and Yeh (2009) all agreed as far as extrinsic motivation is concerned in relation to citizenship education. Greenberg's (1995) position arose from more than forty years of experience as an educator, numerous publications and the creation of a successful alternative school model. Tardif's (1997) perspective resulted from conducting and analyzing several studies on behaviorism and on how students experience of both extrinsic and intrinsic motivations whereas Cheng and Yeh's (2009) viewpoint emerged from the completion of an assessment on the impacts of extrinsic motivation. Greenberg (1995) propounded that the most long-lasting learning occurs when it is initiated by the learner. Tardif (1997) contended that learning happens when tasks at hand are meaningful to students and when pedagogical activities involve learners cognitively. Cheng and Yeh (2009) suggested that extrinsically-motivated students tend to stop their work when reinforcement discontinues and to make minimal effort to complete tasks whereas intrinsically motivated students select challenging tasks, gain more knowledge, display greater creativity and an active involvement. For citizenship education, this means that the degree of coercion in public schools can hinder the emergence of an active and accomplished citizenship from students.

Some researchers have declared that such a degree of coercion ensure that children learn how to rule in a democracy. Nonetheless, this degree of coercion and the extrinsic motivation to which it give rise represent factors to which research has pointed to describe some of the difficulties confronting citizenship education.

Studies have also identified the roles and tasks of students in citizenship education classrooms as other problems facing citizenship education—for example, the passive roles of students, the avoidance of debated issues and the prevalence of rote learning and of standardized tests. Sears (1996), grounded on the results of a review of research on citizenship education in

Canada, expressed worries with respect to the roles assigned to students during citizenship education courses/classes. He declared that this role contrasts with that of teachers. Indeed, he depicted teachers as playing active, dominant and powerful roles while students as subordinate, docile and powerless. Holt (1982) concurred with this affirmation in stating that North American schools do not promote personal initiatives: “The things that children talk about in class, when they are allowed to talk at all, are seldom close to their hearts” (Holt, 1982, p. 235). For Sears (1996), students’ position and roles in classrooms can difficultly enable the development of an active and participatory citizenship.

According to various researchers (Hennessy, 2006; Sears, 1996), the avoidance of debated issues during citizenship education is another issue. Sears’s (1996) study also reached this conclusion. It exposed that teachers have reported to be reluctant to deal with debated issues, especially when these matters are contemporary and deal with local interests. Teachers have admitted to be worried about the reactions among members of their community if they were to ask students to tackle debated problems.

Bickmore (2006) analyzed how the curricula addressing citizenship education in three provinces are presenting justice issues and notions of social conflict, diversity and peace. She found that curricula encourage grappling with debated issues, though that they embody unchallenged dominant discourse perspectives offering little room for students to engage with unfinished democratic efforts, that is with actual debated issues. For her, in the end, with these contradicting allusions, curricula encourages espousing dominant views as well as marginalizing dissident perspectives and limits students’ practices of democratic conflicts. The analysis of Winton (2008) of a school board’s documents about character education is consistent with Bickmore’s (2006) findings. Indeed, it suggests that character education, in assistance to

citizenship education, promotes participation in activities that support the status quo as opposed to encouraging continuously addressing and revisiting arising inequity issues. According to this analysis, this prevents students' construction of conflict resolution skills. For Sears (1996), this avoidance of debated issues stems from the prevalence of rote learning during citizenship education. He also declared that rote learning had been a recurrent theme in many of the studies at which he looked about citizenship education. Meier (2003) asserted that the current pervasiveness of rote learning in citizenship education classrooms emerges from the increasing administration of standardized tests. Tupper (2009), like other researchers, argued that the imposition of standardized tests poses different problems for citizenship education. Tupper's research examined carefully many of the standardized tests that evaluated citizenship in Western provinces. It concluded that these tests entrench dominant systems of knowledge about citizenship and that such tests teach that good citizenship is contingent upon the degree to which students are able to succeed on standardized exams. Another one of its conclusion is consistent with a statement raised by Kennelly (2006). Both assert that standardized tests contribute to instilling a normative construction of citizenship that marginalizes a portion of students. Kennelly's (2006) review of investigations on standardized tests also revealed that these tests teach that good testers are more prepared to participate in the democratic space.

Galston (2004) explored what standardized tests evaluating both citizenship education and other subject matters meant for citizenship education. Behind the results of a study done by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, his findings suggest that the push for high stake testing in core academic subjects occurs at the expense of subjects not considered as core such as citizenship education. Hence, researchers have considered that standardized tests are a factor, among other ones relating to the tasks and roles of

students during citizenship education, explaining some of the difficulties confronting this kind of education.

Research in the field of citizenship education has also targeted the situation of teachers in citizenship classrooms within the constraints of citizenship education curricula as a potential avenue to improve the state of this field of education. It has suggested that the structure emerging from these constraints could offer more variant opportunities for these teachers. This argument is important to this study since it contributes to warranting the study of alternative ways to teach citizenship education, that is ways that provide a different framework to structure such teaching.

Curricula represent a tool that can assist educators in their efforts to better such teaching. The previous section has demonstrated that an increasing number of policy makers are concerned with youth citizenship engagement. On the other hand, the current chapter has also pointed to the findings of researchers who had shared concerns with respect to citizenship education curricula. These have asserted that these curricula facilitate the avoidance of conflicting issues, promote dominant discourses, offer limited possibilities for concrete engagement, and articulate a normative construction of citizenship that tends to exclude dissident voices. As a result, potential improvements to citizenship also lie in these curricula.

Schweisfurth (2006) carried out a multiple case study that focused on how the structure associated to these curricula affect learning about citizenship. For this study, he observed in Ontario the classroom work of teachers, interviewed teachers and analyzed documents on the topic. His findings show evidence that teachers, when using citizenship education curricula creatively, can generate positive opportunities for students to engage with citizenship issues. However, the vast majority of teachers have admitted to be hesitant to take these steps as they

felt demoralized by popular opinion and still limited by curricula. Hence, teachers could benefit from a different curricular framework.

So far, the review of research on citizenship education has highlighted that citizenship education, despite providing various learning opportunities for students, is facing certain problems that have emerged from the combination of numerous factors including the degree of coercion to which students are subjected, the roles and tasks required of students, as well as the limited power of teachers and of their current curricula.

Lessons Learned and Look Ahead

The authors of each of the studies that this chapter has reviewed thus far have speculated on possible ways to resolve the situation. Schweisfurth (2006) advocated for offering a different curriculum that presents more opportunities to citizenship educators. Galston (2004) also recommended that citizenship education become a compulsory topic. In agreement with Sears (1996), Bickmore (2006) and Hennessy (2006), to name a few, concurred in proposing an increase in the numbers of hours per week during which students would be involved in citizenship education classes. As well, Kennelly (2006) suggested a modification of curricula that would encourage students to engage in communicative exchanges in a plurality of ideas.

Clearly, most of these recommendations deal with curricula and with the place of citizenship education on students' school schedule. This stems from the kind of investigations that researchers have conducted in the field of citizenship education. Most of the inquiries analyzed in this chapter have relied on document analysis, interviews, questionnaires or surveys. According to Sears (1996), classroom practices in regard to citizenship education is a topic that has in large part eluded research. Kennelly (2006) warned that classroom practices can differ enormously from guidelines outlined in curricula. For this reason, exploring alternative practices

to teach citizenship education in classrooms could assist schools in teaching citizenship. Recent studies that took this venue showed promising results. For instance, Kahne and Westheimer (2006) carried out a quasi experiment on the influence of ten recent citizenship education programs on students' sense of efficacy as political actors. Their conclusion explains that this sense of efficacy can improve when students have the possibility to participate in civic issues. It also indicates that curricular opportunities for civic efficacy foster the development of stronger citizenship engagement.

Meier's (2003) twenty-five yearlong study of schools, whose goals have been to increase the voter turnout of their graduates, to ensure a low rate of graduates who go to jail and to reduce the gap between rich and poor, also demonstrated the benefits of exploring alternative ways to teach citizenship education. Supported by various methods of data collection, it contends that schools that have well-defined purposes, that offer students many choices, that show openness, and which authority is decentralized provide students with positive citizenship experiences. Because Meier's (2003) results and those of Kahne and Westheimer (2006) exemplify the potential of exploring alternative citizenship education practices and because few studies have tackled citizenship education classroom practices, the purpose of the current study has been to look into a non-traditional way to teach citizenship.

In summary, research has revealed that the situation of young people's level of citizenship engagement in North America is worrying, especially in comparison to that of young North American in the previous decades. It also indicated that schools, notably through citizenship education, can be a key factor in enabling an improvement of this level of engagement. Studies have demonstrated that policy makers are alarmed by this level of citizenship engagement, though critics of the current state of citizenship education have pointed

to many fronts to improve this kind of education. One of these fronts is exploring alternative ways to teach citizenship education. This is what the current study has been set to accomplish. To reach this goal, this research has focused on the democratic activities enacted in free schools.

What Is Known about Free Schooling

This section will look at free schools and the democratic activities that they support as an alternative way to teach citizenship education. For the purpose of the study, I used the word democratic to qualify the two types of activities of interest to this project: school meetings and judicial committees. The literature on free schools recurrently employs this adjective to refer to these two kinds of activities since decisions in these activities are said to be taken by every member who has an equal say on every matter based on equal rights and obligations (Neill, 1960). To what extent these activities are democratic could be debated (discussed in more detail in chapter 5). The objective of the current section is to justify the present research study on free school students' experiences in relation to citizenship education during democratic activities while providing information about the nature of free schooling. It will go over what selected studies have said about free schooling. However, very few studies exist on free schools.

According to Albert Lamb (1992), who edited the 1992 version of the book *Summerhill School: A New View of Childhood*, no inquiry looked at Summerhill School². Hence, the studies that this literature review will discuss mostly address the overall operations of free schools. This review will start by introducing what the works of two very influential free school founders, A.S. Neill and D. Greenberg, tell about these schools. Analyses of some of the publications of these two free school founders will supplement this part of the section. This will lead to a presentation of inquiries that have tackled what goes on in a free school and what happens to former free school

² Summerhill School is the first free school to have been founded and has been a model for the foundation of many other free schools.

students. This section will show how these inquiries have provided methodological grounds for the present research.

Free Schools in the Words of Two of their Founders

A.S. Neill has documented the operations of his school after the establishment of Summerhill School. In turn, his books have persuaded many to create free schools. D. Greenberg has been one of them. In 1968, he built Sudbury Valley School in Massachusetts. He has published many books about his school. His promotion of his free school model has led to the founding of eighty Sudbury free schools around the world (Peramas, 2007). This section will examine how Neill and Greenberg's books, as well as analyses of these publications, describe free school goals, the principles of these schools and the free school approach, including their democratic activities (See table 1 below). In this sense, it will provide a definition of free schooling as emerging from the combination of these goals, principles and approach.

Table 1 Free schooling

Goals	To lay the foundation for a happy life	The respect of students' self-determination	Development of responsible citizens		
Principles	Unfulfilled wishes awake defiance	Children can associate adults to authoritative behaviour	Self-motivation improves learning	Students as responsible of their education	Students can thrive in a democratic environment
Features of the free school approach	Freedoms granted to students	Classes as optional	Egalitarian teacher-student relations	Responsibilities entrusted to students	Democratic activities

These authors have indicated that free schools pursue three specific goals. These schools attempt to lay the foundation of a happy life for their students (Neill, 1992). This goal is paramount over any academic accomplishments. Neill (1992) admitted that he would rather raise

a happy street sweeper than a miserable millionaire. Furthermore, free schools aim at respecting students' rights to self-determination. These rights entail students' freedoms of speech, of assembly and of conscience. According to Neill (1992), students should have the right to decide what to do of themselves. The third objective of these schools is the development of responsible citizens (Greenberg, 1995).

Neill and Greenberg have delineated a great number of principles that warrant and guide the pursuit of these three goals. Works in psychoanalysis have influenced some of these principles (Neill & Fromm, 1960). A first principle justifies keeping students' emotional needs paramount over any other considerations (Peramas, 2007). It states that unfulfilled wishes last forever. When such a wish is unfulfilled, it becomes suppressed (Neill & Fromm, 1960). This suppression awakes defiance. For Neill (1961), this meant that if a wish such as that of playing remained unfulfilled and became suppressed, this wish could re-emerge in a negative way. For instance, a child could respond to a situation where she or he does not get from adults the love desired by vandalizing a property to draw some attention. Hence, free schools endeavour to allow students to grow out of the desire to play by letting kids play as much as they want and avoid all forms of moral sanctions, although these schools issue sentences for violations of rules. A second principle guiding these schools suggests that, when people in charge of children are authoritative, children can associate every adult to authority, ultimately, to unpleasant feelings. Thus, to lead a happy life, children need love and affection from persons in charge of them. Neill (1992) held that if children cannot get love, they can get hate. Hence, to express appreciation to students, free schools try to show that they are on the side of children.

Another principle is Neill (1992) and Greenberg's (1995) shared conviction that the best learning occurs when the motivation comes from within the child. Both have agreed in affirming

that if the emotions are free, the intellect will take care of itself. Regarding didactical methods, Neill asserted that forcing a child to learn was indoctrination (Darling, 1984). He compared proceeding in this manner to an act of parliament that forced the adoption of a religion. In this perspective, he claimed that curricular subjects did not interest most children, especially in traditional schools. For this reason, he reckoned that unnecessary teaching prevented children to learn to find things for themselves and that satisfying their every urge, including that of playing, and being intrinsically motivated would precede productivity in the classroom. The two educators have also listed fostering personal responsibilities through students' empowerment as a core free school principle. This involves that students be responsible for their own education.

A last principle is derived from Neill's (1992) emulation of Henry Lane's *Little Commonwealth*, a youth detention center, to erect the democratic structures that enable the respect of students' rights to self-determination. Lane had implemented a democratic model at his youth detention center. There, children along with members of the staff decided democratically on the operations and on the laws of the center. Lane put delinquent children in charge of police functions. Neill (1992), observing Lane's success with these delinquents, has tried to replicate Lane's democratic axioms with non-criminal children. As a result, one of the key principles of free schooling is that free schools operate democratically by ensuring that students and teachers have the same rights and obligations except for safety and fire matters. To give an example of these rights and obligations, Neill, drawing on his family life, admitted that, in his house, his daughter controlled access to her bedroom while he claimed jurisdiction of other rooms. Similar entitlements apply in the school (Darling, 1992).

Neill (1992) and Greenberg (1995) outlined several implications of many elements of the free school approach that arose from the aforementioned principles. The importance of the

freedom granted to students in free school is a first implication. Indeed, students enjoy a freedom that stops where that of others begins. This freedom enables students to play as much as they want and to do what they want with themselves. Neill (1992) and Greenberg (1995) reported that such a context allows students to satisfy their need to play so that they can later focus on more serious matters. As a result, in their schools, there is no school bell and no official lunch hour since students are free to learn and to eat when they desire.

This freedom means that, as a second implication, classes are optional for students. Thus, these children can learn what they want, how they want it and when they want it. This assures that students attend classes only once intrinsically motivated. In this environment, each free school offer the possibility to follow ministerial or departmental curricula. This way, students can obtain the prerequisites to enter university. At Summerhill School, teachers organize and schedule classes (Neill & Fromm, 1961) whereas, in Sudbury Schools, classes occur when initiated by students.

The democratic principles guiding the free school philosophy entail that, in free schools, the authority lies in the hands of the group formed by students and teachers. From this, relations arise between teachers and students that often contrast with those experienced in conventional schools. Greenberg (1995) claimed that most teachers relinquish their title of teacher for that of facilitator. In fact, individuals labelled expert in the matters addressed in classes teach. These experts can be adults as well as children (Neill & Fromm, 1961). This demonstrates the desired level of equity between teachers and students in free schools and the fact that equity is a core aspect of being on the side of children. In essence, teachers, to express their approval of children in free schools, shun any coercive methods and lend a helping hand to any students in need. In some extreme cases, Neill (1992), to change a student's conception that every adult is

oppressive, went as far as to assist a child in performing antisocial behaviour. For example, on one occasion, a new student, whom Neill believed to see every adult as against him, started throwing mud at a door that Neill was painting, Neill decided to throw mud at the door with the child to show the student that an adult could be on his side.

The free school philosophy has given rise to creative possibilities with respect to entrusting students with more responsibilities. Indeed, some free schools have created a certification system to offer such a possibility (Greenberg, 1995). This system aims at regulating the usage of the equipment around the school. Only people, whether they are children or adults, who are certified to use a specific piece of equipment can do so. Obtaining the certification implies that an individual has to show to two certified persons that she or he can follow the safety rules to employ the piece of equipment in question. For example, those who want to use the oven independently have to demonstrate to two certified people that they will respect the safety rules (e.g. turning it off when done) regulating the use of the oven. If they succeed in gaining the certification, they can theretofore certify others, though they can lose their certification in cases of misuse of the piece of equipment.

An essential implication of the free school philosophy, especially for this research, is the democratic activities in these schools. In a context where students and teachers have the same rights and obligations, these activities serve the purpose of regulating the school social life (Neill, 1992). Furthermore, they guarantee that no child can be spoiled or that no teacher can be authoritative (Darling, 1992). They give rise to the freedom that allows children to learn to handle freedom and to take responsibility for their education and for their conduct. Additionally, the school democratic activities perform the task of defining the limits of this freedom by asking if the actions of each person are harmful to anyone. They empower students and represent a

display of trust by the adults of the school. These activities are divided in two types, the school meetings and the judicial councils, although some free schools choose to hold both types of activities during school meetings.

Even though free schools encourage their students to try to solve their conflicts on their own, when this becomes impracticable, these schools turn to these activities. The school meetings act as a parliament whereas judicial councils play the role of a court. Essentially, school meetings decide on the rules of the school (e.g. prevention of food wastage) and arrange agreements for the organization of group activities (e.g. the coordination of fundraising activities for a school trip). These meetings occur on a weekly basis. As for judicial councils, they settle issues arising from complaints concerning violations of a person's rights or of school laws (e.g. a student's complaint that someone has borrowed her or his bike without asking) (Greenberg, 1995). Thus, the councils rule daily on guilt and innocence as well as issue sentences.

According to the literature, the functioning of school meetings and judicial councils is similar. In both, a chairperson presides. The assembly in these activities elects each time for each activity a different chairperson among students and staffers attending. This individual is in charge of conducting these activities and grants rights to talk and decides on the duration of the deliberations and on the time to vote. This person has the power to make disrupting participants leave, though cannot vote on the issues. In addition, a secretary keeps record of business, of proposals and of new laws during the activities. This individual can hold this position for weeks. Furthermore, presence at the activities is voluntary. Teachers and students compose the assembly in school meetings and the jury of peers during judicial councils. During both activities, these people deliberate on each issue on the agenda to vote on an outcome. For each issue, each teacher and each student possess an equal vote.

There are limits to these democratic activities (Darling, 1992). To begin with, in the school, students have no say in the hiring of any staff members and in the democratic framework of the school. Moreover, during the democratic activities, teachers at the school, more experienced than students with democratic processes, have an advantage over the children. Lastly, at the school, no one plays the role of police officers to assure the implementation of rules leaving some students in some instances to the mercy of bullies. Hence, in the words of Neill (1992) and Greenberg (1995), free schools pursue specific goals through a particular approach to which many principles are inherent. These authors have shown the significance of democratic activities in free school for this approach.

What Went on in Free Schools?

Investigations on what goes on in a free school have portrayed many of the operations of these schools. However, the vast majority of these studies are older than thirty years old, so they mostly depict the functioning of free schools as they were. Alarmed by figures on children's mental health, Croft and Falusi (1969) turned to free schooling to explore a school model potentially positive for students' mental health. Their inquiry examined in detail the operations of a Canadian free school through observations, informal discussions and document analyses of the school mission statement and of newspaper excerpts about the school. It is grounded on a theoretical viewpoint that takes into account the symptoms of mental illnesses and that considers the influence on health of environmental factors. In the findings, the researchers asserted that they did not notice any symptoms of mental illnesses displayed by children. The study formulates various explanations why free schools are beneficial for children's mental health. First, these schools enable students to express freely their feelings. This give rise to rich and warm friendly relations between teachers and students as well as to healthy confrontations between

conflicting views. As well, free schools rely on students' intrinsic motivation. Children can follow their own rhythm to pursue their interests. This implies, as reported by the study, that children can outpace traditional curricular programs depending on students' motivations. In another perspective, the inquiry also describes other elements of the free school of interest to the present research. At these schools, students and teachers share a lot of administrative and domestic tasks. Students participate in activities such as field trips, fund-raisers and seminars led by resource people. In addition, Eriksen and Fiske (1973) completed a descriptive inquiry on teachers' efforts to adapt to the foundation of a free school. They based their results on observations, interviews, discussions and document analyses. This generated different conclusions. To start with, teachers at the school wanted to help students and wished that children took responsibility for their education. In addition, they also wished to nurture positive teacher-student relationships and to overcome what they called the negative effects of traditional schooling. However, many problems were in their way. In the disorientation that ensued, teachers reacted by turning to one another. This persuaded them to work in teams for the planning and the organisation of daily activities as well as for evaluations of the school program. They also decided to encourage students to contribute to the teachers' planning. On this note, the article concludes by suggesting that the flexibility of free schools allows educators to try out new ways to teach.

