Abstract

This thesis asks the question: what lessons are embedded in the consumption of space at Windsor House School. It is explored by looking at the interconnections between rules, mobility, self-regulation, authority, power, and negotiation of space. The fieldwork for this case study was conducted in the spring of 2004 while Windsor House School was located at the Cloverley site in the North Vancouver school district. The research practice is guided by ethnographic strategies of participant observation, observant participation, guided tours, discussions, and reviewing field-based documents. It is authored from a feminist, sociological position that advocates for radical pedagogy. It rests on the assumption that the use of space is a politicized activity with embedded lessons that link to ideology and pedagogy. This thesis finds that the semiotic meaning of institutional school space is being contested and transformed at Windsor House. It concludes that it is important that non-standard school spaces, such as Windsor House, exist because they expand the imagination of what is possible within restrictive spaces.
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Acknowledgements

Producing this thesis, has been satisfying, consuming and frustrating work. It is something that is important to me, and I am pleased to have done it. I sincerely thank the following people for supporting me in this process:

Windsor House and Helen Hughes for your courage, open doors, hard work, and for the hope that is embedded in your existence.

Michelle Stack, Matt Hern, and Graham Smith, for your time, critical engagement, and trust.

Trevor Mills, Charlotte Mills and Frederic Hyde for your love and belief in me.

Larry Fisk, for so gracefully introducing me to an academic space to begin to play with these ideas.

Amea Wilbur, Charito Galling, Lonnie McGuinn, Abby Wener, and Shauna Butterwick, for making possible our collective independent study, and supporting and questioning my work.

Abby Wener, for your continuity, companionship and cohort-ness.

Sairoz Sekon, Indira Dutt, Zoe Ekle, Abby Wener, Amea Wilbur, Eleri Glass, Jeff Thorlacius, Pamela Richardson, Frederic Hyde, and Trevor Mills for editing and listening.

Gerry James, for your nimble typing fingers.

Ryan Slashinsky and Indira Dutt, for hours of talk, sharing this journey, and plotting futures.
Space is fundamental in any form of communal life; space is fundamental in any exercise of power.

Foucault, 1990, p 130
Introduction

The use of space is a politicized activity with embedded lessons; it links to ideology and pedagogy. Often the apparent chaos in the use of space at free schools, such as Windsor House, inspires a critique that insufficient structure is being provided for children. Windsor House has structure, yet it is markedly different than standard schooling (See Concept Box 1). As a result, lessons embedded in the space are distinct from standard schooling. Reflecting its ideology, Windsor House is explicitly structured to diffuse authority and foster self-regulation. This is mediated through rules and governance and is evident in spatial relations. This space has an embedded curriculum with implicit lessons about authority and relationship. It is important to explore both the implicit and explicit lessons in considering how Windsor House uses this standard school building to reshape the lessons of the space. The political hope of this work is that it may assist in expanding the imagination of what is possible within restrictive spaces.

The fieldwork for this case study is guided by ethnographic strategies; it was conducted in the spring of 2004 while Windsor House School was located at the Cloverley site in the North Vancouver school district. My thesis question asks what lessons are embedded in the consumption of space at Windsor House? I explore this question as a feminist, sociologist, and advocate of radical pedagogy. I root Windsor House within the free school movement, and examine texts by, for, and about free schools.

The concept of space used is informed by feminist geographies; it is understood to refer to physical and conceptual structures as well as social organization. In this way, the space of Windsor House School is understood to include the physical building, the social use and conventions of dwelling in that building, the social concepts of belonging and exclusion, as well as what the school symbolizes and what is imagined as possible within that space.
Imagining Space as a Cultural Production

Space was traditionally examined through what Lefebvre critically called an “illusion of transparency” (Blunt and Rose, 1994, p. 5); this refers to the belief that the world can be seen and charted by a single Truth which centralizes a (European, male, heterosexual, White) master subject (Blunt and Rose, 1994). Since the early 1980’s feminist, post-colonial and cultural geographers, among others, have developed increasingly nuanced contestations of this idea of a single perspective on seeing, charting and imagining place and space. They have come to understand space as contested, fractured, positional and paradoxical, in short, as a method of cultural production.