Swidler (1976) addressed another aspect of free schools: what they teach indirectly. She resorted to a mixed method design in which she combined observations and interviews in two free schools to an experiment involving control groups from these two free schools and a test group from a traditional school. An assumption that relies on a definition of hidden curriculum that opposes familial values to those of the hierarchy of formal institutions (such as obedience,

competitiveness and independence) guided her data analysis. The findings indicated that free school hidden curriculum teaches many skills and values at the expense of others. For instance, in comparison to conventional schools, free schools foster group skills more easily, especially through their democratic activities. These schools also teach more effectively self-directedness and openness because they do not instil fear of failure. On the other hand, they do not prepare well for test taking, for competition and for coping with the stress associated to evaluations and failure. As well, they do not promote drive for individual performances. However, no evidence suggests that free schools teach academic skills with less success than conventional schools. Furthermore, the research reaffirms the idea that free schools nurture intimate and personal ties between teachers and students due to the absence of grading. For Swidler (1976), such a climate favours upper middle class students. As such, her argument concurs with some of the conclusions brought forward by Friedenberg (1974). The latter tried to assess how free schools mediate social structures. To achieve this, he reviewed criticisms directed at free schools as well as drew on contemporary studies. Working from a Marxist theoretical perspective, he looked at how the actions of the upper middle class through the establishment of free schools contributed to the alienation of the proletariat. This led the author to conclude that free schools allow the isolation of upper middle class children from those of lower classes. For this reason, according to him, free schools maintain social inequities and benefit upper middle class children.

Novak (1974) looked in a more general way at what happens in free schools. His objective was to describe free schooling as an educative alternative. The inquiry relied on observations during the inaugural and only year of a free school. The study focused divided efforts on what the author termed the school pedagogy (what teachers do), curriculum (what the school teaches) and evaluations. The findings reveal interesting points about these three matters.

The teachers of the schools have created an unstructured environment that generated an anomic state of activity. For these reasons, the school had been unsuccessful. However, the researcher pointed out that the school was not democratic. Indeed, children, despite enjoying a freedom that could not impinge on that of others, have been left out of the decision processes affecting the school.

Gray and Feldman (2004) attempted to evaluate the potential of age mixing in a democratic school, Sudbury Valley School. Collecting data in the early 90s, they conducted an ethnographic study to classify in a table of observation the qualities of interactions between students having an age difference of four years or more. A theoretical standpoint defined by the notion of zone of proximal development grounded this classification process. This standpoint defines this notion in Vygotsky's perspective as a process during which a child acquire knowledge and skills by performing tasks, that she or he could not complete before, with a more competent person. This approach generated many findings. First, the school structure gives rise to numerous interactions between students having an age difference of four years or more. The absence of curriculum and of grade as well as the mixing of students of different ages explains these interactions. The article also distinguished many characteristics of these interactions. Common interests, play styles, personal attractions and common desires to nurture or to be nurtured draw students together naturally in these interactions. Helping, giving, approving, conflicts, pro-social interventions, game variations and comedy motivate these interactions (conflicts in a proportion of twenty percent). Initiatives by the younger students as much as by the older ones make these interactions possible. This allows older students to show some leadership, to be creative and nurturing, and to make implicit knowledge explicit to younger ones. Additionally, the emerging interactions occasion younger students to reach the zone of

proximal development. This helps these children in refining physical and intellectual skills and in performing better physical and intellectual tasks. It also contributes to increasing their motivation to accomplish tasks never done before. Lastly, it serves moral education purposes by encouraging young students to adopt pro-social behaviours.

Drews (1968) also delved into what takes place in a free school. Her description, based on observations and informal discussions of an experimental free school, produced many conclusions. First, at the school, students explored their freedom. In the author's words, few attended to academic matters, though students spent their time reading, listening to music, planning trips and building. This gave to some previously-labelled low achievers the will and the interest to become involved in classes and to learn to read. In the school context, children demonstrated that they wanted to learn and to become more competent. For instance, many decided to grapple with existential issues showing their need to find a philosophy by which to live. Overall, they engaged in meaningful relationships with teachers. The school structure facilitated bridging generation gaps. As a result, students started taking their teachers for role models. In this environment, students became altruistic. This led the researcher to underscore the impacts of intrinsic motivations and of learning by verbalizing. By referring back to the students who, before starting to attend classes, learned to read and develop a notorious interest for reading, she asserted that this motivation brings better results and that it pushes students to pursue their interests to the maximum. She also suggested that verbalizing thoughts helps students to learn and to become very articulate. Consequently, research on the operations of free schools has provided crucial information on the activities of students in these schools between the 60s and early 90s, on some effects and benefits of these activities as well as on the school structures that contribute to the unfolding of these activities.

What Has Arisen from Free Schooling?

Studies have also probed into what arises from free schooling, notably into what happens to former free school students. They have shown that former free school students have become responsible citizens. They have warranted examining the potential of free school democratic activities to generate possibilities to learn citizenship. Betts (1975) conducted one of these studies. It focussed on the development of self-concept in graduating-minority free school students and on the educational and vocational intentions of these students. The study resorted to a deterministic perspective asserting that homogeneous people respond similarly to similar conditions and that free schools have effects on students that are measurable and that are constant over time and space. Hence, employing a quantitative approach, the investigation surveyed a hundred minority free school students and fifty minority students attending a conventional school to form a control group. Its findings offer a great deal of useful knowledge. First, the free school students have reported in bigger numbers not caring about grades, being less competitive, having a positive attitude about school and feeling that they have great school abilities, whereas more students attending the traditional schools considered succeeding as important. For these reasons, according to the author, free school students have a higher self concept. Regarding vocational and educational objectives, more than twice as many of these students as compared to the conventional school students have shared their intentions to go on to higher education and to choose jobs that require more education. Tackling a similar topic, Bernstein (1968) directed his attention to former Summerhill School students. Determinism also underpinned his inquiry as one of his assumptions is that Summerhill School develop a particular kind of persons. His research relied on in-depth interviews with fifty former Summerhillians in their homes. It highlighted many patterns in these people's situation. The overwhelming majority

had not faced any difficulties adjusting to life after Summerhill School. None had gone to jail. Many had gone to university. Their occupations were as varied as their personality. These people had jobs in more than thirty-four different fields. Some were doctors, secretaries, business owners or were working at the post-graduate levels. According to the researcher, they were all hospitable, welcoming and warm. They were part of happy and communicative families. This also transpired in their relations with their children and with other family members. Thus, for the researcher, this implies that Summerhill School had succeeded in reaching Neill's goal of developing happy human beings. As well, the former students have outlined many things regarding how the school prepared them. The school's healthy attitude about sex had helped these individuals in their relationships with member of the opposite sex. The school had provided them with the confidence to address naturally authority figures. The school, despite lacking academic opportunities, had allowed its students to grow out of the need to play so that they could settle for more serious pursuits. In this environment, students, once they had decided what they wanted, could follow their interests fully.

Gray and Chanoff (1986) completed a follow-up study of former free school students consistent with Bernstein (1968)'s results. Their research project had resulted from the complaint that students not compelled to do schoolwork would fail to acquire the skills to function properly in society. With this in mind, they surveyed and interviewed sixty-nine persons who had graduated from Sudbury Valley School. Their survey and interviews pertained to these people's occupation, studies and opinions about the impacts of the school on their lives. The research also employed a causal theoretical perspective that assumed that a type of schooling experience determines the future of students. The findings establish that all participants have become productive members of society. These individuals were successful in a variety of careers (Gray

& Chanoff, 1986). The majority had attended post-secondary institutions. They had encountered no difficulty in their admission to these institutions and no problem adapting to the demand of traditional higher education. They have affirmed that the school benefited them for many reasons. The school had encouraged them to develop their own interests. It had promoted personal responsibilities, initiatives, curiosity, continued appreciation of democratic values and ways to communicate well with others regardless of status.

Hence, investigations about graduating and former free school students suggests that attending a free school can open doors to many occupational and educational opportunities as well to various healthy lifestyles, such as responsible citizenship. As such, they substantiate investigating how experiences in free school democratic activities enable the possibility of learning about citizenship.

In summary, the review of selected studies on citizenship education highlighted many elements related to both citizenship education and free schools that are significant for the current research project. First, young North Americans' level of citizenship engagement declined in the last three decades (Hennessy, 2006). In such a context, many policy-makers deployed various strategies to solve this problem, notably through changes to curricula (Bickmore, 2006). Nonetheless, despite efforts on the part of teachers in the field of citizenship education, many researchers have called for improvements in that field while deploring the avoidance of debated issues in citizenship education classrooms, the passive roles assigned to students and undemocratic aspects related to these classrooms (Sears, 1996). Alternative ways to teach citizenship could benefit schools in regard to this situation. Free schools and their democratic activities represent one of these alternatives as democratic principles ground the operations of these schools (Neill, 1960). Moreover, studies on former free school students have depicted these

individuals as active in their society suggesting that free schools can enable civic engagement on the part of students (Bernstein, 1968; Gray & Chanoff, 1986).

Rationale for this Study in Light of the Literature on Free Schooling

This review of literature on free schooling has identified many implications for the present research study. In turn, these implications warranted carrying out the study. These implications concern the research topic, and the methodology and the theoretical principles that structured this study. The topic of the present inquiry has emerged from what the selected studies have examined. Past studies have mainly investigated issues relating to American free schools or to Summerhill School in England. These studies are on average more than thirty years old and have looked at the overall operations of free schools, at the philosophical underpinnings of these schools and at what happens to former students. Their findings have supplemented this research project with helpful information about the philosophical tenets and the school structure that give rise to a specific kind of democratic activities, as well as about lifestyles that can arise from free schools and from the democratic activities that they support. Because none of them have investigated in detail free school democratic activities, because these activities represent potential alternative ways to teach citizenship, because only one study has probed into a Canadian free school and because none have collected data in a free school in the recent years, articulating an in-depth understanding of these democratic activities and their potential with respect to citizenship education could further our knowledge in the field of education. Hence, the purpose of this research has been to answer what are students' experiences with respect to citizenship education during democratic activities at a Canadian free school.

As for implications of this literature review for the design of the present research, they have stemmed from methodologies used by authors of the selected studies. Many of these

researchers have conducted surveys. This method has produced general knowledge about free school, though the emphasis of the current research is more specific. On the other hand, other methodological components employed by some of these studies have depicted in detail aspects of free schooling. For instance, focusing on one site has brought about such results. The same applies to document analyses since they have allowed cataloguing many of the philosophical underpinnings that give rise to free schooling (Darling, 1984, 1992). On-site observations, informal discussions and interviews have also been efficient to describe particularities of such schools (Drews, 1968; Novak, 1974). In the light of these reflections, this research study opted to complete a case study using tools of ethnography. This method combined the advantages of document analyses, formal interviews and observations to investigate the peculiarities of free school democratic activities.

Complexivist Conceptual Tools

Contrary to previous studies on free schools that have conceptualized students' experiences on deterministic grounds, to acknowledge students' active roles and their ability to adapt and to change (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999), three principles of complexity thinking guided the data collection and the data analysis of the current inquiry in order to take into account the emerging properties of students' experiences. According to Davis and Sumara (2006), there is no definite agreement on a definition of complexity thinking. Nonetheless, they tentatively define complexity thinking as the study of complex phenomena as opposed to that of simple or complicated ones. In simple phenomena, everything remains constant except two to three variables (McMurtry, 2008). The freefall of a ball represents an example of a simple phenomenon. Linear equations make these phenomena easily predictable. As for complicated phenomena, they engage a slightly larger number of variables. Weather systems and the

movement of planets are examples of complicated phenomena. The quantity of variables in these phenomena gives rise to intractable calculations. As a result, probabilistic models and statistical methods enable a predictability of complicated phenomena that is less accurate than that of simple phenomena. On the other hand, complex phenomena engage components that are organic, adaptive and dynamic. Similar complex phenomena can react differently to the same conditions. For example, precisely predicting what would happen to a rock if someone kicks it is possible, whereas determining how a dog would react to being kicked or how a man would respond to a divorce is impossible. In this sense, complex phenomena, as opposed to simple and complicated ones, are unpredictable and emergent. As an example that concerns more specifically education, two similar students might have divergent reactions to a mathematics class. One might be bored and disengaged while the other could be enthusiastic and very involved in the class. Furthermore, such persons can learn new responses to react to certain conditions. For instance, in the case of the students attending the mathematics class, this means that the student who was bored and disengaged could modify how he reacts to the class and become really involved at some point. Given that such modification in the student's reaction implies an active role on the part of this individual, the change in reaction is emergent. Furthermore, the idea of emergence also indicates that, when students adapt to a world, mostly that of the democratic activities, this world changes (Maturana & Varela, 1987). Hence, the first complexivist principle that guided this study is that of emergence. This meant taking into account in the description of the findings that every student can react differently to the same democratic activities and that their reactions can evolve and involve changes in the students' world. It also entailed considering each student's experience as part of a repertoire of possibilities that can arise in these activities. The second principle that this inquiry drew upon complexity thinking is that of nestedness. It assumes that students'

experiences occur and interact with and within other phenomena as illustrated in Figure 2.1³ (Morin, 2005). Indeed, these experiences take place within some democratic activities. The

activities happen in a particular

school. This school evolves within a

specific society. In this sense,

students' experiences are nested

within the democratic activities,

which are nested within the school.

As a result, students' experiences

interact with the dynamics of the

democratic activities, the school and

society. In turn, these interactions

give rise to new and different

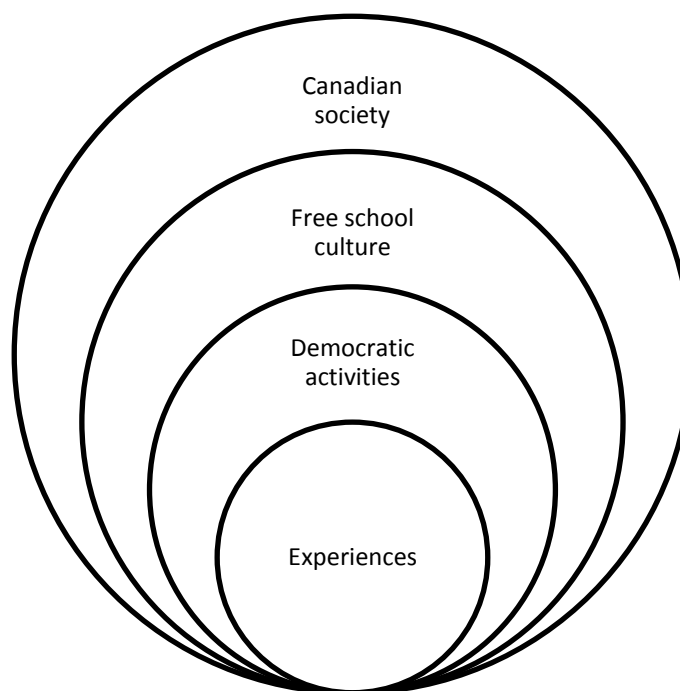


Figure 2.1 Nestedness of experiences

possibilities for students' experiences. For this study, this idea implied answering two questions

to contextualize students' experiences: what are the operations of the school in which these

experiences take place and how do the democratic activities in which these experiences occur

happen. Moreover, it implied taking into account the interactions between each level of

nestedness. The third complexivist principle that helped to conceptualize students' experiences in

this study defines learning to be an adaptation that expands a learner's possible repertoire of

actions (Davis, 2004). Since such adaptations can be part of students' experiences, the current

research project collected information about how students changed when participating in the

democratic activities of their school.

³ Figure 2.1 is an adaptation of a figure used by Davis and Sumara (2006).

In summary, this chapter has identified three major constants about the current situation of citizenship education in North America. A significant decline in youth citizenship engagement characterizes this situation. Secondly, policy makers, schools and teachers are putting important efforts into improving the state of citizenship education. Despite this, many issues still confront this field of education. In the light of these observations, the chapter has indicated that exploring an alternative way to teach citizenship education could support school systems in grappling with the declining figures in young people's citizenship engagement and that free schools and their democratic activities is one venue for this exploration. As a result, this chapter has shown that research about free schools has so far generated useful descriptions of the general operations of various free schools between the 1960s and the 1980s, and descriptions of outcomes of free schooling. In this sense, the lack of knowledge about current free schools, about Canadian free schools and about the potential for citizenship education of free school democratic activities has warranted the present research. Furthermore, literature on free schooling has indicated that case studies, interviews and observations have been successful in studying free schools providing methodological elements to incorporate to the design of this study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The previous review of selected studies on citizenship education helped the delineation of a research topic for the current inquiry: students' experiences in relation to citizenship education during free school democratic activities. Literature on free schools demonstrated the potential value of on-site observations and interviews to study these schools. These research techniques have helped the collection of data to understand students' experiences with respect to citizenship education during free school democratic activities. The current chapter aims at further defining the approach deployed to reach this understanding. It comprises four different sections. The first one will introduce the approach utilized to carry out the study by providing a rationale for the choice of this approach and by outlining the key implications for the data collection and analysis. The second section will offer details on the particularity of the research site and on the demographics of the participants. The third one will give insights into the data collection of this research while the last section will explain how I analyzed the data collected.

The Research Approach

The design employed for this research was an instrumental case study using tools of ethnography that drew on theoretical principles of complexity thinking. A particular rationale substantiated the selection of this approach and had several implications with respect to methodological underpinnings of the present inquiry.

Rationale

One main reason that warranted opting for an instrumental case study using tools of ethnography is that both kinds of approach, case study and ethnography, serve purposes that go in line with the objective of this research. Indeed, according to Stake (1995), the aim of instrumental case study is to understand an issue through the exploration of a bounded case that

illustrates this issue. Congruent with this aim, the goal of the current research was to understand one particular issue, students' experiences in relation to citizenship education during democratic activities at a Canadian free school. Furthermore, for Creswell (2007), the objective of a case study is to generate an in-depth understanding of an issue. This is also in agreement with the purpose of the present research since the goal is to describe in detail the interactions at play during the students' experiences of interest.

As for the use of ethnographic components in the current research, it is in agreement with the purpose of understanding students' experiences during free school democratic activities as co-evolving with and within a school culture. In the words of Walford (2008), the aim of ethnographic studies is to make sense of the behaviours, values and meanings of individuals within a cultural context. This is significant because this study entail investigating a cultural context, that of a particular kind of school, to understand the experiences of a group of people. Students attending *Canadian Free School* took part in the same culture. Many elements inherent to this culture interacted with students' experiences of the democratic activities of the school. For this reason, the procedures of this study drew upon ethnographic principles as the idea of culture is a focal point of ethnography. Walford (2008) defined culture as a group of people sharing certain values, practices, relationship and identifications. Consistent with this definition, students at the school valued freedom and their community. They participated in the same practices, notably democratic activities such as class meetings and judicial committees. These individuals interacted within similar relationships as they all enjoyed an equal status. This equality also applied to relations with teachers at the school. Lastly, student participants all identified themselves as free school students. Hence, this research project involved an ethnographic

component because making sense of the school culture helped understanding students' experiences.

The Nature of the Methodology

Combining elements of the foregoing two types of research approach, case study and ethnography, had several entailments for the methodological underpinnings of the current research. First, the case study component of the research project implied focussing on one case to describe the issue and to investigate this issue in detail. As a result, the inquiry examined the experiences of students in relation to citizenship during democratic activities at a Canadian free school at only one school, *Canadian Free School*.

The process of enculturation represents a second entailment. It arose from the ethnographic aspect of the research design (Walford, 2008). Indeed, in the words of Walford (2008), the best way to know a culture is to proceed in-situ. Thus, the enculturation process implied an involvement in the practices of the participants at the school, notably through participant observations and by spending prolonged periods of time in the field. Living through the process of the culture enabled better understanding what had become tacit knowledge to those who inhabit the culture. As well, according to Walford (2008), doing so can decrease the possibilities that participants behave uncharacteristically during the data collection. However, he warned that this can only occur when the relationship between the participants and the researcher remains positive. In line with this, during the data collection, I did not condemn any participants' behaviour.