Like all cultural production, imaginings of space emerge through shared meaning. The school building is a strong cultural symbol, imbued with meaning and expectations of particular human activities (Fain, 2004). This semiotic meaning is established through a process of cultural production, not because it is intrinsic to the structure. As Stuart Hall states: “meaning does not inhere in things, in the world. It is constructed, produced. It is the result of a signifying practice—a practice that produces meaning, that makes things mean” (Hall, 1997, italics in the original, p. 24). The meaning of space is constructed, it is a product of practice that is not fixed (Hall, 1997) but rather continually being negotiated, contested and affirmed (Matthews, 1997). There is a reciprocal relation of creation between the production and the producers; while people produce cultural meaning, culture shapes what people produce. As a result often the possibility that space is malleable is forgotten as socially constructed meanings become so normative they are assumed to be natural and inevitable (Hall, 1997) restricting the imagination to the limits of what already exists.
Dwelling is the way one occupies, consumes, and produces space. Loretta Lees in “Towards a critical geography of architecture: The case of an ersatz coliseum” (2001) takes a relatively unique stance within cultural geography (Gruffudd, 2003) and looks at dwelling as a politicized activity. Drawing from ideas of shared cultural meaning, and applying a modified tradition of a political semiotic approach to the built environment, she looks at the “embodied practices through which architecture is lived” (Lees, 2001, p. 53) and suggests that the meaning of place changes according to the interaction of the dwellers with the structure. As such dwelling is “a politicized practice through which social identities, environments and their interrelations are performed and transformed” (Lees, 2001, p. 56). This means that altering dwelling in the space alters the cultural meaning, and the embedded curriculum of the place. This potential to alter the meaning of place through social practices is achieved through was Lees terms “creative consumption” (Lees, 2001, p. 72).

The idea of creative consumption of space focuses on “the ways that the built environment is shaped and given meaning through the active and embodied practices by which it is produced, appropriated and inhabited” (Lees, 2001, p. 56). Because the people consuming the space are actively shaping meanings of that space, the space cannot be thought of as fixed or essential. Instead, space is a result of an interrelated practice of production and consumption. Lees argues “a consideration of social practices enables us to appreciate the embodiment of gestures of emancipation within the formal imagery of a building” (Lees, 2001, p. 75). Simply stated, the meaning of space changes according to the social interaction of its dwellers within, and with the space. These concepts are firmly grounded in Foucault’s idea that architecture on its own is neither inherently oppressive nor liberatory, but rather that it works with the actions of the people within space to shape the relationships of people to the space and to each other within that space (1993). However he goes on to warn that there is an immutable interconnection between the space and the actions that occur there; the original intentions and cultural meaning of the structure are still at play:
I think it is somewhat arbitrary to dissociate the effective practice of freedom by people, the practice of social relations, and the spatial distributions in which they find themselves. If they are separated, they become impossible to understand. Each can only be understood through the other. (Foucault, 1993, p. 136)

Spaces are both constructed by, and play an important part of shaping, social norms and socializing people within them. They have socio-cultural and political meaning; inhabitants are implicated in making these meanings by virtue of being part of the space. It is necessary to engage with spaces as constructions in need of perpetual and simultaneous deconstruction and reconstruction. This is the work of this thesis.

**The Project**

The Cloverley site building\(^1\) was not built to be Windsor House School. It is a typical boxy 1970's Canadian public building widely recognizable as a school. However the space, as dwelled in by Windsor House, would likely not be widely recognizable as a school, much of the embedded curriculum of schooling has been altered. Windsor House School is a small local context of shared meanings that is inconsistent with how school is broadly recognized. It is a place where the semiotic meaning of institutional school space is contested and transforming.

At Windsor House there is an ideological framework shaping the processes and use of the institutional public school space. This ideological framework is shifted from those frameworks shaping standard schooling: “Windsor House parents, students and staff are united in a desire for something different from regular school” (Windsor House, 2003, p. 6). These differences center around ideas of academic non-coercion, parent participation, and participatory democracy. The use of space at Windsor House School is shifted from public schooling in relation to a shifted...
ideology. Indeed, as Dorothy Smith stated, “the coordination of institutional processes is mediated ideologically” (Smith, 1987, p. 161). This paper will tease out ways the use of space at Windsor House School are connected to ideology as well as implications of this praxis.

The following chapter provides the reader with a tour of the physical space and the people who shape it. The Literature Review contextualizes Windsor House within the stream of radical pedagogy, specifically focusing on free school literature. The Methodology chapter outlines the basis on which I make claims to knowledge and the procedures for this case study. The three analysis chapters explore the themes of mobility and self-regulation, rules and governance, and authority, negotiation and power as they relate to the consumption of space at Windsor House. The final chapter summarizes the findings, and outlines the recommendations emergent from these findings. Italicized text is used throughout this thesis to indicate fieldnote excerpts. Concept boxes are included to clearly outline my intended meaning behind some of the ambiguous terminology. Photographs and maps of the space are included to impart a feel of the space. Images are not able to include people due to ethics requirements; as such they are rather hollow representations of a very active space. Other than Helen, the founder, all names are pseudonyms. It is my hope that this thesis will be of interest to readers who are themselves part of free schools, those interested in alternative education, as well as for readers interested in negotiating space more generally.
Image 2: Windsor House School Building Front Entrance
Windsor House School

The Physical Space

Windsor House has a history of relocation: it has made its home in church basements, members’ homes, and rooms in parts of schools. Eleven years ago, Windsor House was allocated a few rooms of the North Vancouver school district building on the Cloverley site. Over the years, the school expanded to occupy the entire main floor of this building and is jokingly referred to as ‘the school that ate Cloverley.’ During this fieldwork, Windsor House was in its final few months at this location.

Context

North Vancouver is located on the steep incline on the base of the North Shore Mountains on the west coast of Canada. At the bottom of the mountains are railway tracks and the Burrard Inlet, which separate the city of North Vancouver from Vancouver. The east side of North Vancouver blends into an industrial area and port; the west side borders the wealthy city of West Vancouver. The land of North Vancouver is the territory of the Squamish and Burrard Nations; the city is intersected by four designated First Nations’ Land Reserves. There are three commercial areas in the city, a quiet downtown area, a large mall and a ‘big-box’ shopping area. There are some tall buildings, particularly in the downtown area, as well as a number of medium-sized apartment buildings throughout the city. However, the vast majority of North Vancouver’s residential structures are modest single-family houses or duplexes, most with front and back yards. The Cloverley Site is located on a quiet street in a residential area. There are three buses that come within 6 blocks of the site, and a main road nearby which connects to the two bridges that link to the city of Vancouver. There is a passenger transit ferry that runs regularly between the downtowns of North Vancouver and Vancouver.
The Grounds

The school building sits at the front of the property and is surrounded by a large amount of green space (Image 4). Approaching the school the Windsor House sign is visible (Image 1). Behind that is the medium sized parking lot and the school building. Along the left edge of the parking lot and the building is a green space called 'The Hill,' home to a few large well-established trees, and a steep grassy incline. During the day The Hill will usually have students playing sword or chase games, reading or talking under trees, and/or rolling down the hills.

Behind The Hill, between the concrete edge of the school and the road, is a broad sloped area that has a blackberry patch and a playground. The blackberry patch, whose bushes can reach a height of five or six feet, is home to a maze of paths and forts in various states of tending, which
can be quite an adventure to explore. There is no master plan behind the placement of the paths; they are an on-going work in progress created by those who play in the area. Blackberry bushes, being generous with their growth and fairly indestructible, are well suited to survive these encroachments. The playground nestled into the prickly blackberries includes wooden climbing apparatuses, a little hanging bridge, and a few springy teeter-totter toys all on a woodchip bed. This is a well-used area, which almost always has students of various ages playing in it throughout the day.
Behind the blackberry patch is a long wooded slopped area, this is the ‘Upper Forest.’ Its tall thin trees are accompanied with sparse ground cover and a well-trod path leading through them (Image 5). This forest has been stewarded by members of Windsor House who have invested time and money into naturalizing it. Entering Upper Forest feels quite wild, peaceful, and removed from the rest of the property. Walking along the path there will be signs of forts, tea parties, climbing ropes and other adventures. The top edge of Upper Forest is a city road, the bottom edge borders the sports field, and the far end leads into the city parkland; there is no road or fence dividing the school property from the city park. The park has a vast green area, tennis courts, and a colourful city playground. All of which are a great lure to many Windsor House students.