Congruent with Jeffrey's (2008) suggestion, the enculturation process also entails on the one hand, immersion, involvement, empathy and on the other, distance and objectivity. Thus, during the data collection, I moved back and forth between participant observations and direct

observations. Participant observations gave rise to first-hand experiences from within while direct observations allowed me to take a step back to gather information (Creswell, 2007). With this, a fourth implication stemmed. For Trondman (2008), even though first-hand experiences represent the most appropriate way to make sense of a cultural group and of the practices of the group, first-hand experiences are not sufficient to describe in-depth such cultural aspects otherwise everyone will be doing ethnography all the time. In his words, describing a culture involves an abstraction of reality that implies leaving out some parts. For the benefit of the description, he suggested framing this abstraction within a theory that would provide a compass to guide the data collection and the data analysis. The principles of complexity thinking that structured this study played the role of this theory

Another entailment of the methodology involved using multiple forms of data since Yin (2003) recommended the collection of many different types of information to conduct a case study and since Walford (2008) suggested the same idea for the completion of an ethnographic study. Hence, the current inquiry collected data in four ways: direct observations, participant observations, interviews and document analysis (the section dedicated to data collection will provide more information about this). Interviews served the purpose of obtaining the perspectives about the experiences at hand and about the school where these experiences occurred from people having these experiences and participating in the school culture. For Walford (2008), such an inclusion of multiple viewpoints can only enhance the quality of an ethnographic study since there is no better perspective than those of the participants experiencing the cultural context.

Lastly, conducting a case study using tools of ethnography also involved making a detailed description of students' experiences. Indeed, Creswell (2007) insisted on the importance

of articulating a detailed description of the case when carrying out a case study while Jeffrey (2008) formulated the same advice with respect to ethnography for the richness of the findings.

Put simply, the selected methodology implied focusing on one case, proceeding to an enculturation process, resorting to a theoretical framework, using multiple forms of data and generating a detailed description.

Research Site and Participants

This instrumental case study using tools of ethnography took place at *Canadian Free School* with particular participants.

The Site

In order to respect the anonymity of the school and of the participants, this section will briefly describe the school. Nonetheless, it will depict the specific school population, spatial environment and *modus operandi* that characterized the school.

Many individuals composed the school population. Two teachers worked at the school, one, full-time, and the other, part-time. Various mentors also volunteered at the school for different activities such as cheerleading and as a music band. One of the founders of the school was also engaged in many ways in the school during school hours when present at the site on some occasions. The student population comprised between 37 and 39 students during the course of the research as the number of registrations at the school grew, though only 21 students had been attending the school since the beginning of the school year. Most students were first-year free schoolers. Students were aged between 11 and 16 years old. The school did not divide them into grades, though, in the words of the educators of the school, the majority of students, if they were in a traditional school, would be in either grade 7 or 8 while few would be in the first years of high school. One third of the students were girls. According to one of the educators, the

proportion of vegetarian students at the school was large in comparison to that of other schools in the area. This proportion reached almost one third. However, the percentage of racialized minority students was small with respect to that in other schools in the same geographical area. Furthermore, some of the educators at the school claimed that many of the students, if they were attending a traditional school, would be labelled with a disability such as attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder.

The school thrived within a Canadian urban environment in a building shared with some organisations. It mainly comprised three classrooms. In these classrooms, there were a computer area, a kitchen, a lounge area, an art cabinet, blackboards, shelves filled with books, a small administrative office, and several desks and chairs. The school also enjoyed access to a gym and to a music room. It also had connections with, for instance, a dance school, a garden and a local museum for mentorships.

The school mission statement introduces *Canadian Free School* as a democratic school. Indeed, three different democratic activities structured the operations of the school. They comprise class meetings, judicial committees and community meetings (each described in further detail in the next chapter). A schedule organized the daily activities at the school. School started at 9h00 in the morning. 30 minutes later, morning gatherings would take place to coordinate the sequence of events of the day. They would last for ten minutes. Optional classes and personal activities would follow until 11h30. At that time, the lunch hour began. It ended at 12h30. Then, between 1h00 and 2h00, optional curricular and personal activities would resume. After that, cleaning would begin until 2h20. From that time until 3h00, the full-time teacher and the students would go to the gym where organized as well as personal activities would take place. At 3h00, school would be over. Lastly, every week, on Tuesday at 11h00, class meetings occurred.

The Participants

Several people engaged in the school decided to take part in the research. A total of 26 people participated (this dissertation will identify each of them with a pseudonym). Four of them were adults. These included the two teachers of the school, one of the founders of the school and a pre-service teacher (to respect the anonymity of these people they will be identified as either Educator 1, 2, 3 or 4 in no particular order). In addition to these educators, I invited every student in the school to partake in the research. 22 students became participants in the study. They were aged between 12 and 15 years old. They comprised nine girls and thirteen boys. Five of them were racialized minorities. During the research, I observed all of them on multiple occasions in everyday-activities at the school and, more specifically, during class meetings and judicial committees. I invited all of them to participate in an individual interview. 17 elected to do so. Three of them were educators whereas fourteen of them were students. The student-interviewees included six boys and eight girls. Three of them were racialized minorities.

Data Collection

To collect data, I gathered information in multiple forms during the time of my research. The data gathering lasted four weeks during the month of May 2010. During that period of time, seven sessions of the two types of democratic activities of interest to this research took place. Four of them were class meetings and three of them were judicial committees. In the course of the data collection, congruent with the aforementioned principles associated to the process of enculturation, I spent prolonged periods of time in the field. To achieve that, I stayed at the school every day during the four weeks between 9h30 and 3h30 except for two days. At the school, I collected data and tried to take part in the activities of the school, though while remaining passive, that is non-authoritarian. One of the many activities in which I have been part

was a school newspaper that I helped to organize, which published its first edition. Moreover, I also took part in many classes. I participated in personal activities with students such as playing chess or engaging in multiple conversations. I went on a field trip with the school to an organic farm. I attended two community meetings. At the gym, I played hockey and basketball with various students.

The Sources of Data

Consistent with the selected approach, I collected data in multiple forms: direct observations, participation observations, interviews and document analysis. During the research, I recorded many observations in a notebook. These observations fulfilled the purpose of collecting data regarding two things. Many of them concerned the general activities and operations of the school. These observations offered information about the school culture and about what was happening at level of the school of which students' experiences in democratic activities were part. As such, these observations gave me insights into the environment that enabled the dynamics of the school in which the democratic activities happened. The majority of my direct observations pertained to these democratic activities, in fact, to seven of them. These democratic activities comprised four class meetings and three judicial committees. My observations focussed on what was taking place in these activities and on the procedures out of which each democratic activity rose. Taking notes on the procedures of the activities entailed identifying the rights and responsibilities of participants in these activities. Recording thoughts on what happened during the democratic activities meant taking notes on, among other things, the different point of views, experiences, concerns and interests that entered the democratic activities. Lastly, during the democratic activities, I also paid heed to what students were doing.

In the course of the data collection, I also made some observations as a participant. The object of these observations was the same as that of the direct observations: the general activities and operations of the school, the democratic activities and students' actions during these activities. I made observations as a participant in the school activities throughout the data collection about what was happening at the level of the school. Indeed, I took note of these observations while I was engaging in activities such as classes, personal activities with students and playing sports at the gym with participants. I recorded few observations as a participant during the democratic activities about these activities and about what students were doing in them. These observations only occurred towards the end of the data collections when I shared my opinions on few and brief occasions about issues and solutions to problems discussed during the democratic activities. Participant observations of the democratic activities started notably after I was asked by some students to state my opinions about certain issues in these activities. Participant observations allowed me to record first-hand experiences of the democratic activities.

To supplement my observations, I conducted some interviews. The purpose of these interviews was twofold. On the one hand, they provided the study with words coming from participants to make sense of the practices taking place at the school, notably of the democratic activities. On the other hand, they offered insights into what I could not observe that played a role in the students' experiences. These elements included students' feelings, actions, past experiences and changes. Understanding students' feelings during their experiences helped to make sense of their motivation – a key element of any educational undertaking- of their actions and of their changes. Furthermore, collecting data about feelings enabled better conceiving students' free school experiences as feelings are a focal point in the free school pedagogy. On

that issue, Neill declared, “If the emotions are permitted to be really free, the intellect will look after itself” (Darling, 1984, p. 161).

In total, I realized seventeen individual interviews that represented over ten hours of audio-recorded material. For three of them, I interviewed educators of the school. These three interviews lasted between 20 and 50 minutes. They bore on the general operations of the school, the relations between the democratic activities and the school, and the procedures and freedoms inherent to both judicial committees and class meetings. As a result, my description of the functioning of the democratic activities and of the operations of the school in the next chapter largely relies on these educators’ words. Questions to elicit information related to these matters were open-ended for the most part. For the other fourteen interviews, I questioned students. These interviews lasted between 25 and 40 minutes. They took place as soon as possible after either one of the seven democratic activities that I had witnessed during the research. More precisely, they happened between one hour and two days after each democratic activity. The objective of proceeding as such was to ensure that students’ memory of their participation in the democratic activity remained fresh. The majority of my interview questions were also open-ended for students. For each democratic activity that I had observed, I interviewed two to three volunteering students. During these interviews, I posed questions to most students in relation to each kind of democratic activities, that is in relation to the class meetings and to the judicial committees. With respect to each of these activities, these questions concerned three main themes regarding participants’ experiences during, specifically, the last democratic activity attended and during the democratic activities in which they had participated since the beginning of the year. These themes comprised students’ feelings during and about the democratic activities, students’ actions during these activities and their changes and evolution during these

activities. Questions about feelings concerned the emotions that students felt in general in the democratic activities and those experienced when various events occurred during specific democratic activities. These questions regarded both the nature of these feelings and the reasons given by students to give meaning to these feelings. For example, in many cases, I asked students how they felt about judicial committees while, in some instances, I also posed questions similar to how did you feel when a certain person suggested a particular solution to a conflict brought up to the judicial committee. I followed these questions with why did you feel like that. I also asked students questions about what they did during the activities, when they did these actions, why they choose to commit these actions and how they did them. For instance, during some interviews, after I had asked some students what they did during the last class meetings, some replied that they had shared their opinions about a specific issue. When this happened, I asked these students why they chose to share these opinions and how they did it. As for students' evolution during the democratic activities, I questioned students in three different ways. First, I asked them how some elements of their experiences were when they started participating in the democratic activities and how, at the moment, these elements were when they were participating in these activities. These elements could represent any aspect relevant to the democratic activities including feelings and actions. If I had identified any changes between what these elements were at the beginning and what they were now, I asked how and when these changes occurred. For example, I asked some students how they felt about class meetings when they first took part in one and how they felt now. When some hinted at differences between the feelings experienced when participating in the democratic activities for the first time and those experienced during the last democratic activities, I questioned student on the moment when these changes occurred. As a second way to gain insights into students' changes during democratic activities, I asked many

what they had learned during any of the democratic activities. When some students reported that they had learned something, I asked them to give me some examples. As an instance, one student held that he had learned to include proofs in his statements when arguing. I asked him to give me an example of when he had done this during an argument in a democratic activity. He replied that he had brought rotten stuff from the school fridge to insist on the importance of cleaning the kitchen. To identify other forms of evolution on the part of students, I also asked students if they had changed anything after they had participated in any democratic activities. When students expressed that they had changed something, I asked them to support their statement with some examples. For instance, one student maintained that she was cleaning more since a class meeting had addressed the issue of cleaning. I asked her what she was doing to clean and she told me that, for example, she had started picking up from the floor candy wrappers among other stuff that did not belong to her. During each interview, I posed questions in relation to each of the three themes associated to students' experiences in the democratic activities, that is feelings, actions and changes. However, the specifics of these questions with regard to these themes varied with respect to the events that had happened in the previous meeting (since I only interviewed two to three students in relation to each democratic activity) and with respect to what was emerging from students' discourses during the interviews. For example, some students stated that they had played particular roles during a specific class meeting such as chair or peacekeeper while some others said that they had only been members of the assembly during that meeting. As a result, for the students who had played such roles, some of my questions pertained to the performance of these roles whereas, with student who had not carried out such duties, I asked questions in relation to other elements of the interviewees' experience in the democratic activities.

To complement the data gathered during observation sessions and interviews, I collected some artefacts. During the data collection, I made some electronic copies of four types of documents. The first one comprised a set of judicial committee forms as students completed such forms to initiate a judicial committee and to confirm agreements, rulings and decisions at the end of each judicial committee. Secondly, I kept a copy of an email made by one educator to every member of the school community to clarify the procedures of the judicial committees. I also took note of some of the information presented on the webpage of the school concerning the principles and the functioning of the school. Lastly, I made copies of various documents posted by students and teachers on the wall of the school. These documents included a list of the values of the school, a schedule and work made by students.

As such, data in the form of observations, interviews and artefacts provided me with information about students' experiences in free school democratic activities, including details about these activities themselves and the culture of *Canadian Free School*.

Data Analysis

The analysis of these data involved two main steps, transcription and codification. Before proceeding to the codification of the data, I put into words every piece of information that I had. I transcribed all seventeen interviews. Then, I took note of what artefacts and collected documents were saying about students' experiences during free school democratic activities.

At that point, I went through the data and associated every idea to a category. Most of these categories arose from participants' words and from concepts that emerged from the literature review. As an example of a category that stemmed from participants' words, when a student said "I do much appreciate them" in relation to the democratic activities, I categorized the statement as "feeling of appreciation". Other categories that arose as such include those of

concerns, dislike, frustration, boredom, interests, changes... As an instance of a category that arose from the literature review, when a student expressed in an interview, “I shared my opinion...” I used the notion of critical thinking to categorize the student’s statement. Categories that emerged as such notably comprise those of empowerment, conflict resolution skills, citizenship engagement... Based on the categories that arose, I conceived conceptual maps. These conceptual maps were similar to the one shown in Figure 3.1, though more elaborate, moving, top-down, from themes to subthemes to citations taken from participants’ interviews.

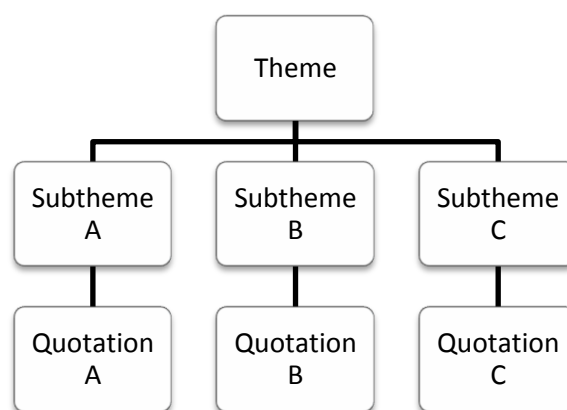


Figure 3.1 Conceptual map template

One question guided the creation of these conceptual maps: what does each piece of information tell me about the three focal levels of nestedness engaged in students’ experiences: the operations of the school, the dynamics of the democratic activities and students’ experiences of these activities. I created a conceptual map based on the categories emerging from the data for each of these components. The conceptual map for the operations of the school comprised all the categories pertaining to the nature of the activities that had happened in the school, to the procedures and freedom that enabled these activities. I devised two conceptual maps for the democratic activities, one for the class meetings and one for the judicial committees. Each of these maps included every category relating to what had happened during each of these activities, to the procedures that enabled each democratic activity, to the freedom inherent to each activity, and to the differences and commonalities interconnecting participants that had entered these activities. Lastly, I designed fourteen

conceptual maps, one for each student who had participated in an interview. These maps all dealt with the experiences in the democratic activities of each of these students. They comprised every category concerning the feelings that students had experienced during and about each kind of democratic activities, concerning what students did in each of these sorts of activities and concerning the changes that students had made during these activities. Once I had created these fourteen conceptual maps, I highlighted the multiple connections, indicated by students during the research, that existed between the different elements of the conceptual maps for the map of the operations of the school, for that of the democratic activities and for that of the experiences. I used a red pen to underscore these links in the conceptual maps in a fashion similar to what appears below, though more elaborately:

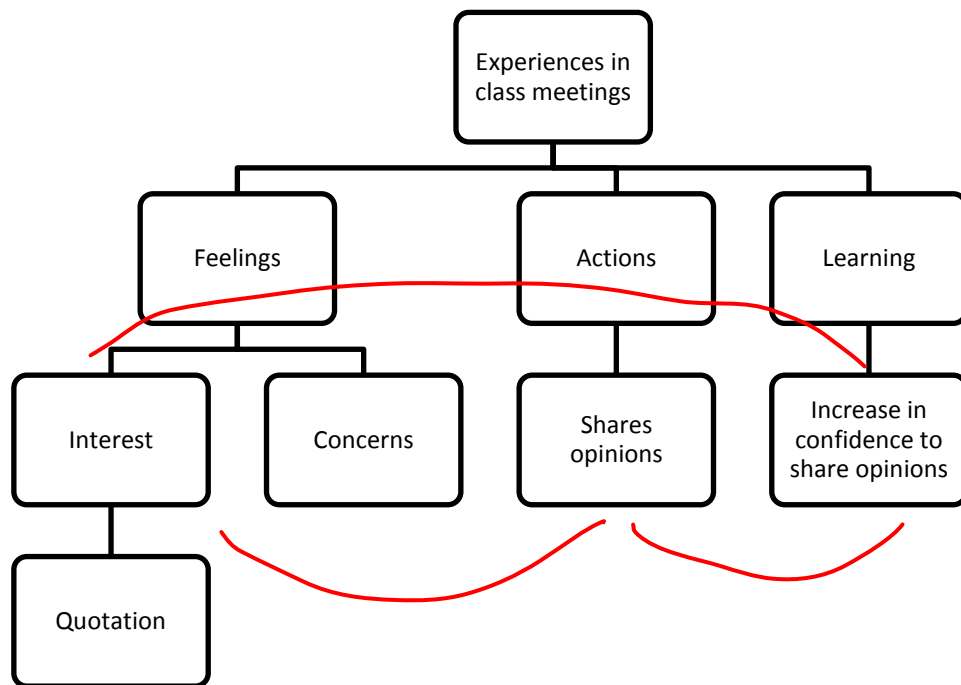


Figure 3.2 Conceptual map with connections in red

The following is a concrete example of how these links worked and emerged. When a student expressed having commented when interested in a topic of discussion during a democratic activity (for instance, Patrick said: “I have been doing (...) a lot more of making comments (...) I

find commenting a lot more fun now”), I categorized the student’s comment as an action and the interest as an aspect part of this student’s feelings. In addition, I identified with a marker in the conceptual map the link between this actions and this feeling.

Once I had highlighted in this manner all the links connecting various components of the conceptual maps, using the fourteen conceptual maps concerning the experiences of every student, I designed a conceptual map combining the elements of the experiences of every student in each democratic activity. To accomplish this, I kept and underlined every element that had been common to the experiences of every student. Then, I added all the other possibilities that had emerged while indicating the prevalence of these possibilities among the experiences of every student. For instance, listening to others’ point of view, making comments, voting and raising objections were all recurring elements with regard to what students did during the democratic activities. On the other hand, sneaking out of assemblies was not such a recurring element. Nevertheless, one student admitted in an interview having sneaked out of some meeting. As a result, I included in a conceptual map all the recurring elements relative to what students did during the democratic activities and added the action of sneaking out as part of one student’s experiences of these activities. This way, my conceptual map could account for every possibility that had arisen that comprised the possibilities part of a repertoire of potential experiences in the democratic activities.

When I finished meshing into one conceptual map every conceptual map associated to the experience of each student, I identified all the links connecting various elements of each map. For example, links existed between the activities of the school and items added to the agenda of the class meetings. To ensure, that these links were clear in the findings, I marked them in a recognizable way.

Once I had completed this step, I used the resulting three conceptual maps – that of the level of the school, that of the level of the democratic activities and that of the level of students' experiences - to formulate my detailed description of the possible students' experiences that had arisen during democratic activities at *Canadian Free School*. This description followed each studied level of nestedness from the largest to the smallest. Hence, it started by situating the experiences within the larger phenomena. Thus, it began with a description of the operations of the school and, then, continued with a depiction of the democratic activities. A part of the description indicated the connections linking these levels. Then, I articulated what had happened at the level of the students' experiences while making references to what had entered these experiences from the levels of the democratic activities, of the school and of society.

CHAPTER 4: WHAT ARE STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES DURING FREE SCHOOL DEMOCRATIC ACTIVITIES?

The purpose of the current chapter is to present a description of students' experiences during the democratic activities at *Canadian Free School*. This chapter is divided in three parts following each focal level of nestedness. As such, the first part contextualizes the democratic activities by depicting the operations of the free school. The second part portrays the two kinds of democratic activities in which students participated (i.e., class meetings and judicial committees). The last part of the chapter focuses on what students experienced when taking part in these two kinds of democratic activities. Each part of the chapter highlights links between the each level of nestedness.

The Operations of *Canadian Free School*

The operations of *Canadian Free School* were guided by certain principles. In an interview, Educator 3 defined self-directed learning as being one of them:

[Students] are people who have the ability to do the types of changes that they would naturally do if they were left to themselves to progress in life, because the assumption that many people have in education is that, unless you force someone into a particular mould, they would not do anything, that they would just either do the exact opposite or that they are like robots that need the computer program put into them so that, unless you push them in those ways, they will do nothing so the assumption on which [*Canadian Free School*] is built is that people actually do want to succeed in life. They don't want to do nothing. They want to be able to help themselves so, if you give them the opportunity to do so, they will move naturally in that direction (...) this is one of the reason we are pursuing this way.

In the school, the principle of self-directed learning considered that students wanted to be successful and that, as such, they would be able to take the necessary steps to reach their goals if left with the responsibility of choosing when to learn, what to learn and how to learn.