The section of this slope that runs along the eastside of the sports field is often referred to as ‘Lower Forest,’ because of the steep incline this area is generally unoccupied. The sports field is a large multi-use grass field that has structures to support baseball and soccer and is quick to become muddy in the high use areas. From the sports field there is a 100-degree view of the mountains and the harbour can be seen through the alders of Lower Forest. Between the sports field and the school is a small patch of trees. These trees are often climbed and used as a place from which to watch games.
The Cloverley building itself is built roughly in the shape of a backwards ‘L’ (Image 9). Framed by the ‘L’ is a rectangular paved concrete outdoor area, half of which is covered to provide protection from the rain (Image 6). This area includes yellow painted square ball courts, and a small set of bleachers. It can be seen, and often heard, through the large windows of the classrooms on the side of the school it borders. The long part of the ‘L’ of Cloverley is two floors. The bottom floor, including the concrete play area and portable along the East side of it, are home to a French School that is autonomous from Windsor House. The sports field and the first floor gym are spaces that both schools use; time-use agreements have been established so that only one school uses these spaces at a time.

These outdoor school spaces are almost always in high use, especially if it is not too rainy. Generally there is a continuous movement of people running around, entering and exiting the building, and coming or going from the property. Noises of play are heard all over the school grounds. Typically people are engaged in small, changing groups or independent play. It is less frequent that a large group will be organized in a single activity;
The Building

Entering the building is most commonly done through the main doors on the front porch (Image 7). There will likely be a group of teenagers sitting on the porch bench and draped over the metal railings of the accessibility ramp engaged in verbose, sometimes curse-filled conversation. The main doors’ windows tend to be thickly covered with notices and pieces of paper, making them hard to see through. Some of these notices will be clearly intended for everyone who enters, others are for a narrower audience, usually related to a game in progress. Stepping into the building, the main hall will almost always appear to be a profusion of commotion, full of people, of many ages, walking or running in different directions. As Chris Mercogliano said of The Albany Free School, a school similar to Windsor House, it is “an environment so full of activity that a great many first time visitors perceive it as nothing short of chaos” (Mercogliano, 2003, p. 7). The hall looks like many public school building hallways; it is
wide, with ceilings that feel as if they should be just a little higher, its walls lined with lockers have many doors opening into it (Image 12). To the right of the entrance is the Multimedia Room. This is a small room, with computers, a couch and generally a number of teenagers working and lounging. Just past the hall entrance is a small glass table and chairs, where people often play chess. The wall behind it, like most of the walls in the school, is covered with a hand painted bright mural.

Lining the walls of the hall is lots of information posted on boards and clipboards, usually with people writing on or reading them. First time visitors to the school will likely go to the office which is a little to the left of the entrance. On the office door, is a large laminated sign that reads, “It takes a community to raise a child.” The office is a small room that holds a surprising number of desks, a photocopy machine, and shelving. One of the desks has a computer reserved for school business; this generally has a student or adult working at it. The photocopy machine is well used; often at least one of the desks will be covered with papers being collated. It is usual to find a number of adults and some students loitering around the office. There will likely be at least one person sitting on top of a desk; sometimes it will be students playing Mancala or cards, or using the stationary that is stored in the office; sometimes it is a parent, chatting, nursing their infant, or involved with school business. Against the far wall is a table under which young children have built themselves a room of sorts (Image 8). There will invariably be one or two small children absorbed in some activity of their own making under this
table; often, they will be so hidden and quiet that they may not be noticed. There are two doors off of the office, one goes into the Secretary’s office, and the other goes into the vice principal Helen’s office, which is a room in two parts. One part is her work area; it is a little space consisting of her desk, a door to the main office and an open door frame into the other part of her office. The second part she calls her conference room, it has four little couches forming a square, and has many little toys and books. This room is used for conferencing, private discussions, a place where students are sent for direct supervision, or where they go for a visit or quiet time out.

The bottom part of the ‘L’ of the Cloverley building holds the offices, conference room, gym, stage, kitchen, band room, theater storage, general storage, recycling, darkroom and one of the large classrooms, which is used as the art room. The long stem of the ‘L’ holds seven large classrooms, one of which is divided into three smaller rooms, school bathrooms, plus eight small rooms and offices, mostly clustered together around the World Room. Each of the large classrooms has two doors that open into the hallway and windows that line the outer wall of the room. Each room at Windsor House is named, the doors of most rooms are labeled with the name of the room, and generally rooms are referred to by the same name they are labeled as.