Educator 3 listed three things that the school did to promote self-directed learning. This educator introduced the first one by declaring:

We allow [students] the space to do what they want to do in the school. We try to present them with the type of space that they would want so, if they want something in the space, we try to take that into consideration and bring it in the space, but we don't bring extra things in, we only bring the things that people actually want in the space.

Observations of the school dynamics were congruent with this statement. Teachers largely allowed students the freedom to do what they wanted with themselves in the school. For instance, during school hours, when Mary wanted to paint, she did or, when Dan and his friends wanted to play magic card games, they did. As another implication for self-directed learning, Educator 3 added:

As far as the type of things that the teachers offer, the teachers will offer the regular curriculum to the students, but only as an offer, not as something that [students] are forced to do, but [students] will have the opportunity to see what other people of their age would normally see in society so they can decide for themselves if they want to go in that route.

In line with this, observations of the school indicated that, at *Canadian Free School*, educators presented courses derived from the ministerial curriculum. These courses were optional for students. The topic of the classes covered mathematics, writing, language, science, history and geography. In terms of content, the classes varied from below to above grade level. In this context, when an educator invited students to take part in mathematics class, students who elected to participate in other activities did. On an occasion like this, students including Tom, Dan and Joe played games like chess or cards while a group of students attended the class. While classes involved between one to 15 students during the course of the data collection, most classes gathered five to ten students. Therefore, students were allowed to make their own decisions about the content, pacing and time of their learning. Lastly, there was another step taken to assist students in their work toward their goals, as Educator 3 articulated:

If there are particular things that are not part of the curriculum, that are not part of what [students] would not normally do in the space that they are offered, then, we can give

[students] mentors who work in the area that [students] are interested. We set up mentorship for them either within the school or outside the school.

Mentorships represented other opportunities during which students could pursue their own interests. In this case, the close mentoring relationship between mentors and mentees allowed for students to learn at their own pace, focus on one relevant topic to them while making decisions about where to go next. As an example based on observations, Mia and Diana, among other students, wanted to learn how to play some music instruments, though none of the educators was in a position to teach these skills. The school set up a mentorship program with a music teacher in which both students took part. The same happened with a dance school, a gardening club and a local museum. In the self-directed learning examined environment of the school, students participated in activities that included attending classes, reading, baking, playing games, using the computers, doing personal projects, participating and organizing field trips and fundraising activities.

The notion of community is a second element that structured the operations of *Canadian Free School*. Educator 3 also spoke about it:

The idea of community is that everybody's voice is important to develop a community. Everybody has to put in what they believe to be the right way to do things. Everybody has to listen to it and what is to be considered to be the truth for the school has to be built out of all the perspectives that people have.

In this sense, Educator 3 stated that the activities and the functioning of the school arise from the union of everyone's voice. As such, the community included educators, parents and students. At the school, parents had the rights to volunteer during school hours and to take part in the decisions and activities that affected the community like any other members of the school while having to comply with the rules and principles of the school. Thus, the idea was that the development of the school community entailed everyone's engagement.

Educator 3 explained that the school has two types of meetings to decide on the activities of the school that work based on consensus in order to engage students, teachers and parents in the development of the school community. Class meetings represented one of these types of meetings where students and teachers gathered once a week to decide on activities to do in the school and on rules to implement. About them, Educator 2 said “it is a free school. Lessons, [students] don't always have to go to, but the one mandatory thing is class meetings (...) [because students] have to take a little bit of responsibility for the community.” A second type of democratic activities was called community meetings. They took place monthly after school hours and involved educators, parents and students who attended them on a voluntary basis. Educator 3 summarized what happened during community meetings:

There are committees that report on what [students] have been doing and people can ask questions and chose whether they want the direction [that the school takes] to continue or whether they want to do something else.

In community meetings, participants voted to take decisions. Educator 3 also noted:

The community is based on a consensus model (...) if there is a major concern that somebody has about something, that person has to be listened to. [People] have to find out what that concern is, why this person has it and how [the community] can make it so that this person's experience at the school suits how [this individual] wants to do things.

This implied that if someone had a major objection with the decision taken by the assembly at the end of a vote in both class meetings and community meetings, the community had to find a way to satisfy the needs of the person who had the objection. People could raise objections when they absolutely could not live with the decision taken through the vote.

Canadian Free School also promoted the idea that its members (students and teachers) work out their conflicts on their own. Educator 2 talked about this principle:

[Conflict resolution] is something that [students] have to learn to figure out, the sooner you learn this, the earlier, the better. This is a great age for doing it because [students] are so social (...) so it is a good time for them to struggle a little bit in this conflict resolution.

You have to make the mistakes and have to do the stupid things where people will get upset with you. We've all gone through it. They have to go through it and it is better that they go through it now rather than when they are in university or when they are married or they are forty in a relationship then, and they still don't know how to resolve conflicts and deal with the issues that are bothering them.

Hence, educators at the school wished that students learn how to deal with issues that concerned them and how to solve their conflicts. They wanted that students try to solve their conflicts on their own in an effort to benefit students later in life. This not only acknowledges that conflict resolution is part of everyday situations (outside school boundaries), but also a normal situation in democracies where people can make mistakes when thinking on their own.

To encourage students to solve their conflicts on their own, the school put in place a particular conflict resolution process. An excerpt of a guide that details this process listed the first steps to take to resolve a conflict at the school:

- 1) Students are encouraged to solve their own conflicts when they arise. 2) If the conflict cannot be solved at the time, and it continues, any person involved in the conflict tells the others involved that what the others are doing or saying bothers the person and the behaviour should stop. 3) If after this, the behaviour continues, the person who is bothered need to tell any other people involved in the conflict that he or she plans to write any of those involved up for the judicial committee. 4) If after this warning, the behaviour continues, the person goes ahead and writes up any others involved in the conflict for the judicial committee. 5) The judicial committee is organized and meets to solve the conflict.

These steps aimed at facilitating discussions between students who had conflicts. When these discussions did not work, judicial committees run democratically by students and educators based on the consensus model of the school could take place.

In sum, the school staff, guided by the idea of self-directed learning, trusted students with the responsibility of their education by, notably, granting students the freedom to explore their interests, freedom that stopped where that of others started. To create a sense of community, the school set up class meetings and community meetings to decide on the activities and rules of the

school. It encouraged students to resolve their conflicts on their own at first and, then, through judicial committees. At the school, certain obligations came with students' freedoms and rights to decide about the operations of the schools. Attendance, as opposed to participation, to class meetings was obligatory. Furthermore, according to what Educator 1 expressed during an interview, students had to attend morning gatherings because equality between teachers and students on matters of accountability did not apply. These gatherings lasted for about ten minutes. During these gatherings, teachers presented the activities of the day and students shared their plans for the day. This enabled the teachers to report to the community meetings what had been going on in the school.

The Democratic Activities

Class meetings and judicial committees corresponded to two democratic activities that characterized *Canadian Free School*. The present section describes these two activities as nested within the dynamics of the school since the investigated students' experiences took place in these activities. It details their specific functioning and content.

Class meetings

The class meetings occurred every Tuesday at 11h a.m. in the main classroom at a large round table. The four class meetings that I observed lasted between 20 and 50 minutes while most went over the 35-minute schedule and continued past the beginning of the lunch hour. The purpose of these meetings was to decide on what happened in the school, that is to organize activities and to solve issues concerning everyone in the school. However, there were some limits to the decisions that class meetings could take. On this matter, John said:

I actually try to start some other trips, but there was not enough time to do the fundraising needed for the trip so we were not able to do it, but if we would have started the fundraising, we would have been able to do the trip.

Thus, funding and time represented constraints that class meetings had to face. Attendance was mandatory for students to class meetings, though Educator 1 clarified that those who had a major objection to participate in these meeting were not forced to be there “in order to avoid a power struggle with students”. Between 20 and 28 students attended each of the observed class meetings. When asked about how class meetings worked, Educator 2 said:

The meetings always happen when there are two [educators] around, one of them will go talk to the students and just remind them, this is a school where you have a lot of freedom, but you have to take a little bit of responsibility for the community.

Thus, class meetings occurred in the presence of two educators. The role of one of the educator was to remind students of the obligations that came with the freedom that they enjoyed in the school. According to Educator 2, “There are two students who run [class meetings]. There is the chair and, then, there is what was called the peacekeeper, [this person keeps] the peace.”

Shannon clarified how the assembly selected the chair and the peacekeeper. She reported, “When there is a boy chair, then, there is a girl peacekeeper so [, at the next meeting,] they have to choose [their successor]. Like a girl would choose a boy.” My observations confirmed this procedure. One of the rules of class meetings was that two new students performed at each meeting the roles of chair and peacekeeper, that the persons who succeeded each other in carrying out these roles were of different gender and that the chair and the peacekeeper had to be of different gender at each meeting. One of the responsibilities of the chair and peacekeeper was to choose the person who was going to succeed them at the next meeting. About this, Educator 2 indicated that, for the selection of the chair, “if someone has never been the chair, they always get preference.” The same applied to the role of peacekeeper. When questioned about the duties of the chair, Educator 2 responded that:

The chair starts the meeting by saying, 'who has any agenda items or anything that they want to talk about.' Then, [the chair] writes it down and their name beside it. The first

person who speaks on any topic is the person who brought it up and, then, the discussion begins and the chair tries to keep a speakers' list if there are too many hands up. If there are any kinds of votes, [the chair] summarizes what other students have said, the [chair says], 'we are voting for either this or that.'

The responsibilities of the chair and the chronological steps of class meetings emerged from Educator 2's response. The chair had the responsibility to start the discussion by asking to the members of the assembly for what they wanted to talk about. The chair had to create a list of the items to be discussed and, then, to grant the floor to speakers by, first, offering it to the person who brought up each item and, after that, to the persons who wanted to respond. Chairing entailed the responsibility to summarize the positions for which the assembly was going to vote and to count the votes when someone requested a vote about an issue. Educator 2 also added to that list of responsibilities associated to the role of chair asking to the assembly if anyone had a major objection about the decisions reached and, opening the discussion to address the objection in cases where someone formulated one.

The chronological steps of class meetings followed the chair's responsibilities. The first step after the selection of the chair and the peacekeeper was the creation of an agenda. At that step, the chair had to ask students for items to add to the agenda. The second step was the chronological discussion of each item. The person who had added the item of discussion to the agenda had to present this item once this individual was granted the floor by the chair. Then, people could respond to what this individual had said. The discussion of an item could end by a general agreement or a vote. When a vote occurred, the chair had to remind the options to everyone and, then, the vote took place. Students and educators' votes had an equal value. People who had objections could raise them to the chair at the end of votes. Then, the assembly had to listen to the objections to try to find a way to satisfy the need of the person(s) who had the objection. The step of addressing a major objection aimed at following the consensus-model of

the school. Once the assembly had covered an item, the next step was to go over the following item. The chair had to adjourn the meeting when class meetings had addressed every item.

Concerning the peacekeeper, Educator 2 claimed that how this person can keep the peace during class meetings worked through a system of warnings:

The strategy is supposed to start by giving the person a warning. You are talking, 'first warning' and, then, you talk again, 'second warning.' Third warning, you should be moved and usually it means that you will be moved next to a teacher (...) if they don't want to move and if they still are disruptive, they really aren't able to settle down, which of course, happens, then, they have to leave. At first, it is just for two minutes, you take two minutes and you come in as you are ready and, then, that is pretty much it and, then, they come back in.

In essence, the peacekeeper could give warnings to disrupters. No consequence is associated to the first and second ones. However, during class meetings, peacekeepers had to keep track of the accumulation of warnings given to disrupter. After giving a third warning, the peacekeeper had to move the disrupter to another seat. If that did not work, the peacekeeper had to expulse the disruptive students for two minutes at first and for the rest of meeting on the second occasion. Marc explained what such expulsion entailed: “[you] miss opinions being spoken during that time and that is the punishment. You don't get your opinion out on that one topic.”

The dynamics of these meetings varied as well as the performance of peacekeepers. In one of the meetings, the dynamics was very calm. People were raising their hands. During another one, few were talking and laughing while most were looking and listening to the speakers. Thus, class meeting assemblies implemented mechanisms to maintain the order of the meetings. In almost every meeting, educators reminded the chair and the peacekeeper of the responsibilities associated to their roles. In one meeting, educators moved certain students to other seats and asked one student to go in the hallway whereas, at another meeting, educators only requested that few students remain quiet. Peacekeepers also contributed to the regulation of the meetings. They

gave warnings on multiple instances in all of the meetings. In one of the meetings, a peacekeeper moved one student while sending another one out of the classroom. Prior to this, the peacekeeper had given warnings to these two students separately by simply saying “First warning”, “Second warning...” After that, people stayed focussed on the matters on the agenda. Mary, as a peacekeeper at another meeting, asked repeatedly to be quiet in an assertive way to the whole class at one point, to Alex and to a group of students later and, finally, to Educator 2 who was telling a student about the importance for the community of participating seriously to the meetings. In every observed meeting, a peacekeeper moved someone to a different seat. In two observed meetings, a peacekeeper sent someone out. As for the chairs, they did not always get involved in the regulation of the meetings. Karen, as the chair in a meeting, did not even have to keep track of who was raising their hand as no one was talking out of turn. As for the members of the assembly, they had many rights during class meetings. As suggested by Educator 2, they could put any item on the agenda. They could raise their hand to make comments. They could vote on the issues raised at the meeting and state major objections.

Students and educators at the school established and agreed upon the general functioning of class meetings at the beginning of the school, though it could change. In this sense, Educator 2 said, “When the school began, how it all ran was discussed by that class at that time (...) if something does not seem to be working, then someone may just complain. It starts with a complaint.” Hence, a person could make a complaint to change the procedures of class meetings by adding this complaint to the agenda of a class meeting. Educator 2 provided two examples of how class meetings changed through such a process. First, he stated:

With the peacekeeper, there was a person who took the job a little bit too authoritarian. It was kind of like [shouting] 'YOU HAVE TO GO OUT, YOU HAVE TO LEAVE.' It was actually becoming more of a disturbance, so we decided what are the strategies that the peacekeeper can use to quiet it down and what actually helps quieting down and what

causes just more chaos. So, it came up naturally at the meeting. It happened right there, 'oh ok, this has to be discussed, what are the roles.'

Thus, the system of warnings associated to the duties of the peacekeeper was not in place until a class meeting addressed this issue. As a second example of change to the class meetings, Educator 2 said that “judicial committee was a student's idea who had it at a different school.” Before this student brought the idea to a class meeting, class meetings also fulfilled the function of solving conflicts.

Despite the democratic aspect of class meetings, educators initiated modifications to aspects of class meetings without consulting students. Two such modifications were carried out about the class meetings. According to Educator 1, the first one was the abolition of the information component of the class meetings. Before this change, educators took a few minutes of class meetings to present some of the school activities to the assembly. Educator 2 presented the second modification initiated by the educators at the school in the following manner:

We used to have the meeting over there in the kitchen, encompassing the lounge and part of the kitchen, but there was too much arguing about who gets to sit on the couch and fighting about that, so we did it in [the main classroom] just to minimize disturbances, because over the course of the year, we grew very quickly from a class of twenty students to a class of 37 students. So, because we grew so much, it would be a lot more difficult to keep meetings running suitably and peacefully if we had people sitting on the couch or sitting on the floor. Now, because we are sitting down at a table, we got more of a business feel because we are here to discuss community business so we should be sitting at a table.

The creation of agenda, discussions, debates, votes and agreements happened during class meetings. Preparations for the discussions and debates started on some occasions with complaints by students to teachers, who tried to make students bring their complaints to the class meetings. Heated debates preceded some class meetings. Based on my observations, this had been the case over issues such as cleaning and the use of computers.

Discussions arose during class meetings when students had similar interests or concerns while expressing divergent points of view about these interests or concerns. The differences in terms of viewpoints were about the nature of the problems raised, about the solutions to undertake and about activities to organize. As an example, in a 30-minute discussion that started when Paul asked that the assembly create a rule to keep the kitchen clean, many students shared divergent viewpoints about the nature of the problem. Indeed, the issue for Dan was that people were too lazy to pick up their dishes while the problem according to Shannon and Paul was that some people did not clean up their dishes and, for Liz, the issue was that some individuals left their dishes half-filled. The formulation of these opinions occurred in a discussion during which every student stated that they thought that the cleanliness of the kitchen was a problem after everyone had agreed to share their opinion on the issue. In that same discussion, many proposed conflicting solutions to the problem. Indeed, Educator 1 suggested keeping the system as it is. Paul requested a rule. Dan asserted that enforcing a rule was not needed. Shannon and Liz asked that people clean their own dishes while Ella put forward the idea of forcing Chris, her friend, to clean everyone's dish. Out of such differences, discussions and debates arose. As another example, during the discussion of an item about animal mistreatment in a class meeting, a debate that involved similar commonalities with regards to interests and concerns, and differences in terms of viewpoints about the nature of the problem and of the solution to take arose. This discussion started when Ben asked for clarifications about the death of the two class pets, two chicks. Even though everyone who talked during that discussion expressed some interests about the topic and concerns for the death of the animals, many disagreed about the definition of the problem. Abbey and Liz claimed that the chicks had been mistreated. Marc and Patrick asserted that the chicks died of natural causes while some, such as Mia, affirmed that the chicks died

because they were overloved being subject to continuous attention from many students. During that debate, discussions also took place when students shared their disagreements about what to do about the issue. Liz and Abbey claimed that the assembly should create a rule. Other students said that there was no need for a rule. Many, including Paul, Patrick and Dan, declared that the rule should be created at the beginning of the following year because no more pet would be introduced to the class before the end of the school year. A vote in favour of this last suggestion put an end to this discussion. Debates occurring as such set up votes or discussions for agreements to move to other topics to address in the class meetings. Not all agenda item gave rise to such debates. As an instance, Abbey declared during a meeting to have heard about the organisation of an end-of-year school trip to a theme park and that she wanted more information. Marc raised his hand to say that she should ask Educator 2 who was in charge of this project, but who was absent that day. In reply, Abbey said that she would, ending the discussion of her topic.

In addition to the fieldtrip to a theme park, to the cleaning of the kitchen, to animal mistreatment and the creation of a cooking club, class meetings decided on issues comprising computer use, school rules, couch use, participations to a painting contest and to a walk to raise awareness about the socioeconomic situation of children in an African region, a fieldtrip to an organic farm, camping trip, the relief effort for Haiti, community meetings, judicial committees, a cheerleading mentorship and the potential implementation of a swear jar. On average, class meetings covered three to four topics. The assembly reached various decisions with regard to each topic. For instance, it decided during one meeting to create a sign-up sheet for the use of the computers and to enforce a rule that allowed each user to be on the computer for sessions of only twenty minutes. At another meeting, the assembly made a rule that forbade people from bringing food and drinks in the computer room. As for school rules, participants in the class meetings

have elaborated at the beginning of the year a list of expectations for everyone in the school. This list took the form of a contract that every student signed. This contract enumerated five expectations that were further defined in the meetings: mutual respect, appreciation of oneself and of others, learning and listening attentively. Furthermore, students and teachers agreed during different meetings to participate to a school painting contest, to set up a cheerleading mentorship, to take part in the walk to raise awareness for the situation of children in a specific African region, and to go on a daytrip to an organic farm. At one class meeting, the assembly rejected the idea of creating a swear jar.

Discussions of each agenda item did not only result in votes. On many occasions, the discussion of an item ended with a general agreement that did not necessitate a vote. In the case of the topic of the swear jar, after John raised it and many shared that they disliked the idea for various reasons such as students do not have any income, someone might steal the money and some people might decide not to put anything in the jar, the chair moved the discussion to the next item as no one, including John, raised their hands to make any comments or to request a vote. The discussion of some topics ended on other instances with the creation of committees. Class meetings formed many committees. For instance, John said in an interview, “I am in a million committees right now”. One of these committees raised money for the relief effort in Haiti. About this, John replied:

For one week, at every lunch, we had bake goods being sold. We raised about 150 \$ for Haiti and the government matched the donation so it reached 300 \$ in total so I feel like we did our part. We really helped. [My friend and I] brought up [the idea] at the meeting. A committee was formed. The committee decided on a bake sale. We created posters, put them up, went to the principal, got permission and it started.

John also described the creation and the functioning of the committee more specifically:

[At the class meeting,] we were talking about it and we were just going back and forth and, we just, like, I can't remember who thought of the idea of forming a committee so

people who wanted to do this could consult each other to do that and, after the meeting, the committee met (...) I think ten or eleven [people were involved] (...) A vote was done and [Karen and I] were elected chairs. It was really like we got everybody on board and people started making posters and we had people doing certain jobs (...) we voted on [the idea of a bake sale] among a couple of other things. I think that the vote was unanimous.

This committee emerged out of a group of people's desire to participate in a common project that could not be carried out within the framework of a class meeting. During an interview, Paul gave examples of other committees such as the dishwasher committee, which aimed at finding a solution to the broken dishwasher of the school, and the yearbook committee.

These committees replicated many aspects of class meetings. As an example, the bake sale committee for Haiti elected chairs democratically. People voted on resolutions at the meeting. When asked how the committee came up with the idea of operating democratically, John answered, "It is just the way it works in this classroom. Everything is democratic pretty much. That is the way things work."

Even though chairs adjourned class meetings when each item had been covered, educators took steps on some occasions to ensure order in meetings after meeting adjournments. During the observation of one such occasion, Educator 2 met for 25 minutes into the lunch hour with Karen and Mia. The educator started the conversation by asking these students how they thought that their disruptions during the last class meeting affected the community. They all agreed that the disruptions sent a message of not caring. Farther in the discussion, Karen replied to the educator, "Why is it always us, why does nothing ever happen to Julia, she is not perfect." At that point, the educator realized that the issue was not inherent to the meeting, but to a conflict that Karen and Mia had with another student. He asked these students if they could keep their arguments to their feelings and needs. Hence, educators sometimes engaged in conversations

after class meetings were over to promote constructive participation in meetings and the principles of non-violent communication (emphasis on feelings and needs).

Judicial Committees

As for judicial committees, they had a particular purpose. To describe it, Educator 2 said, “[judicial committee] are to solve conflicts (...) Conflict resolution is not something that is going to come down from me. It is something that [students] have to learn to figure out.” The goal of judicial committees was to enable students to solve and to learn to solve conflicts. As indicated earlier, people who had conflicts needed to take other steps prior to resorting to a judicial committee to solve conflicts except for situations that could include, for example, physical threat, the school dealt with such situations on the spot. Educator 2 talked about the form to complete to initiate a judicial committee after attempts to solve the conflict had failed:

So, we have a form that has your name, the person you are writing up and, then, why you are writing them up and that is what gets put in the form and the second half of that sheet gets written during the committee, so once you write them up, you put it in the folder.

The first part of the judicial committee forms to be completed before the committee took place asked for the name(s) of the person(s) making an accusation, of the person(s) being accused and of the witness(es), and for a description of the conflict. As observed, the second part of these forms had to be completed during the judicial committees. It included spaces for the description of the agreed upon account of the conflict, for the consequences and for signatures. The school had a folder stapled to a board in the main classroom to keep the completed forms to have a record of the consequences, of the conflicts and of the engagements.

About the occurrence of judicial committees, Educator 2 said that “we usually do judicial committees once a week, when they come up, unless there is something important that we need to resolve right away, then we try to do it within one or two days.” Hence, the school tried to

hold judicial committees when the resolution of conflicts necessitated such a committee within a week after the problem arose. Educator 2 mentioned that a group of people called the judicial committee ran these committees. To depict the selection process of the members of the judicial committee, he said:

[The committee comprises] four students, two boys, two girls, that are chosen by the rest of the class in a private vote so whoever wants to be one of the judicial committee members put their name down and each people in the class gets to vote for them, two boys and two girls, so four people in total you got to vote for and whoever gets the most votes gets to be on the committee for one to two months depending on how much conflicts there had to be dealt with. If it lasts two months, if there has not been much, then, we don't change it because there has not been any, but, if there has been more, we have to change it so that everyone who wants to be on the committee has a chance to be on it. If you have been on the committee, your name does not go on the ballot the next time around.

The selection process for the committee required the election of two boys and two girls by the people of the school out of the eligible individuals who volunteered for the positions. To be eligible, one had to have never been on the committee or to have not been on it for a long time. In addition to the four students, an educator had to be on the committee. Members of the committee had to elect a chair at each judicial committee. Educator 2 said that usually “the chair is whoever wants to be it when we pick it out”.

About the people who could participate to a judicial committee, Educator 2 mentioned:

Everyone can watch a judicial committee. If there is a conflict to be resolved, people can even make suggestions in terms of consequences if there has to be any, but they don't have a vote. They just have to listen and they can hear and, if they are disruptive in any way, the chair of the committee can kick anybody out without any warning (...) It is not a right to be there. It is a right to have the option to be there, but you don't have to be there.

Thus, attendance to judicial committees was optional. Students who were not members of the committee and who wanted to attend a judicial committee had the right to listen and to suggest consequences. They could not vote on the consequences or make any comments about the account of the conflict. They had the responsibility of not disrupting the committee. The chair

was responsible for the order of judicial committees and could send people out. Only accuser(s), people accused and only members of the committee had the right to vote on consequences.

Educator 2 listed the chronological steps that judicial committees had to follow:

The chair reads what the issue is and the first person who gets to speak is the person who wrote up and, then, the person who has been written up gets to say their side of the story and, then, if there [are] witnesses, because on that form there is a spot for witnesses, witnesses get to speak and, then, it is just up in the air for discussion for a story to be agreed upon once everyone said their side of the story. It is up to the chair to summarize, once again, and say 'it sounds like this is the story that we are saying, that these things have happened' and, then, there might be a little argument about how long or how many times you poked him and we try to make the story and get the key points and get to the point where everyone agrees that these key points happened (...) People make a bunch of suggestions for consequences. It gets discussed around. Sometimes there are some that you drop because they are too silly or someone will say 'I take mine back because', but, then, it gets voted on (...) if there is a major disagreement with the consequence, especially if it comes from the person who is either writing up or the person who is going to do the consequence, if it is something that they are not going to do because they don't agree to it, then there has to be more discussion.

Based on this description, the first step of committees was the reading by the chair of the issue as written on the form filled out by *the accuser*⁴ (term employed by the participants to talk of the complainant). Then, the accuser(s), the person(s) being accused (referred to by participants as *the accused(s)*) and witness(es) could state one after the other their sides of the story. After that, the chair had to summarize the conflict by drawing on every testimony. The people who could vote had to agree by voting on the accuracy of the summary. When they disagreed, a discussion to modify the summary and another vote could occur. The following step was to decide on the necessity of consequences for the various parties as accusers could also have a consequence, and to decide on the nature of those consequences. During that step, anyone could

⁴ Towards the end of the data collection, members of the community expressed being uncomfortable with the terms accuser, accused and judicial committee and being worried that these terms represented constraints towards the construction of a consensus-based community. As an example of the emergence of the democratic activities of the school, a couple of months after the end of the data collection, I was told that the school had replaced the term accuser for person who writes up, the word accused for person who is written up and the concept of judicial committee for conflict resolution committee.

suggest a consequence. Once the chair had listed all the suggested consequences, the people who were allowed to vote could vote on the consequences. Afterwards, the chair could open the discussion to address a major objection if one was raised.

An electronic document listed other potential steps that would be undertaken if the judicial committee did not succeed in solving the issue:

1) If the behaviour continues, it means that someone in the dispute was not heard or understood by the others involved. The person who wants the behaviour to stop at that point should inform the others involved that the conflict resolution was not effective. The option should be that another judicial committee is called as soon as possible to get the situation resolved. 2) If the behaviour still continues, and people are unwilling or unable to ensure that the Community can grow stronger from the conflict, the dispute needs to be brought to the Principal's attention to determine if those involved in the dispute understand and are willing to abide with the core values of the school. The Principal will determine in association with the Community how to solve the conflict to ensure that the school is able to maintain its mission to be a student-directed school where the Community is developed based on consensus.

Hence, measures were in place to solve problems in the case that a judicial committee were not efficient in finding a solution.

Like class meetings, students and educators decided at the beginning of the year how conflict resolution through judicial committees would work. On this subject, Educator 2 expressed that “at the beginning of the year, we modelled the judicial committees with the former students who had done it.” Next, educators opened the discussion to everyone about the democratic adoption of the judicial committees by the school.

The judicial committee forms that were either completed and signed or still pending informed of the activity of these committees during the school year. Even though many conflicts arose at *Canadian Free School* during the time of the research, during the school year, only eleven conflicts were taken to judicial committees while most of the other ones were resolved in

the steps that preceded judicial committees. These conflicts were between students, between students and educators and between students and volunteers.

In line with my observations, once people had gathered for a committee in the lounge area, conflict resolution processes started with discussions to determine how disputes took place, whether anyone deserve a consequence and what that consequence could be. Judicial committees ended with votes to select such consequences and with the completion of the judicial committee form. Conflict resolutions processes emerged when participants' concerns and points of view shared many similarities while having some differences. For instance, in the case of a judicial committee initiated by Abbey about a vulgar story told by Chris in which a character was named Abbey, participants including Abbey, Liz, Dan, Chris, Shannon, Paul, Mia, Diana and Educator 2 all wanted to find a solution to the conflict. On the other hand, many disagreed on how to solve the conflict. A debate took place when participants presented divergent points of view on the solution to undertake. Shannon wished that Abbey learned to deal with the conflict by herself while many wanted consequences that varied. Paul suggested that Chris be banned from the lounge area for a week. Educator 2 put forward the idea of a swear jar. Diana, Mia, Dan and Chris agreed on an apology, though they argued on the form, the content and the length of the apology. Debates happened when people expressed such disagreements. Thus, the debate from which emerged the decision-making processes of the group of people involved in the judicial committee occurred when students wanted to solve interpersonal problems while disagreeing on the solutions to choose.

According to the judicial committee forms, the issues with which judicial committees dealt comprised name-calling, the respect of building-related rules, computer use and an attempt to reach consensus during class meetings. All judicial committees finished with a resolution

either after the assembly had voted or had addressed a major objection. However, according to Educator 2, addressing major objections occurred rarely. This educator mentioned:

I don't think the person who has had the consequence ever disagreed with it, because (...) you know when you have done something wrong. It is nice to have someone to give you a consequence for it to be over and resolved instead of having it underlying.

The solutions to various conflicts varied in the judicial committees. For example, in a case where Shannon accused Dan and Educator 2 of not working based on the consensus-model of the school, the judicial committee chose as a consequence that the next class meeting would try to reach a consensus on the topic. In another instance, two students accused people of being disgusting and of making sassy jokes, and a supply teacher of being a “meanie bobinie”. The judicial committee voted that these two accusers would not be allowed to be on the judicial committee until further notice.

The first observed judicial committee lasted 30 minutes while the other ones were close to an hour in length. While attendance to judicial committees was optional, the three observed judicial committees gathered an average of 15 students while, on some occasions, some participants listened to some parts, then, left and came back later. 18 participants attended one of the judicial committee.

Class meetings and judicial committees represented two kinds of democratic activities, along with the subcommittees that emerged from class meetings, that students experienced at *Canadian Free School*. Both democratic activities worked on a consensus-model that largely relied on votes, which were of equal value for each educator and student, and on mechanisms to address major concerns in order to reach consensus. Judicial committees aimed at solving interpersonal disputes while class meetings served the purpose of deciding on the rules and activities of the school. During both class meetings and judicial committees, discussions,

debates, votes and consensus occurred. The next section will deal with the various experiences students had during these activities.

Students' Experiences in the Democratic Activities

Even though every student's experience remained unique, each one of these experiences had many similarities and each represents a possibility that can emerge during democratic activities. This section details these possibilities. For each activity, it portrays how students experienced a combination of feelings. Then, it depicts how students engaged in each activity while having these feelings. Lastly, it details how students reported having changed in many ways after participating in each type of activities.

Students' Reported Experienced of Mixed Feelings during both Democratic Activities

Most students experienced a combination of similar feelings during both class meetings and judicial committees, though some of these feelings were specific to either class meetings or judicial committees. During both kinds of democratic activities, students' feelings mostly comprised a combination of appreciation, concerns and empowerment. Students' appreciation during class meetings and judicial committees related to these activities in general, to some aspects of these activities and to some specific meetings or committees. For instance, Liz said in relation to class meetings, "I think, in general, they are good." Marc commented, "I do much appreciate them." About judicial committees, Karen asserted, "I like watching [these committees] (...) I like to vote. I like to listen to people's story."

All interviewed students declared appreciating aspects of class meetings and of judicial committees, although these aspects varied from one student to the other. Many enjoyed what class meetings brought to the school. John expressed, "very good things have happened [in class meetings]". He described as examples the bake sale for Haiti and the walk to raise awareness

about children in an African region. Some students were pleased with other accomplishments made during class meetings. For instance, Ben talked as such an accomplishment about the creation of a sign-up sheet to go on the computers. He affirmed, “It is nice to know that you have the option to, if you want to do some work on a research or a project that there is a signup sheet [for the computers].” Moreover, many students took pleasure in the roles of the chair or of the peacekeeper. On chairing meetings, Karen maintained, “I like choosing people to talk (...) I like being in power.” All interviewed students listed several class meeting topics of interest to them. When asked to give examples of such topics, Shannon replied, “people wanting to clean up the classrooms, people bugged by people swearing or saying offensive stuff.” As another example, Abbey expressed, “there is some fun topic, like going to [an exhibition] or going to [a theme park]. It is basically like I can't wait to find out more information about when it is going to happen.” On another matter, Liz exclaimed, “I am glad somebody else [raised the topic of animal mistreatment].” Hence, students' appreciation took the form of interests for various topics during class meetings. Many students also took pleasure in voting. For instance, Ben declared, “[class meetings] are good because a lot of decisions get to be made and we vote.” As for aspects of judicial committees appreciated by students, some participants enjoyed the functioning of these committees. On the topic, John declared, “It is a good idea (...) it is not just the teacher going like 'you got that, you got that' (pointing). It is like the committee who gets to decide on what the problem is, what the punishment is.” Many were glad with the efficiency of judicial committees to solve problems. For example, after saying that judicial committees “help most of the time,” Mia justified her statement, “because it helps to solve problems.” Students also enjoyed some specific aspects of judicial committees. Some liked what they learned in these committees. On this matter, Marc claimed, “I think judicial committees are good because students get to learn to

deal with problems a lot better.” Everyone enjoyed specific components of judicial committees such as debating and voting. In this sense, Liz stated, “I am really argumentative and I like to discuss things that different people might have different opinions about.”

Numerous students affirmed that they liked some class meetings and some judicial committees specifically. Paul, to justify why he appreciated a class meeting in particular, said, “Because everyone said their points of view and everyone was attentive in that meeting.” Congruent with this, when questioned about a specific meeting, Marc answered, “I thought it was pretty good. It went ok. It was quite calm and there were some good discussions.” Many students were glad with elements particular to certain judicial committees. For instance, Patrick, in relation to a summary that Dan, as a chair, articulated of a dispute in which Educator 1 accused Patrick of coming too soon to class during a lunch break, asserted, “I felt good that [Dan] did not leave out that I wanted to get in the classroom to get one thing which was a piece of paper.”

While experiencing these feelings of appreciation, students had various concerns regarding both class meetings and judicial committees. Some students were worried with other students' participation during class meetings. As an example, after saying that class meetings could be improved, John added, “a lot of the times, it is not the actual system that is wrong, but it's that kids will push ideas without thinking of them.” Similarly, Diana commented about a specific meeting, “People spoke out of turn. This is never going to change.” Some were concerned with the place attributed to class meetings on the school schedule. On this issue, Shannon said, “[class meetings] are right before lunch, which I personally think is a very bad time to have them. So, everybody wants to get out, so everybody is just like 'ya, lets agree on that.’” Many students complained about aspects of some meetings. Among them, Patrick

mentioned, “This time, we finished only two things because, this one thing, we talked way too long on, which happens a lot, I find.” Likewise, Paul was concerned when people changed their mind over the same topic:

When [an issue] is brought over and over again, the meeting does not get very much done. People just agree on something and, then, a week later, or, the week after that, they disagree on it, so it is quite a big problem.

A small number of participants showed concerns for some solutions. One of these students, Ben, affirmed, “even though [rules] are not enforced that well, they are made and it is all written down.” Hence, students had some concerns of different nature during class meetings. The same applies to judicial committees. The majority of students had many concerns about the school community and the functioning of judicial committees during these committees. For example, when asked why he attended judicial committees, Alex answered that he “wanted to know what happens in the school.” The majority of students were concerned with solving the conflicts happening in the school. Many of them wished to solve their own conflicts when they arose. For instance, Abbey declared, “Chris was saying, making up stories that were pretty vulgar and, then, I started getting creeped out and, then, I was thinking (...) I should write him up (...) so that there are consequences.” Every participant who attended judicial committees was concerned with resolving conflicts happening in the school. On that topic, Paul said to justify why he attended committees, “you want to make sure that [the culprits] don't do it again, the thing they did.” While students were concerned with the well-being of the community when attending judicial committees, they were also worried in relation to aspects of the judicial committees. Some were disquieted that so few students resorted to the judicial committees. Congruent with this, Shannon declared, “Usually, [judicial committees] don't happen too often, so most problems don't get worked out.” As suggested earlier, a small number of students were glad with only some of the

solutions that these committees brought to some issues. These same students had concerns for the elements of these committees that regarded efficiency. As an instance, Paul contended, “The judicial committee just happened randomly so [the committee members] are not prepared for it.” Otherwise, few students were concerned by some individuals’ participation in the committee. For example, Abbey did not like that her accused shouted that he was innocent when asked if he had anything to add to the description of the dispute.

Most students also felt empowered when taking part in democratic activities in the sense that they felt as though they had some control over their situation. This empowerment related to the activities of the school. For example, John said in relation to class meetings:

The thing is if this class wants to do something. It usually happens, which is really nice (...) If the class wants to raise money for Haiti, for example, or wants to do a trip, well, usually, we go on the trip. We have the willpower in this class to do these kinds of things.

Students felt empowered when they had a say in the activities of the class. Many students also felt this empowerment during class meetings in relation to the rules of the class. Mia commented on this matter, “[class meetings] are helpful because if you have a problem with the whole class you can bring it up.” Some students also experienced empowerment when performing the roles of chair and peacekeeper during class meetings. In relation to her role as a chair, Karen declared, “I like getting a chance to be a leader and I think this is a very important quality at first to be a leader.” Students also felt empowered during judicial committees. As an example, Liz commented:

I think it is better that we kind of get to do it as a group with the students discussing it, solving it and deciding things. I like it because it is a little more fair because everybody gets to vote, it is not just [Educator 2] who listens to one person and tells the other person that they have some kind of detention (...) I like that it gives the person who is accused and the person who accuses the option to, with the help of [Educator 2], and, in a more calmer environment, to solve it themselves and decide on a punishment that they both are ok with.

Likewise, Karen stated, “we are actually feeling like adults. We got a chance to do what we want and we can feel sometimes like we have more responsibilities.” Some felt empowered in relation to specific elements of judicial committees. Congruent with this, Shannon said about her role as a member of the committee during one committee, “I felt I played an important roles, I had some opinions that I shared.”

Hence, when taking part in democratic activities, students experienced for the most part a combination of feelings that included enjoyment, worries and empowerment. However, another feeling entered this combination for several students during class meetings. Indeed, some students were bored during long conversations about certain topics or when issues were repetitive during class meetings. For example, Donna admitted, “sometimes, they are fighting over bigger things, like overnight trips, and I just get bored.” Shannon complained, “Some of them take a while and they are very repetitive.” On the other hand, boredom was not a recurring aspect part of students’ experiences of judicial committees.

Some students had in some cases other feelings that were not common to everyone’s experience of the democratic activities, though these feelings remain possibilities that can arise during such activities. In the case of class meetings, few students were frustrated on some occasions in relation to specific issues. In line with this, Karen declared, “I feel like Paul always brings up the kitchen, like always. I don't like that because I feel like he is always nagging and I don't like nagging.” Some students also experienced feelings of acceptance. This feeling concerned the implementation of class meeting regulations. Mia, when asked how she felt when requested to leave a meeting, replied, “I was in the meeting, but I was just laughing so I just went in the hallway to stop bugging anybody else, but I did not really care. I would have gone anyway so that I could stop laughing.” Some students remained indifferent in relation to different things

during some meetings. In this sense, Ella, about how she felt when the assembly reached an agreement that the cleanliness of the kitchen was a problem, declared, “It did not really matter that much.” Thus, some students experienced frustration, acceptance or indifference on some occasions during class meetings. As for judicial committees, some experienced dislike about certain components of these committees. These components comprised certain consequences on some occasions. However, one of these components involved in one case sharing a problem with everyone. Indeed, Donna admitted, “Whenever something happens to me, I really don't like a bunch of other people to get involved and the judicial committee has everybody in the entire school involved.” When making an accusation or being accused, students accepted their roles. As an example, Patrick stated regarding when accused of showing up too soon to class in disagreement with the building rules, “I think that it was a fair reason what [Educator 1] wrote me up for.” Like for class meetings, some students were frustrated in some situations of specific judicial committees. For instance, Diana added after having affirmed that she had seen one accuser laughing in contempt “I was a little pissed off because of it.” As well, some students empathized with others in some cases. On that matter, Liz asserted after describing that students took lightly Educator 1's problem with Patrick coming in early:

We [students] don't care if a student is out in the hall when he is not supposed to be because it is not our responsibility, but the [educators] do care and it is their responsibility and if we are in the hall, they get in trouble, so it was kind of unfair and [Educator 1's problem] should have been seen as more important. Just because [Educator 1] is just an [educator], what bothers and upset [this educator] should still be important in this class.