On occasion I heard some other nick-names used.
The Castle' is the first room on the left side of the hall; it holds a bank of computers divided from the rest of the room by a false wall shaped and painted as a wall of a castle fortress. The room is set up with rows of tables and chairs in curved lines facing the chalkboard. The next room on the left side of the hall is the Library; this big space has been divided into multiple little areas by the many bookshelves. One corner area holds a couch and book display, another a study carrel and work table, another the main stacks. There is also an area with a round rug cozy chair.
conducive for reading aloud, and a larger area by the entrance with a table and chairs, administration desk, and a couch. These little areas provide a sense of coziness and privacy; there is no place to stand in the library from which the entire space can be viewed. Often people who use the library tuck themselves away reading novels, or work in small groups at the main table.

The next room on the left side of the hall is ‘The Temple of the Flying Pig.’ This room is a big open space, with a piano and a large center oval table. This is set up for meetings and for classes with instructors that prefer in the round. ‘The Milky Way’ is the next room; it is organized in three main areas. Half the room is a kitchen space with a stove, multiple microwaves, sink, kettle and lots of little tables and chairs. Many people make and eat lunch here and Stone Soup is held here on Thursdays. A third of the room is set up as a small make-believe kitchen space complete with many wooden fruits, vegetables and cooking tools. The rest of the room is set up with larger table and chairs. The last room on the left side of the hallway is the ‘Big Muscle Room,’ more commonly referred to as the BMR. This is a giant, wall-to-wall carpeted room; in the far corner is a little loft. The only furniture in this room consists of gigantic pillows and large wooden blocks (Image 18). This room is intended for running around, play fighting, fort building, and generally being rambunctious.

The back end of the right side of the hallway holds the ‘Space/Time Room.’ This room has recently changed from the elaborately set up old-fashioned schoolroom and now holds a computer, a large oval table, and a few couches in the corner. On one side of the room, carefully drawn on the wall, is an intricate and detailed timeline pictorially depicting the earth from the big bang to today. The back of the room has a floor to ceiling papier-mâché tree with a collection of

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3 Inspired by the folktale of the same name, Stone Soup involves members of the school bringing ingredients for soup, as they are able. These get worked into two main soups that everybody at the school can eat lunch from.
4 For more information see The BMR in Rules and Governance.
5 During the time of my practicum this room was organized down to the last detail as a Victorian schoolroom, complete with inkwells, slates, readers, and costumes. This elaborate set up was done for a simulation game, which is a long running non-scripted role-playing game. The result of this was a peculiar arrangement of school children and school teachers ‘playing school’ while in school creating many overlapping meanings of the use of space.
river rocks at its base, and a large owl perched in its branches. This tree fits into the mural landscape on the wall behind it, which is completed by a painted stream that works its way around the sink and into a mirrored pool on the floor. The Space/Time Room is often used as a production area for 'zines.' The Science Room, also on this side of the hall, holds a big center table that is either a lab bench or a pool table depending whether the plywood top is on it or not. There are two offices off of the science room, one that is locked and holds chemicals and other potentially hazardous science equipment, and another that is often open and used to hang out in by students.

The other large classroom on the right side of the hall is set up for primary students. This space has walls that divide it into three smaller rooms, ‘The Cottage’, ‘The Cottage Garden,’ and ‘The Gazebo’. The Cottage has lots of little tables, art supplies, play areas, cubbies, and a sink. The Cottage Garden has many shelves with bins holding playthings such as puzzles and plastic animals (Image 24). Its floors are carpeted and it has a large pillow area for curling up on. The Gazebo is a smaller room within the Cottage Garden, it has many windows and toys for playing store and house. There are usually many parents in these primary rooms. The other rooms on this side of the hall are small and medium sized rooms. One area, called ‘The World Room,’ has numerous office-sized rooms attached to it. ‘The Nest,’ in The World Room, is a small loft area in which any one over three feet tall has to crouch in order to stand in. Some of the small and medium rooms are teacher’s offices. Some, such as ‘The Unofficial Russian Embassy’ and ‘Ocean’s Eye Room’, are what are known as ‘student controlled rooms.’

Entering the space of Windsor House it does not take long to notice that something non-standard is going on. Many things may appear peculiar for a school space, some of these things

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6 While I was at Windsor House I received ‘Animaleus Magazaleus #1: The Bird Edition,’ ‘S.H.I.T.E (Silly Heaters Interview the Establishment): The Back Pocket Edition’; as well as ‘The Gamer’. Each of these were student initiated and produced projects, printed and distributed at the school.