Hence, some students also experienced during the democratic activities on some occasions feelings that were specific to their experiences.

What Students Did during the Democratic Activities

Students mostly engaged in decision-making processes during class meetings and in conflict resolution processes during judicial committees while experiencing a combination of feelings. Their involvement in decision-making processes during class meetings mostly entailed presenting topics of discussion, listening to debates, thinking about arguments, commenting, voting and performing roles. The majority of participants added items to the agenda of meetings when concerned by an issue or when interested in some activities. On this issue, Marc claimed, “often, I go along and give a good idea for a topic like if I had thought of a good idea for a field trip or there is a good club idea or something like that and I do enjoy doing that.” Many students like Marc presented topics in class meetings and were glad to do so. In line with this, Ben mentioned, “I was just interested in what had happened to [the class pets that had died] so this is what I said and I wanted a rule to be enforced.”

As most students presented topics in certain meetings, students' involvement in decision-making processes in the meetings entailed listening for most of the duration of each meeting when concerned or interested by some issues or ideas. For example, after having expressed being concerned about the treatment of class pets, Mia declared, “I sat and listened” during the discussion on that topic. Ben, in relation to what he was doing when people were discussing the possibility of setting up a cheerleading mentorship and of participating in a school painting contest, said, “I sat there and listened (...) I thought it was a good idea to listen because it was interesting.” Students also followed the argumentations. For instance, Paul declared, “I decided to talk at that point because I heard one side and I heard the other (...) to know what the situation is about.” As such, Paul paid heed like many others to each side of a debate while he was interested in a situation.

Students engaged cognitively for the most part in defining the nature of the problems raised and in identifying ways to solve these problems while spending most of their time listening during class meetings. For instance, Mia, talking about the class meeting during which the assembly debated the idea of implementing a swear jar to prevent people from swearing, said, “I did not think it was a good idea, because I knew that, I did not know if people were going to steal it, but people would not probably put money in it cause if they don't have money on them...” During meetings, many were also thinking about solutions to such problems. Ella, concerning what she was doing when Dan suggested that every member of the assembly share their opinion on whether they thought the kitchen was a problem, expressed, “I thought [Dan's suggestion] was a good idea (...) somebody might have an idea of how to fix the problem.” Lastly, many of students' thoughts dealt with activities in which to participate. In line with this, Marc admitted, “class meetings do help me a lot thinking about my future more and really just thinking about what I want to do and help me structure my life a little bit better.” Here, when saying that class meetings helps him thinking about what he wants to do, Marc notably referred to activities at school and out of school.

Students' thinking in relation to the topics of discussions during class meetings is evidenced by their comments during these meetings. Indeed, every student made such comments when interested or concerned by a topic. This was Patrick's case who claimed, “If I hear something that I am interested in, I try a lot more to get a comment in.” These comments pertained to various issues such as the nature of problems raised to the assembly. For example, about the discussion on animal mistreatment, Liz commented, “I put my hand up to say that, even though being put in the submarine, the hamster was not killed. It was still wrong to put it in a submarine.” Students' comments also concerned solutions to problems. Congruent with this,

Shannon affirmed with respect to the possibilities of creating a swear jar, “I shared my opinion about how the swear jar thing was not really a good idea, because it was not really fair.” Some of students' comments also bore on how others were getting their points across. Indeed, Karen, to justify why she expressed during a meeting feeling disrespected when Paul was “preaching at the class”, exclaimed, “because I was fed up with it.” Students tried to share their opinions in specific ways. For example, Karen said,

I feel like, if my eyes are met with the person I am talking to, I come across more assertively. I say [my comment] clearly. I say it fast. I try not to say it angrily. I try to say it calmly because a lot of persons won't respect me if I start to freak out.

To bring an end to certain debates, some students requested votes on some occasions. In this sense, Marc declared, “Often, I will say something to help a debate or something or start a vote.” I observed that every student voted when votes took place. Students had different ways to reach their decisions on what to vote. For instance, Ben asserted, “A lot of the times, you vote for what your friends are voting for” while Shannon stated when depicting what she did to vote, “I just think whether it would be a good idea to do the thing or if it would be a bad idea.”

The engagement in decision-making processes for two students during each meeting also entailed performing the roles of chair and peacekeeper. Every participant had carried the duties of one of these roles by the end of the data collection. Karen described what she did as a chair after volunteering for the position:

As a chair, I would call up the people who put their hands up to say something, I would read off the topic and check them off and, usually, I would try to take notes (...) I took a lot of notes on the kitchen topic.

Marc, when asked to tell what he did as a chair, answered, “I stopped a few people from disrupting.” Peacekeepers and chairs fulfilled their responsibilities in specific ways. Marc described how he gave warnings as a peacekeeper:

Basically, I do it quite fast, because I think it should be like that, fast and clear. It can be quite frustrating because the student don't listen and say, 'no I was not talking' or make a big deal of it. At that point, if they keep talking, I just give them a second warning.

Even though the participation of every student shared many similarities, some students' participations had their particularities. While every student listened, thought, commented, voted and fulfilled some duties related to class meetings at some point or another, certain students became involved in some cases in activities unrelated to class meetings. One of these students, Donna, sneaked out in some instances when bored. She explained, "It [was] kind of boring (...) they had a long conversation about how the kitchen was disgusting (...) Me and my friend, Tanya, don't really spend any time in the kitchen anyway so we are not really involved so we just left." As other examples, Diana admitted, "When I was there at the meeting, (...) I was drawing" while Ella declared, "I listened to music and talked to my friend, Liz, (...) I am usually multi-tasking and paying attention." Furthermore, some students' experiences of the class meetings were not limited to the duration of the meetings. Some students took part in discussions about agenda items before the meetings started. For example, Ben affirmed:

I had also told my mom about how the chicken died. I was a little distressed because I just walked in and they said all two died of internal bleeding, so I told my mom and she said 'you should bring it up at the meeting.'

As for what students did during judicial committees, students mostly engaged in conflict resolution processes when having feelings that mostly comprised pleasure, concerns and empowerment. Their participation included performing roles specific to judicial committees on some occasions while in some other cases being a member of the assembly. According to judicial committee forms, more than a half of the participants of the research made an accusation that led to a judicial committee during the course of the year. Abbey said on this issue, "I was writing up Chris, so I told the story of what happened and what I would like to happen to get him to stop

and, then, when you are on the council, we all, the witnesses will decide on what is fair.” As exemplified by Abbey’s comment, in addition to writing up, accusers mostly shared their account of the disputes to justify their accusations, suggested and discussed consequences, and voted on the consequences.

While many had been accusers during class meetings, the majority of students asserted that they rarely were the person accused. For instance, Diana declared, “I have already been written up once before.” People accused did many things in lockstep with accusers. In the words of Educator 2, people who were accused and who had committed an offence always admitted their wrongdoing when given the floor to tell their side of the story. Patrick described his actions as an accused, “I said that [Educator 1’s accusation] was pretty much what I did (...) I said that I wanted to get in the classroom to get one thing which was a piece of paper.” Then, he added to explain why he voted for Educator 1’s consequence, “Because, I think that [Educator 1’s punishment] is fair (...) It is going to fix the problem.” In accordance with Patrick’s account, accuseds presented their sides of the conflict, suggested consequences on some occasions and voted. One accuser raised an objection in one observed case.

Witnesses described their sides of the conflicts to shed light on the nature of the dispute. Many students played the roles of witnesses during the committees. For instance, Mia declared, “I am often there as a witness.” About her role in the committee during which Abbey accused Chris of telling vulgar stories implicating her, Mia commented, “I agreed with what Abbey had said and then I kind of pointed that [the story] was more directed at Liz than at her.”

Many elected students also fulfilled the responsibilities of members of the committee during judicial committees while others had tried to be selected on this committee. For instance, Marc declared, “I have tried to join the committee and I am going to try again.” Congruent with

my observations, members of the committee performed their tasks in contributing to the delineation of the disputes, in deciding on the need of consequences and in debating and voting on these consequences. The persons who chaired each meeting carried out duties in accordance with their responsibilities during meetings. Dan stated about his role as a chair, “I was getting the story from everyone and keeping order (...) I tried to work with both stories and try to mesh them together (...) I tried to count all the votes accurately and I tried to make sure no one influences on anything.” Hence, committee members largely followed the procedures associated to their roles.

Committee members along with other people who could vote exercised this right, though how they took their decisions varied. Indeed, various thoughts and concerns entered their decisions. As an instance, Karen affirmed, “I think that Chris, once proven guilty, a punishment should be chosen by someone else, not by him, (...) I voted on the one that I thought was right.” On the other hand, to vote, Abbey's intentions were to “basically make sure that the person who is upset knows that there are most likely to have their problem fixed.”

Members of the assembly, including those of the committee, engaged in many other ways in conflict resolution processes during the committees. During the course of the study, about 80% of the participants took part in a committee. They mostly followed the discussions, had thoughts and shared opinions about the disputes, and suggested consequences. In this sense, Diana stated about a specific meeting, “I just wanted to listen to what is going on, [judicial committees] are really funny,” while Paul declared “I was just basically observing to see if [the conflict] was solved properly.” Some students paid heed to some elements of the committees specifically. For instance, Mia mentioned, “Because I was a witness, I listened to like when Liz asked for Abbey's side of the story and Chris' side of the story.” Similarly, Marc said, “Having a

whole group of people getting their opinions just helps me out to see different parts of the argument, like the other persons' side.”

They had various thoughts about the different elements going on during the committees while listening. Some tried to establish what the disputes were. For instance, about the issue for which Educator 1 was accusing Patrick of coming early to class and asking repetitively to come in, Liz stated, “I saw [Patrick] come back a lot of times so when he told his story and he said that he only came back twice that was not true.” In this example, after remembering the dispute that she had witnessed, Liz formed an opinion about one of Patrick's claim when hearing his account of the issue. Many students also analyzed the suggested consequences for each conflict. In this sense, Dan described the consequences for which he voted at one committee, “[the one where] Edward has to be the first out the door and that Patrick has to get some stuff (pen and paper case). I first thought that it was too harsh and then I thought, 'naaa', it is not really that harsh.” Lastly, some students gained personal perspectives in relation to some types of problems. For example, Karen said about an issue involving name-calling, “I thought [Chris calling Sarah a whore] was terrible and that it was very mean, especially in a democracy. It is not nice to call people names.”

Students when having such thoughts often shared their opinions on the nature of conflicts and suggested consequences. As an example, Shannon said in relation to the case where Abbey was accusing Chris of telling a vulgar story, “I was basically saying that I don't find [the issue] a very big deal.” Many of the students also proposed some consequences. Diana declared about the problem affecting Abbey, “I said to give Chris a restraining order.” In the end, the assembly decided that Chris could not go to the lounge area for two weeks. About the issue that involved Patrick showing up too soon to class, Paul described a suggestion that he made, “for one week,

Patrick could not enter the classroom for lunch.” Hence, students largely engaged in conflict resolution processes during committees by commenting on the disputes after having thought about these issues and listened to debates.

Participants also indicated that they managed to solve most of their conflicts in the steps leading to a judicial committee. For instance, Donna enumerated many strategies that she employed to grapple with her interpersonal problems. She stated that, in some instances, she decided to ignore people nagging her. However, she declared that, in most cases, she went to a teacher to set up a discussion with the other party or tried to work out the conflict herself. In an interview, she said, “Once, I was feeling excluded from the group, like me and Mel and Danielle, and we worked that out.” When asked how they worked it out, she replied, “First of all, we talked about it and then we went home and I explained how I felt and we all said that we were sorry.” Congruent with Donna, Karen admitted that she tried to solve her conflict on her own, “I have had a lot of conflicts. Believe me. I had times, but I don't really feel like bringing them to the judicial committee sometimes. I feel like I can deal with them on my own.” To answer how she dealt with her conflict, she said, “I would just talk to the person or I would just let it go or say I don't want to be friends for sometimes.” Karen provided an example of a situation:

I have written up someone [for a judicial committee]. I remember we got in a fight. We talked afterwards so we did not do the committee. Sometimes, we don't even do the committee, because, when they bring it up, they say Karen wrote up Peter, and we would say 'that is already resolved. We solved it on our own.' And they would throw away the judicial committee form.

Hence, in some instances, conflicting parties had a second discussion about the issue and solved it in time before the committee could meet. Karen mentioned how Peter and she solved their conflict, “the next day, Peter came up to me and he apologized to me, so I apologized to him so we just kind of made up.” Thus, for the most part, people put in practice various conflict

resolution strategies without having to take the steps that would lead to a judicial committee. Some students talked immediately with the people with whom they had a conflict whereas, in other instances, they brought their conflicts to educators right away. As observed, when such situations confronted educators, they asked the students if they had tried to address the issue within themselves. When conflicting parties had such discussions successfully, these people talked about what happened, shared their feelings and intentions, apologized and made up.

Students' Reported and Observed Adaptations during the Democratic activities

Students reported changing in several ways after having participated in decision-making processes during class meetings and conflict resolutions processes during judicial committees. These changes mostly pertained to students' participations in democratic activities and in the school, to their feelings, to their conceptions and to their conflict resolutions skills. Every interviewed student modified how they participated in class meetings and in judicial committees. They described increasing the quantity of comments that they made during these activities. For example, Liz asserted:

When I first came to the school, I never said anything, (...) after a bit, I learned more what was talked the most at the meeting and I knew everybody's name and everybody knew mine so I felt more comfortable with the class so that I could share my opinion more comfortably than before.

Marc also stated:

Like at the beginning of the year, I was not very open to say my opinion because I was really nervous and I was not sure what the other kids would think (...) I have basically learned now to say what I want to say when I want to say it, how I want to say it.

Both Liz and Marc's examples show that students, when they increased their participation to discussion, also improved their self-confidence. For many, changes in the frequency with which they shared their opinions occurred at the same time that they started raising topics for class meetings more often. For instance, Ben said, "at the beginning of the year I did not really bring

up [any topic], the mistreatment was one of the first one I brought up.” In addition, students adapted how they formulated their opinion. On this matter, Paul implied that he started bringing proofs to support his arguments. Patrick declared, “I think that my commenting skills have risen (...) I can take more information in and make a better comment.”

Changes in students' participation also involved voting. For instance, Shannon affirmed in relation to the beginning of the year, “sometimes I felt like voting what my friends were voting for” and declared, with respect to how she voted at the moment of the interview, “mostly, I vote on what I want to do.” Similarly, Liz commented, “now, even if I would be the only person voting for [a thing that I want], I would still vote for it.” Several students also declared modifying how they fulfilled the roles of chair or peacekeeper. After saying that she felt confident chairing meetings, Karen mentioned, “I was a chair at one of the first class meeting. I wanted to be a chair because I thought that it was interesting. I did not really know much about being a chair so I had a lot of people there to help me about being the chair.” Karen's words exemplify how learning occurred for many students when they were interested and took part in some aspects of the meetings.

Students also changed what they did at the school after the creation of rules, after the selection of consequences and after the organisation of activities during democratic activities. For example, Ben said, “we went on the walk [to raise awareness about children in an African region] that was decided at the class meeting.” In another situation, many signed up for cheerleading after a cheerleading mentorship was set up. Several students started contributing more to the cleaning of the school after class meetings dealt with this issue. Ella expressed, “I was not one of the persons who was leaving like candy wrappers all over the floor, but I started picking up other people's junk.” Congruent with this, I observed that Paul started cleaning the

dishes in the kitchen and Matthew, Mia, John and Ben took the initiatives to mop the floor on some instances after having asked the janitor for the mop. As another example, Patrick described how he complied with the consequences issued to him, which was to carry drawing material at all time, “I have been carrying a pen.”

How students felt about class meetings and themselves also evolved in many cases after participations in class meetings. Earlier, I hinted at the idea that many became more self-confident after taking part in meetings. On this subject, Karen, when asked if she shared her opinion in her first class meetings, replied, “No, I was too shy then (...) I guess, I got more confident.” Some students changed how they felt about sharing their opinions. For instance, Patrick mentioned, “I have been doing a lot more going on forums on the internet and making comments on forums because I find commenting a lot more fun now.” Some students also modified how they felt about class meetings in general. For instance, Karen declared:

At first, I thought that it was really interesting. I really liked going to them, but as, the year dragged on, they got more boring. Also, it was new and exciting because I had only been to public schools so a meeting where I got to say suggestions like that was actually really cool to me. I mean this is so cool that I am at a school where I am allowed to say what I want to do.

In some cases like that of Karen, students' feelings for meetings shifted from appreciation to appreciation and boredom. Some students also adapted how they felt about some offences discussed during judicial committees. On the matter, Marc affirmed:

Name calling or insulting, well, before, I would not have done much about it. I would have kind of gotten angry at the person and my anger would have generally grown and grown against that person (...) [judicial committees] are kind of helping me to open up to the other person and kind of not make me build up as much anger.

Moreover, students modified their conceptions of various aspects. They learned about the activities of the school when listening in class meetings. Shannon provided an example of an activity about which she learned during a meeting, “there are fieldtrips to this [organic farm] that

we have a choice to go on.” Students also refined their understanding of democratic assemblies. Abbey was unsure about the functioning of such assemblies before she attended the school. She said, “I did not know much about [democratic assemblies].” Many learned about some of the issues tackled in class meetings. For instance, Ben after having described the socioeconomic situation of the children in an African region about which he had walked to raise awareness, said, “I guess I learned about [the situation of these children].” This was recurrent in numerous interviews. As well, some changed their perspectives on the nature of disagreements. In this sense, John, stated, “I used to feel like people were mean to me when they shut down my ideas and now I just think that they have other ideas and they’d rather do other things.” Lastly, many students changed their conceptions of some of their classmates. For example, Liz admitted, “I did not know that people had mixed feelings about the way the chicks had been mistreated (...) I did not know that Ben was at all thinking about that or concerned at all about that.” Many changed some of their conceptions in relation to democracy-related issue. Some learned about the procedures of the judicial committees. For instance, Dan said, “I learned that the accused could vote.” Some learned about the disputes tackled during judicial committees. In line with this, Mia declared that during committees “you can hear both sides' reasons, both sides' of the story (...) you can get a better understanding of everything.” Several changed during these committees their stances on certain consequences. In this sense, Lucy said concerning a specific committee, “before [the committee], I just thought that [Abbey] should just forget about the whole thing and make up. Now, I suggest an actual consequence for [Chris].”

Most of the students modified how they participated in conflict resolution processes. Some adapted their contribution to the judicial committees. For instance, Shannon expressed that she did not suggest any consequences in her first participations in committees and that she

started proposing punishments more constantly in the recent committees. Most of the interviewed students affirmed that they changed how they grapple with interpersonal conflicts after following the conflict resolution steps in place at the school. For example, Mia stated, “I was just throwing the f-word around or calling each other mean names, and, now, it is just talking. It is not fighting. It is not swearing. It is just calmly saying to someone else how you feel.” Likewise, some students adapted strategies to prevent conflicts. For example, Marc admitted, “[judicial committees] do help me think before I speak a lot more often.” He described an occasion where that happened after attending a judicial committee whose central issue was named-calling, “I did have thoughts running into my head that, like my friends [and I] were kind of ripping on my other friends and stuff like that [so I did] not say that as much as before.” In the interview, he articulated those thoughts as “it might turn the other way or maybe they might think it is offensive.” Some other students began taking matters into their own hands to solve their own conflicts. Congruent with this, when asked how she solved her problem, Donna replied, “we have private meeting with Educator 2 or just try to work it out ourselves” and, then, she admitted that she had just started to resort to the judicial committees. Hence, after participating in the democratic activities, students mostly increased their agency during decision-making and conflict resolution processes, adapted their conduct in school, changed how they felt about themselves and about meetings, refined some of their conceptions about the activities of the school, the operation of the meetings, and their classmates. These changes occurred after repetitively engaging in decision-making processes while experiencing a combination of feelings that largely comprised enjoyment, worries and empowerment.

Consequently, at *Canadian Free School*, a school operating democratically with a consensus model where students enjoyed a particular freedom having a status equal in many

ways to that of educators in the school, students had various experiences in two kinds of democratic activities. These activities, nested within the operations of the school, included class meetings and judicial committees. While judicial committees provided a framework to solve interpersonal conflicts in the school, class meetings represented a mechanism for the students along with the educators to take decisions about the activities and the rules of the school. During both kinds of democratic activities, all students experienced a combination of feelings that largely included pleasure, concerns and empowerment. In those activities, while having these feelings, they mostly took part in decision-making processes by enacting specific roles on some occasions and by listening, thinking, commenting and voting. After having taken part in these decision-making processes, students adapted for the most part some of their conceptions, some of their feelings and their participation in the school and in the democratic activities.

CHAPTER 5: THE MEANINGS OF THE FINDINGS FOR CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

The purpose of this study has been to explore free school democratic activities as an alternative way to go about citizenship education by examining the experiences of students in these activities. The objective of the current chapter is to clarify what the findings of this study mean for citizenship education. Earlier in this dissertation, the review of studies about citizenship education highlighted that the goal of this education is to promote an active citizenship to students. Chapter 2 suggested that pedagogical strategies that teach about democracy democratically while intrinsically motivating students and asking them to play active roles could benefit citizenship education in reaching this goal. Furthermore, the second chapter identified empowerment, critical thinking and the ability to grapple with conflicts as aptitudes that can enable an active citizenship. Moreover, Hennessy (2006) warned about how detrimental the absence of an active citizenship could be for the health of a democracy such as that of Canada. Engagement on the parts of citizens such as voting, debating, volunteering, involvement in the community and other similar initiatives is what gives life to democratic systems. For this reason, this chapter examines what free school democratic activities mean for strategies to teach citizenship education, for the development of aptitudes associated to an active citizenship, and how they provide in-school opportunities for citizenship engagement.

Free School Democratic Activities as Teaching Tools for Citizenship Education

To discuss the significance of free school democratic activities as a strategy to teach citizenship education, this segment shows how these activities largely teach about democracy democratically and specifies how they arise from interactions between levels of nestedness inherent to free schools. It also argues that students' participation in these activities is predominantly intrinsically motivated and that these students play active roles in these activities.

Chapter 2 raised a question that asked how teachers can, using a language of compliance, of control and of authority, teach about an active democratic life to students who are required to be passive (Ladson-Billings, 2005). This statement demands that educators teach about democracy in a democratic manner. An environment is said to be democratic when the decision affecting this environment and the persons in it are taken by these individuals in a context where everyone has an equal say on every matter having equal rights and obligations. Hence, a pedagogical activity that teaches about democracy while enabling students and teachers to take decisions affecting their environment in a context where all these people would have an equal say on each decision being entitled to equal rights and obligations would represent a way to teach about democracy democratically. Free school democratic activities correspond to a large extent to such strategies for many reasons.

Class meetings as one of those activities aimed at taking decisions democratically, while nested within the school, about the operations, the activities and the rules of the school. As an example, one of those decisions concerned the creation of a swear jar. John declared in relation to what happened during a class meeting, “I brought up the idea of bringing a swear jar to the classroom, but it was rejected because people believe that it is not needed presently. People think it is ok that there is a little bit of swearing.” In this citation, John gave an example of a rule that the assembly of a class meeting discussed. He also indicated that the decision to reject the creation of the rule was taken by the people. Thus, democratic activities enabled participants to take decisions about the school democratically. As another instance of a situation where the class created a school rule, on one occasion, Educator 2 declared to be worried about food and drinks near the computer and asked for a rule. Robert raised his hand and suggested that people caught bringing food and drinks would be forbidden from using computers for a full day. The chair of

the meeting asked if anyone had any other suggestions. While no one proposed any other rule, the chair asked people to vote on whether they wanted to implement Robert's rule. Every participant voted in favour of the rule. After seeing this, the chair asked if anyone had any objections. None were raised. This example shows that each decision taken during class meetings entailed the involvement of every participant, that students and teachers made these votes and that each decision implied that people who voted against a proposition still had to consent to the decision so that the school could implement the ruling. In this sense, everyone in the school was involved in the decisions that regarded the school.

In the decision-making processes, everyone considerably had an equal say that entailed equal rights and obligations. The findings of the current study showed that both students and educators had in class meetings the right to present topics for discussion, to suggest rules, to comment on others' suggestions, to vote and to raise major objections. Furthermore, both educators and students had for the most part the responsibility of being present at meetings and of not disrupting these meetings. In fact, everyone had to deal equally with the peacekeeper on matters of disruptions. In one of the observed class meetings, Mary, acting as a peacekeeper, gave warnings to numerous students, but also to Educator 2 on two occasions. However, each educator had the task of reminding certain students of their responsibilities in these meetings as members of the school community. On the other hand, the school largely reserved the roles of the chair and the peacekeeper to students. Hence, students and educators did not have all the same privileges despite having many common rights and obligations as educators could not be chair or peacekeeper during class meeting. Moreover, girls had more opportunities to perform the roles of chair and peacekeeper in a context where there were more boys than girls in the school and where the selection of people for these positions alternated between genders at each

meeting. Nevertheless, overall, class meetings represented activities in which members of the school took decisions about the school having largely an equal say on each subject while having similar rights and responsibilities. As such, since students enacted democratic assemblies in those meetings, class meetings gave insights about democracy democratically.

As for judicial committees, they took decisions relative to some conflicts arising in the school by replicating the functioning of a representative democracy as the people who voted on the conflicts only comprised the members of the judicial committee, the accuser(s) and the people accused. In the words of Educator 2, these members included four students elected for two months by the members of the school. Hence, in the dispute involving Donna, her friends and Chris, only Dan, Ben, Lucy, Liz and Educator 2, as members of the committee, along with Chris and Donna and her friends voted on the account of the dispute and on the consequence. Therefore, members of the committee had the responsibility to represent the school when unresolved conflicts arose to decide on the resolution of these conflicts. Hence, judicial committee incorporated elements of representative democracies. In addition, only a student member of the committee could chair these committees. This person had the right to ask anyone to leave a judicial committee. As such, not all students and educators had an equal say on the resolution of the disputes brought to judicial committees. However, they equally had the rights to be a candidate for the elections associated to the positions of members of the judicial committees. Once again, in a school where boys outnumbered girls, girls had more chance to be elected on this committee as this committee had to include two girls and two boys. Otherwise, people attending these committees had similar rights and obligations. In judicial committees, anyone who attended the assembly had the rights to attend these committees, to suggest consequences, to comment on others' suggested consequences and to state major objections.

Furthermore, everyone in these committees had the responsibility to be attentive, though attending the committee was an obligation for the accuser and the accused.

Consequently, judicial committees served as activities nested within the school for a certain numbers of people in the school on behalf of the others to reach decisions about certain elements of the school. In this sense, this activity had many characteristics of a pedagogical strategy to teach about democracy democratically, though not everyone had an equal say on the matters tackled in these committees. Nevertheless, the combination of judicial committees with class meetings presents possibilities for students to learn democratically about democracy. For citizenship education, it is important to keep in mind that the emergence of these activities is connected to elements of the structure of the school in which these activities happened. Indeed, these activities mostly served the purpose of offering a strategy to the members of the school to regulate the social life in the school. The need for such a strategy arose in a context where students and teachers largely shared the same rights and obligations. Hence, a school philosophy that grants such rights and obligations to students can enable the possibilities of judicial committees and class meetings as democratic strategies for citizenship education.

A second significant aspect of free school democratic activities as a teaching strategy for citizenship education was that students' participation in these activities was intrinsically motivated. Indeed, according to Greenberg (1995), the most long-lasting learning occurs when students initiate the learning. As indicated in the literature review, calling for relying on students' intrinsic motivation, Epstein (2007) contended that extrinsic motivation hinders the development of responsible citizens. Cheng and Yeh (2009) described intrinsic motivation as occurring "when the cause of the motivation exists within an individual (...) It emerges spontaneously from psychological needs, personal curiosities, and innate striving for growth" (p.598).

Students participated in the democratic activities when interested or concerned by an issue or an idea. It is in this sense that Abbey declared with respect to a discussion about a field trip during class meetings, “It is basically like, oh, I can’t wait to find out more information about when it is going to happen, when we get to go.” Many students like Abbey wanted to listen to what others had to say when interested in a topic and wanted to share their opinions. The same applied in many ways to judicial committees. I asked many students why they attended one of those committees. To this question, Alex replied, “Because I was interested to know what was going on in the school. I wanted to participate in the rules, to be part of it.” Students’ motivation, like that of Alex, came from their curiosity for what was going in the school or from their desire to see interpersonal conflicts solved. Hence, their motivation was intrinsic. However, the findings of the study also suggested that some participants had sneaked out of some class meetings when bored. These students were not interested in participating during these specific meetings. Nonetheless, as the majority of participants changed some of their attitudes about the democratic activities, most of the students who expressed disinterest about some specific meetings also shared their desire to be more active in these meetings. On that subject, about an issue that dealt with the adoption of class pets, Donna asserted, “[the class] decided to get the chicks and stuff and [my friends and I] did not feel comfortable about that afterwards and we did not have a say in it because we were not there, so we are trying to get more involved.” As a result, Donna and her friends’ intrinsic motivation for class meetings was growing.

The findings also indicated that the discussions and debates that gave rise to democratic activities emerged when students shared different perspectives about common personal concerns and interests. For example, in an observed judicial committee, many proposed various consequences to address the same concern, to solve a dispute. Educator 1 suggested that both

Patrick and Edward be the first to leave for lunch every day. Patrick asked that this punishment apply only for one week. Dan advanced the idea that Patrick should not be allowed to get in the classroom ahead of time for a week or a month. Paul suggested a consequence that he described in an interview, “It was one week [Patrick and Edward] could not enter the classroom [during the lunch break], not for lunch, not for cooking, things like that.” The different perspectives on what this consequence could be gave rise to a debate. Educator 1, Paul, Dan and Patrick’s intrinsic motivation to solve the conflict in this debate is evidenced by their suggestions of consequence. As such, students’ personal concerns played key roles in the emergence of their divergent viewpoints, therefore in the phenomena of the democratic activities.

However, the findings also showed that some students engaged during class meetings in occupations that did not relate to the meetings, suggesting that some students were not fully motivated to take part in these meetings on some occasions. Congruent with this, Diana, when asked about what she did during a specific class meeting, said, “I was drawing (...) I guess I am a drawing fanatic.” Even though some students engaged in some cases in such activities during observed class meetings, every time a vote was requested, every student voted. Consequently, despite being involved in activities unrelated to meetings, every student was intrinsically motivated to vote. Nonetheless, while most of the topics discussed during class meetings were raised by students, some participants expressed being bored during some parts of class meetings, therefore not intrinsically motivated. However, boredom is not an aspect that emerged from judicial committees, whose attendance was optional. Hence, students’ participation in the democratic activities at *Canadian Free School* was for the most part intrinsically motivated; this was especially true with respect to judicial committees as students attended voluntarily. In this

sense, intrinsically-motivated participation on the part of students represents a key possibility that can arise in free school democratic activities as a teaching strategy.

According to Sears (1996), another important aspect for citizenship education is that teaching strategies assign active roles to students in classrooms. The democratic activities practiced at *Canadian Free School* granted such roles to students. During these activities, students were active as a collective group and as individuals. They were not listening to a teacher talk about democracy or citizenship. The collective actions and experiences of the people of the school, which included those of educators as well as those of students, created the democratic assemblies of the class meetings and of the judicial committees as phenomena nesting these experiences. Indeed, these collective actions entailed discussions, debates, votes and agreements on topics and issues raised by the people of the school. An observed debate over the idea of the creation of a swear jar can illustrate this. During one class meeting, John raised the idea that the school could have a swear jar. When hearing this, Paul declared that there were no reason to discuss this since it had been addressed during the previous judicial committee. Then, Dan said that the school had a swear jar for a short period of time the preceding year and that people forgot about it and did not care about it. Robert, after having heard a student asked where the money would go, raised the issue of what would happen if a person who would swear did not have any money. After that, Shannon reminded everyone that they were in a context of a recession, that kids did not have any job and that, as a result, the idea of the swear jar was stupid. At that point, Andy brought up the issue of the possibility that someone could steal the money. The discussion ended with a general agreement against the idea of the swear jar. In this example, a student, John, raised the topic and only students shared their perspectives on the idea to reach the agreement. Thus, students, as a collective group, gave rise to the debate and the agreement.

As such, students were collectively active during this decision-making process like in all the other ones in class meetings and judicial committees.

Furthermore, the findings of the study described as active the individual experiences of students as well since, during discussions, votes and agreement, each student largely listened, thought, commented and voted to engage individually in such decision-making processes. One of the things that students did the most was listening during democratic activities. As an instance, Ben mentioned with regard to a discussion over the possible participation of the school in a contest that involved painting a chair, “About the chair thing, that was the one that I was listening most because it was the second biggest topic that did not speak in.” Like many other students, Ben was listening most of the time when he was not speaking about an issue, though an important question is to whom students were listening. Students were either listening to each other or to educators. Thus, active while listening, students paid attention in most instances to what other students had to say when playing key parts in the democratic activities. For example, Mia asserted in relation to a judicial committee, “Since I was there because I was a witness, so I listened to like when Liz asked for Abbey’s side of the story, Chris’ side of the story.” Another one of the findings indicated that students were thinking on many occasions during democratic activities about elements relevant to these activities such as problems, solutions, rules and activities. For instance, Karen declared with respect to her vote in a judicial committee, “[Educator 1] suggested that [the accused] had to bring the judicial committee form to his parents. I thought it was a suitable punishment.” The collected data suggested that the majority of students had thoughts like this one during the democratic activities of the school showing evidence that students were active cognitively during these activities. Students’ opinions largely drew on what other students had said. For example, Abbey answered when asked if she

suggested a consequence in a judicial committee that she had initiated, “I said a mixture of all the consequences, like an apology, one week out of the lounge area, swear jar when he is being vulgar.” Thus, Abbey’s suggestions, advancing the idea of a mixture, made reference to the consequences that other members of the assembly had given until that point. On more than one occasions, the findings of the inquiry also established that students’ agency also entailed voting. On the other hand, they have also implied that students, in class meetings only, engaged in some cases in activities that did not relate to these meetings such as talking or drawing. Nonetheless, as shown by the results of the study, such actions did not prevent these students from participating in decision-making processes as they voted every time they had a chance.

As such, students were largely active collectively and individually during democratic activities at *Canadian Free School*. The possibility that students play such roles is largely connected to the operations of the school as they provided students with considerable freedom. This freedom notably enabled students to take many initiatives characteristics of their agency, like suggesting rules, field trips and the creation of committees. Their agency was intrinsically motivated in these activities that considerably provided opportunities to teach about democracy in a democratic context. Hence, this means for citizenship education that free school democratic activities represent teaching strategies that provide students with opportunities to play active roles, that can teach about democracy while operating democratically and that can intrinsically motivate students.

The Development of Aptitudes for an Active Citizenship during Democratic Activities

So far, this chapter showed that free school democratic represent viable strategies to teach citizenship education. The current section will demonstrate how these activities can enable the development of aptitudes key to an active citizenship such as empowerment, critical thinking and

conflict resolution skills. In doing so, it will highlight the connections between the emergence of these aptitudes and the dynamics of free school democratic activities.

Francescato, Solimeno, Mebane and Tomai (2009) declared that schools need to promote empowerment among students to favour the growth of an active citizenship. In essence, empowerment occurs when people believe in their power over what is happening to them and to their world, in the case of students, to their school. After conducting a study with Ontario high school students, Raby and Domitrek (2007) complained that these students felt powerless with respect to the rules that governed them. In contrast, free school democratic activities can promote the empowerment of students.

The findings of this research project showed that students considered that they had some power over what was happening to them and to their world during both class meetings and judicial committees. For example, about the judicial committee, John said:

It is a good idea (...) It gets people's problems solved and it is not just the teacher going like 'you got that, you got that' [pointing]. It is like the committee who gets to decide on what the problem is, what the punishment is (...) It is our school. We should be able to have a certain amount of control in it.

In this example, John indicated that he had some power through judicial committees along with his classmates over how problems were resolved in the school. He was one of many who made a distinction between having a say in the resolution of conflicts and being constrained to letting a teacher find the solutions to disputes. Indeed, Liz stated, "it is better that we kind of get to do it as a group with the students discussing it, solving it and deciding things (...) It is not just [Educator 2] who listens to one person and tells the other person that they have some kind of detention." Liz's declaration indicates that she considered that she had some power over the resolutions of conflicts. This belief was a theme recurrent with most participants. These students

were empowered over conflict resolutions in the school with mechanisms like the judicial committees.

The same applied to other decisions in the school when these students took part in class meetings. It is in line with this that Karen affirmed in relation to class meetings:

I think it is great that we get to say what we want to do and that we get to suggest fieldtrips and stuff. I think that it is actually a really, really, good idea. It is good being in a democratic school where we can do stuff like that.

Her statement exemplifies that students were conscious of their influence in the selection of activities at the school. The same applied to the regulation of the school life. For instance, Mia asserted, “[class meetings] are helpful because like if you want to do something, you can bring it up at the meeting or if you have a problem with the whole class, you can bring it up.” Mia’s reference to bringing up a problem with the whole class indicated her awareness that she had a say in the creation of rules in the school. Even though empowerment was a recurrent theme in all the interviews, one student suggested that his sense of empowerment fluctuated throughout his participation in democratic activities. Indeed, John asserted:

I would usually bring up a topic. I would be very involved in setting things up, getting things going and I would write people up for the judicial committee and I would be a part of the meetings, but for a little while I more or less just stopped.

To explain why he stopped, John said:

I felt like a lot of my ideas were being shut down by people (...) I kind of lost confidence in the actual process. I felt like what I said was not being valued and that, in the committee, nothing really got done. I felt that way, but things do get done so I have been trying to get back into it.

Hence, at some point, John did not think that the system was working and that his actions had any weight on the activities of the school. John expressed wanting to be a part of the community at the time of the interview, even though his conceptions of how his actions could contribute to his community fluctuated.

Therefore, for the most part, students felt during class meetings that they had some power over what was happening to them and to the school. Furthermore, this power was not limited to what concerned them and the school. It included parts of the larger society as another nesting level. Indeed, many students felt that they contributed to the relief effort in Haiti when organising a bake sale for this country after having raised the idea in a class meeting. On that matter, John declared, “[The donation] reached 300\$ in total so I feel like we did our part. We really helped.” As another instance, many students considered having contributed to raise awareness about the socioeconomic situation of children in an African region after having participated in a walk to which they decided to take part in a class meeting. Thus, students’ awareness of their influence over what happened to their world suggests that empowerment is part of students’ possible experiences in free school democratic activities.

Most participants have indicated feeling this empowerment as soon as they took part in their first democratic activities. It is in line with this that Ella stated about her first participation in class meetings, “[class meetings] sounded interesting probably because the student got to choose what happens in general, because they were in charge.” One recurrent theme is how students’ rights to vote, to suggest ideas and to raise objections enabled this empowerment and, as such, connected the emergence of this attitude as part of students’ experiences to elements of the dynamics of the democratic activities as nesting these experiences.

Students also fostered their ability to think critically after participating in democratic activities at the school. In the words of Winton (2007), critical thinking is an aptitude part of the decision-making skills that students need for an active participation in civic life. Even though, according to Johnson and Morris (2010), there is no agreement in the field of citizenship education on a definition of critical thinking, Winton (2008) conceived thinking critically as

having a social outlook geared towards examining commonsense realities, in other words, as raising questions about given information.

In line with this definition, students developed their critical thinking when participating in free school democratic activities. In the interviews, the idea of sharing one's opinions was one of the most recurrent themes in relation to students' participation in these activities. Indeed, this idea came up in all the interviews conducted with students. Abbey gave an example of what such opinions could be with regard to the issue of animal mistreatment:

I just raised my hand and said what I thought would be a good idea about that problem like making a new rule about having a pet because one kid put a hamster a while ago in a submarine, I was not there but I heard about it and was very astonished about that, and was saying 'it is fine there is nothing wrong with it.'

In this example, she indicated that she defended the position of creating a rule for class pets, which was later put off to the following year. Furthermore, she showed that, even though one of her classmate said that the school had the previous year a hamster that did not die from being put in a submarine and that, as a result, this experiment was acceptable, she adopted a position on this issue that went against that of many of her classmates. An element intrinsic to the level of the democratic activities is linked to the emergence of this students' defence of her opinion and criticism about some of her classmates' ideas. Indeed, the freedom of speech and the right to raise objections associated to the democratic activities enabled Abbey to formulate her comment. In the meeting, she defended her opinion and questioned another person's version of an event. This applies to the experiences of the majority of participants during democratic activities. Hence, most of the students thought critically on many instances in these activities.

Furthermore, the frequency at which most students shared their opinions and questioned others' ideas during these activities increased after these students participated in many

democratic activities. For example, Patrick, when asked if his participation to class meetings had changed, answered:

Ya (...) I try a lot more to get a comment in. I try to get a comment in all of the meetings (...) also, I have been doing a lot more going on forums on the internet and making comments on forum because I find commenting a lot more fun now, I guess.

In Patrick's case, sharing his opinions became something that he started doing more during class meetings and in out-of-school activities. When asked on what he commented in forums, he gave an example, "If I really like an animation. I will go comment on forum and there are discussions about [the animation], like talking about what it meant." When asked what he was trying to say by what it meant, he indicated that he commented on the forums about the meanings of the stories that he had seen. Even though Patrick was one of the few students to express in an interview to share opinions more often in out-of-school activities, the majority of students admitted that they presented more frequently their perspectives on various issues during democratic activities after having taken part in many of these activities. No student suggested otherwise except John who indicated, as mentioned above, that his participation and commenting in these activities fluctuated to come back to what they were. Thus, for the most part, not only did students think critically during these activities, they did on a more frequent basis after participating in several of these activities. In this sense, for students, thinking critically and fostering this form of thinking represent viable possibilities that can occur in free school democratic activities.

According to Bickmore (2006), an active citizenship entails, in addition to critical thinking, being able to grapple with democratic conflicts. For her, conflict resolution skills are prerequisites to this ability. In line with this, free school democratic activities are meaningful for citizenship education as they can enable the development of these skills. All students at

Canadian Free School indicated putting in practice various conflict resolution strategies when having disputes. It is in this sense that Donna said “we try to work out [conflicts] ourselves.” In the words of Bickmore (2006), many Canadian provinces are trying to teach conflict resolutions skills so that students can see alternatives to violence when dealing with problems. At the school, students mostly tried to sort out disputes on their own and, when this did not work, they used the judicial committee. For instance, Marc affirmed, “I was having a lot of trouble with my friend, Dominic, last year (...) so we discussed it at one point.” In the findings, Karen gave an example of how such a discussion could go when she said, “Peter came up to me and apologized to me, so I apologized to him so we just kind of made up.” The findings also showed that, when working things out themselves, some students chose to ignore some issues, shared their feelings or asked an educator for mediation in a discussion with the other party. When such discussions happened during which an educator worked as a mediator, educators tried to encourage students to follow non-violent communication principles. On this, Educator 2 stated, “students will come to me and say, ‘I need to talk to you,’ or ‘can we talk with so and so and I?’ (...) and then we have a discussion about it and we use that sort of empathy non-violent communication.” Hence, students enacted various conflict resolution strategies to work out their disputes on their own or with the mediating role of an educator. When students did not succeed to resolve their conflicts using similar strategies, many employed the judicial committee as another conflict resolution strategy. Congruent with this, John asserted, “If something major happens between me and somebody, I will write them up.” According to the judicial committee forms, eleven of these committees took place during the course of the school year. During these committees, students along with mostly one educator tried to find solutions to conflicts. About these committees, Dan said, “the committee is the selected people who vote, who decide on what the punishment of the

people written up would be if there is any and the committee is voted on by the students democratically.” Dan’s description highlights how a group of students with one educator took the decisions relative to conflict resolution in these committees. As such, judicial committees offered another opportunity for students to practice conflict resolutions skills. Hence, in an educational setting that involves the procedures of the judicial committee, for students, putting in practice various conflict resolution strategies while avoiding violence is a key possibility.

In addition to using these strategies in such a setting, most students modified how they went about solving conflicts. The findings indicate that many students had a more violent approach to conflict resolution before attending *Canadian Free School* and before following the conflict resolution steps associated to the judicial committee and that, after having followed these steps, they started grappling with their conflicts through strategies that revolved around discussions. The case of Karen as discussed in the findings can illustrate this. She said, “I was just throwing the f-word around or calling each other mean names, and now it just talking, it is not fighting, it is not swearing. It is just calmly saying to someone else how you feel.” She added, “I have been starting to talk about my problems with people instead. It even has made a big difference at my home (...) with my brother.” As Karen, several students expressed changing how they went about their conflicts. Even though, in most cases, these students only discussed such changes in relation to conflicts at the school, some, like Karen, talked about adopting new conflict resolution strategies in out-of-school situations. However, based on the interviews, these changes mostly occurred within the context of the procedures associated to the judicial committees. Furthermore, other elements inherent to the operations of the school further enabled this evolution with respect to conflict resolution. These elements comprised the absence of a grading system to divide students, the absence of competition between students that comes with

such a system and the freedoms that students enjoyed in the school. Educator 2 concurred with this. He advanced reasons why students rarely engaged physically at the school, “because there is a little bit more of freedom [at the school].”

Nevertheless, even though limited possibilities can take place in relation to conflict resolution during class meetings, the practice and the modification of conflict resolution strategies remain a significant possibility part of judicial committees and of the steps leading to these committees. For citizenship education, the emergence of the development of these strategies can be meaningful when connected to aspects of the operations of the school. Indeed, possibilities related to the fostering of conflict resolutions strategies can occur in a school setting where students possess a freedom to interact during school hours. Indeed, at *Canadian Free School*, students interacted a great deal in many activities that they initiated such as games, projects, classes, committees, etc. In turn, these interactions gave rise to certain interpersonal conflicts on some occasions. As such, these interactions and conflicts gave rise to the emergence of possibilities for the development of conflict resolution skills. It is in such situations that students, as reported, took opportunities to attempt to solve their conflicts and modified how they went about conflict resolution. The largely equal status that existed between students and teachers at the school is another component of the operations of *Canadian Free School* that enabled students’ modifications of their conflict resolution skills. This status put students in charge of the resolution of their own conflicts and granted guiding roles to educators when conflicts arose. Thus, the development of aptitudes associated to an active citizenship such as empowerment, critical thinking and conflict resolutions skills is a significant possibility that can be part of students’ experiences of free school democratic activities. For citizenship education, this means that these activities represent a viable alternative way to teach these aptitudes.

Citizenship Engagement during Free School Democratic Activities

Most of the studies cited in the literature review emphasized that the goal of citizenship education was to foster citizenship engagement on the part of students (Bickmore, 2006; Galston, 2004; Hennessy, 2006; Winton, 2007). The majority of these studies focused on what schools were doing in relation to the development of aptitudes associated to an active citizenship (Bickmore, 2006, Galston, 2004; Winton, 2007). The purpose of this section is to expand the scope of research in this field by showing how citizenship engagement can be a part of students' experiences in free school democratic activities and how such an engagement can emerge within the operations of free schools to bring about changes at the levels of the school and of society. Authors such as Galston (2004), Cook and Westheimer (2006) implied that actions such as voting, taking part in debates, protesting, participating in one's community are examples of citizenship engagement.

Such actions were done by students during and enabled by free school democratic activities at *Canadian Free School*. Indeed, voting was an element common to every student's participation in these activities. For instance, to justify why he liked class meetings, Ben declared, "cause a lot of decisions gets to be made and we vote." Moreover, based on observations, all students availed themselves of their rights to vote every time they had an opportunity. This applied to students who had been disruptive during class meetings as well. Moreover, even though only the accuser(s), the people accused and the members of the committee could vote during judicial committees, every time a chair asked in these committees for these people to vote, many other students still raised their hand to vote.

In addition to voting on the issues that concerned their school, students were involved during the democratic activities from a citizenship perspective when participating in debates on

various matters that regarded their world. The findings indicated that students had numerous debates. Some of these debates pertained to animal mistreatment, to the cleaning of the school and of the kitchen, to the use of computers and of the couch, to the nature of certain interpersonal conflicts and to the selection of consequences for these conflicts. The results also showed that these debates emerged from participants' comments and that many students formulated such comments in each debate. As an example, Marc declared to describe his conception of what happened during a judicial committee regarding a dispute involving name-calling, "Everybody seemed to be disagreeing, which is not bad necessarily. I think that it is good to hear people's opinions and stuff. We came up with a good solution." In saying this, Marc described a discussion during which many conflicting views were shared out of which a solution arose. John illustrated how involved the debates could become by depicting a similar debate. This debate regarded the potential adoption of class pets. He said, "[The discussion] went over many meetings. Every meeting, somebody would bring up [the idea of getting two class pets]. There was always an argument about whether or not, but, in the end, it was decided that we would take them." In this example, John implied that the debate extended over many meetings and that people defended during that period of time various arguments in favour or against the adoption of two class pets. Ben provided an example of how such a debate could arise from any topic of discussion. He affirmed:

We had something about cooking and there are a lot of vegetarians in our class so there were a lot of people talking about why they are vegetarian. It kind of turned into an argument between both sides, like people who eat meat and those who don't, so it was kind of interesting to see why people were vegetarian.

Interestingly, this example shows how some discussions about activities such as cooking emerged into debates on issues such as vegetarianism during democratic activities. Therefore, in these activities, students took part in many debates that enabled these people to remain engaged

within their community. Hence, citizenship engagement in the form of participating in debates is a yet another possibility that can emerge, as indicated earlier, during free school democratic activities in a context where some of the procedures associated to these activities provide students with a freedom of speech and a right to raise objections.

Another one of these possibilities concerns involvement in the community. Indeed, during the course of the research project, every participant volunteered and offered to volunteer at one point or another for an activity in their community. One of these activities was a mentorship-appreciation dinner. Many members of the school community were grateful that many people accepted to mentor pro bono students at the school so they wanted to organize a dinner to thank these mentors. The idea of organizing this event was discussed at a class meeting. After that, forms were posted on the wall so that students could volunteer for various tasks for this dinner. As indicated by these forms, volunteers were needed to waiter, to decorate, to welcome and to entertain guests during the dinner. Students' signatures on the forms indicated that everyone volunteered for one of these tasks, which these students carried out after having rehearsed on many occasions. Hence, participants co-ordinated and organized various events during class meetings. Doing so, they became involved in their community by notably volunteering.

Another way in which students were engaged civically through class meetings concerned assisting others in needs. Students' creation during a class meeting of a committee that involved more than one third of the student body to help the relief effort in Haiti exemplifies this. The same applies to the class's co-ordination during another class meeting of a participation in a demonstration to raise awareness about the socioeconomic situation of children in an African region. The organization of such activities that involved fundraising or protesting to help people

in need only happened in class meetings. Nonetheless, citizenship engagement in the form of these activities took place during that democratic activity. Hence, this kind of engagement can occur in class meetings. More precisely, the findings indicate that the emergence of this engagement is linked to certain aspects of the operations of the school. Indeed, the school allowed students the freedom and the time to pursue their own interests. These interests corresponded to, as an example, helping the relief effort in Haiti for a group of students for a certain period of time. At the school, students benefited from up to four hours a day to organize a committee and a bake sale for this purpose. It is in such a context that they engaged civically.

Consequently, students at *Canadian Free School* took many opportunities to be active from a citizenship point of view during free school democratic activities by notably voting, debating and engaging in their community. These forms of engagement enacted by students in these activities were in line with two of the three types of citizenships defined by Westheimer and Kahne (2004). They were congruent with the personally-responsible citizenship and the participatory citizenship models. Westheimer and Kahne (2004) qualified personally-responsible citizens as persons who act responsibly in their own community. Students at *Canadian Free School* did so during democratic activities notably when exercising their right to vote, when volunteering and when participating in demonstrations. As for the idea of participatory citizenship, Westheimer and Kahne (2004) applied it to people who organized community efforts to help others in times of need. When students at the school decided in a class meeting to organize a bake sale to help the relief effort in Haiti, they exhibited an engagement congruent with the notion of participatory citizenship. As for the third type of citizenship, that of justice-oriented citizens, Westheimer and Kahne (2004) described these individuals as seeking the root causes of issues to act on these causes. Even though students decided to participate in a walk to

raise awareness about the socioeconomic situation of children in an African region, signs of the development of justice-oriented citizenship in Westheimer and Kahne (2004)'s sense did not emerge from the data analysis. This remains puzzling and might be because such development did not occur at the school during my stay there or because I, as a researcher, missed such signs when collecting data. Despite this, free school democratic activities represent teaching strategies in which citizenship engagement on the part of student is a possibility.

What is the significance of the findings of this study for citizenship education? In light of this chapter, free school democratic activities represent a viable pedagogical tool to teach citizenship. Indeed, the format of these activities enables teaching about democracy in a democratic way. Moreover, most students can be intrinsically motivated to participate in these activities that assign active roles to these individuals. In addition, the development of aptitudes associated to an active citizenship corresponds to a key possibility of what can happen in free school democratic activities. For the most part, students can modify their sense of empowerment, their critical thinking and their conflict resolutions skills during these activities. Lastly, another significant possibility for these activities is students' engagement from a citizenship perspective. Indeed, in the space that these activities provide, students can take opportunities like students at *Canadian Free School* to vote, debate, volunteer, protest and become involved in their community. Despite what free school democratic activities can offer as alternative ways to teach citizenship education, this chapter indicated that these activities as practiced at *Canadian Free School* could make some modifications if desired by the members of the school to increase the possibilities that students not experience feelings of boredom, not engage in activities unrelated to class meetings in these meetings or have more opportunities to vote in judicial committees. An interesting component of free school democratic activities is that these activities offer students

and teachers with tools to make such modifications in a democratic way as, at *Canadian Free School*, participants have implemented democratically such changes notably to create judicial committees to adapt how conflict resolution worked at the school.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

Chapter 2 pointed out that many researchers are worried about young people's citizenship engagement in North America (Cook & Westheimer, 2006; Feldmann, 2007; Galston, 2004). To improve young North Americans' level of citizenship engagement, research looked at citizenship education (i.e. Bickmore, 2006, Hennessy, 2006). Studies showed that policy-makers, in the recent years, progressively increased the place dedicated to citizenship education in curricula (Bickmore, 2006; Tupper, 2009). However, despite this and despite the eagerness of many educators to promote citizenship engagement (Schweisfurth, 2006), many schools have been struggling to provide students with opportunities in democratic contexts to play active roles in citizenship education classrooms or to grapple with debated issues in these classrooms (Galston, 2004; Hennessy, 2006). Research suggested that exploring alternative or new ways to teach citizenship education could benefit school systems (Kahne & Westheimer, 2006; Meier, 2003). Inquiries on former free school students concluded that individuals, after attending a free school, have become engaged in their community in numerous ways (Bernstein, 1968; Betts, 1975; Gray & Chanoff, 1986). This suggested that free schools and the democratic activities that they support have a potential for citizenship education. For this reason, the present research project examined free school democratic activities as alternative ways to teach citizenship education by looking at students' experiences in these activities.

To carry out this inquiry, I conducted a case study using tools of ethnography at *Canadian Free School*. 26 people, including 22 students, participated in the investigation. This study collected data about the operations of the school to understand the context in which the democratic activities occurred, about these democratic activities to depict their procedures and what happened in these activities, and about what students experienced when taking part in these

activities. These data took the form of observations, interviews and document analysis. Indeed, during four weeks, I observed the operations of the school as well as seven democratic activities. I also analyzed many documents used and produced by the school community in addition to completing seventeen interviews.

According to the analysis of the collected data, the school operated democratically with a consensus model that valued self-direction, community involvement and initiatives to solve conflict. In the school, students enjoyed multiple granted freedoms such as those of assembly, speech and thought. The school nested two specific kinds of democratic activities: class meetings and judicial committees. The former aimed at regulating what happened in the school (activities, field trips, school rules...) and the latter was intended to solve conflicts in the school environment (name-calling, violations of rules...).

Within the democratic activities of the school, students had various, but similar experiences. During and within these activities, students experienced various feelings while taking part in decision-making processes and modified their participation to these processes. While a combination of appreciation, concerns, and empowerment, largely composed these feelings, in some cases, some students also experienced feelings such as boredom, frustration, empathy, indifference, dislike or acceptance. While having these feelings, students mostly listened, thought, shared their opinions and voted while, on some instances, they performed roles, such as chair or peacekeeper. Moreover, in a few cases, students attended to occupations unrelated to the democratic activities. After having taken part in many democratic activities, for the most part, students adapted their conflict resolution strategies, their agency in the school and in the democratic activities, and some conceptions about these activities and about their classmates.

The description of students' experiences in these democratic activities at *Canadian Free School* is significant for citizenship education in multiple ways. First, it shows that these activities can serve as pedagogical strategies to teach about democracy in a democratic manner that entails the assignment of active roles to students. It also indicates that, for the most part, students can be intrinsically motivated to participate in these activities. Moreover, the findings of this study demonstrate that the development of aptitudes associated to an active citizenship can arise in these activities. These aptitudes include critical thinking, a sense of empowerment and conflict resolution strategies. Additionally, the results of the inquiry also suggest that civic engagements on the part of students are a key possibility that can arise in the democratic activities. These engagements can notably take the form of voting, debating, and becoming involved in one's community by volunteering, protesting and helping people in need. Hence, the present inquiry concludes that free school democratic activities can become a useful tool to assist educators in the field of citizenship education.

However, I would like readers to keep in mind that certain limitations constrained the scope of this inquiry and, as such, my conclusions. One of these factors was the impossibility to observe directly some dimensions of students' experiences such as the cognitive and emotional processes underpinning these experiences. To account for these, I had to rely mostly on participants' descriptions. To ensure that the findings stemming from these descriptions remain as adequate as possible, I have mostly asked open-ended questions to interviewees and ended my data collection once I had reached data saturation. Despite this, the words elicited during interviews did not directly provide insight into students' experiences, though they helped to comprehend the complexity of the cognitive and emotional dimensions involved in the experiences of students. In the same sense, descriptions of certain elements of the democratic

activities and of the dynamics of the school arose largely from interviews with educators, even though the purpose of these descriptions was to situate the experiences of students, not those of educators. Furthermore, every inquiry is positioned and there is no observerless observation (Davis & Sumara, 2006). Consequently, answering my research question necessitated a viewpoint. As such, I became part of the phenomena being examined. In this sense, the truth corresponded to what worked at the present moment for me, the researcher (Davis & Sumara, 2006).

Moreover, even though many similar possibilities can emerge during the experiences of students in democratic activities in different free schools, the current study only investigated the possibilities that could arise in these democratic activities at one free school. Thus, research in different free schools could help to identify possibilities that can occur in these activities that the current study has not discovered. Inquiries with a greater number of participants and with participants of a larger age-range could also accomplish this. Indeed, the age-range of the participants was limited to 12 to 15 years old and the current inquiry could not examine the experiences of every student at *Canadian Free School* as some students elected not to participate in the study. In line with this, attendance to one of the studied democratic activities, the class meetings, was mandatory while Chapter 2 suggested that the prevalent model of these activities implies optional attendance. While, the current research project found that, in these class meetings at *Canadian Free School*, some students were bored in some instances showing that these students were not motivated in these occasions, research in a free school where attendance to democratic activities is optional could discover students' experiences different from the one described in the present study. Consistent with this, at *Canadian Free School*, representatives elected among students mostly took the decisions in judicial committees. As such, these

committees represented a learning environment that operated in line with principles associated to representative democracies. However, in many free schools, every student and teacher have an equal vote on every matter during these judicial committees (Greenberg, 1995). Hence, research in such free schools could unearth some students' experiences that could have new meanings for citizenship education.

Nevertheless, despite having certain limitations, the current study still described and analyzed many possibilities that can happen as far as students' experiences in free school democratic activities are concerned. As such, it furthered the discussion on free schools. Moreover, this inquiry offers to educators a description of an alternative way to teach citizenship that provides many opportunities in relation to engaging students from a citizenship perspective and in relation to the development of aptitudes associated to an active citizenship. Even though the freedoms granted to students entailed by this alternative way to teach citizenship offers numerous obstacles to the implementation in conventional schools of this alternative teaching strategy, conventional schools can still put into practice in activities across the curriculum several elements inherent to class meetings and judicial committees carried out in free schools. All classes in conventional schools present many opportunities to take certain decisions democratically. For instance, the students of an English class could have a discussion followed by a vote over what novel to read among a selection chosen by the teacher. A history class could have a debate about what historical topic a paper would address, debate that would be solved democratically. A science class could decide democratically on the choice of a fieldtrip. Schools could set up judicial committees during lunch hours to deal with disputes that remained not physical while providing students with chances to take part in the resolutions of their own conflicts. Furthermore, since conflicts and, as a result, conflict resolution at *Canadian Free*

School arose in a context where students had a large freedom to interact between themselves, conventional schools could offer students with more opportunities to interact, perhaps by encouraging group work in classes, in order to provide more chances to teach about interpersonal relationship and about conflict resolution. As well, at the beginning of a semester, a teacher of any subject matter could set up a democratic debate to ask students to determine the value that each exam, oral presentation and paper would have on the final marks. A gym class could hold a similar debate over what sports to practice or on how to share a gymnasium. Such a debate could take the form of one that occurred at *Canadian Free School* on that matter. Ben depicted the debate in an interview. He said:

There was a meeting on gym and what would be happening at gym and I like gym so I wanted to say what I thought. I wanted to do because, if I had not, then, it could just be put forward that we are just going to play something like skipping or something that I was not interested in (...) from there, we started figuring out this gym sheet so like every day, like Monday half of the gym is for to do whatever you want and the other half is for soccer or something like that (...) so that the people who generally don't do stuff could have a chance to do whatever they want on the other side of the gym while there is organized sport on.

In this example, Ben indicated that a topic such as what is going on in a gym class could engage students in a democratic problem-solving process, that ideas between people who appreciate gym and individuals who are generally less involved during gym classes could confront their ideas and that, from the confrontation of these ideas, a solution could arise that could meet the needs of both types of people, i.e. individual activities on one end and organized sports on the other. Many teachers often take such decisions, though students are collectively capable of taking them through democratic processes. Ben's comment also illustrated the role of intrinsic motivation in his involvement in the meeting when he mentioned that he wanted to have a say and had a say on the matter in circumstances where he was interested by the issue at hand. In this sense, in conventional schools, students could give rise to significant debate when interested or concerned

by the topic of the debate. Thus, setting up such debates requires that teachers work in function of their students' interests and concerns. It is my contention that every group of student have various interests and concerns that are school-related and that, with each of these interests and concerns, comes possibilities to engage students democratically in society.

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