7 For more information about student controlled rooms see Negotiation and Territory in Authority.
are: age groups mixing; lots of adults; children seemingly without supervision; students going outdoors and leaving the grounds; calm spaces of children raising their hands to vote; lots of commotion; kids who appear to be doing nothing; the absence of desks; few large groups; the presence of babies and very young children; and the gigantic number of notices that seem to be posted everywhere. It is evident that Windsor House School consumes the space of this public school building in ways unfamiliar to standard schooling.

**The People**

Helen Hughes is the founder, leader, and current vice principal of Windsor House. In 1971 she founded the school with fifteen students and their parents in her home on Windsor Street in North Vancouver. Helen began her career as a successful and efficient schoolteacher within standard schools. She often tells the story of the enjoyment she had in her well-structured classroom as a novice teacher and how after her first year of teaching, her teaching evaluation given by her superior said something to the effect of *Mrs. Hughes keeps a very good classroom, but her blinds are often uneven and open to the wrong level*. Helen says she was careful to make sure her blinds were perfect the next year (Hughes, 2003). Helen’s career changed when her daughter started school. The more her daughter became involved with school, the more Helen witnessed her daughter’s spirits diminishing; Helen resolved that intervention was essential. As is common in the formation of alternative schools, Helen’s decision was to instigate a small school of her own (Hughes and Carrico, 1996). Thirty-three years later, Helen is teaching in her final years before retiring, her daughter is now a full time teacher at Windsor House and has children of her own that attend the school.

According to the free school literature, Helen, and my observations, there are two principal reasons why families come to free schools in general and Windsor House in particular. One is
because the family has a philosophical alignment with the pedagogical intentions of the school. Often children in these families have been homeschooled or have come to Windsor House as their first form of schooling. Generally, these students are fairly well adjusted to the school, do well at Windsor House, and would likely do fine in most educational arrangements. It is my impression that most of these families come from a well-educated, middle-class predominantly White context.

The second reason families seek out Windsor House stems from a deep need for a space which will support their child who is not fitting into and/or being pushed out of standard school settings. Often these families come in desperation and anger about their past school experiences. These strong feelings are generally due to pressures experienced around biopsychiatric drugs, testing, depression, bullying and/or other forms of violence. Often these students come with needs that require considerable attention and they may have a long adjustment period in their new school.

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8 These themes, which dominate the Free School literature, were confirmed through general conversation at the school. I had two extended conversations with parents about why they came to Windsor House, one family came to Windsor House from homeschooling (Fieldnote, June 4, 04, 2791-94). The other came to Windsor House because of frustration at the way their standard school was addressing how one child was being bullied and the other was bullying, they also noted a frustration with the time pressures the school was making on their home life (Fieldnote, May 31, 04, 1663, 1674-79).
These families tend to come from a wider range of class, race, and educational backgrounds. Many families with less education and financial wealth come from schools that are poorly resourced and are unable to attend to the needs of their children, these families are seeking alternatives within publicly available options. Other families come from private school backgrounds with considerable financial wealth and educational options. Of the students who come later in their schooling experiences, many stay at Windsor House for a short time, either because they find it incompatible with their needs, or because their families feel they have become ready to return and be successful in a standard school, others find a more permanent place at Windsor House.

Students

There are approximately 175 students at Windsor House School, most attend close to full-time, but many attend part-time. The students range in age from five to twenty. The population has over twice as many kindergarten and elementary aged students as it does secondary level students (Johnson, 2004, p. 6). Officially, the school is able to provide kindergarten up to the equivalent of grade ten. Some students make alternate arrangements to stay at Windsor House for the equivalent of grades eleven and twelve. Slightly over half of the students enrolled travel thirty to eighty minutes to North Vancouver from Vancouver to attend Windsor House. A handful of students travel from even greater distances. There appears to be a

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9 For further information about the integration of new students see Limits and Control of Movement in Mobility.
10 This temporary use of the free school is a dominant theme in Mercogliano's accounts of the Albany Free School (1998), and seems to play out at Windsor House as well.
11 There is a discrepancy between the school's numbers on students and the district audit conducted the same year.
12 It is my impression, as a result of the audit that 'recommended' all healthy students attend full time fewer students were attending part-time. Previous to this, many families chose to combine their time at Windsor House with homeschooling.
13 Some forms of these alternant arrangements include correspondence courses, forfeiting credentials, or combining other programs with Windsor House.
greater ‘racial’ diversity within the students of Windsor House than in the neighbourhood where Windsor House is located.

**Staff**

On site, Windsor House has 8.1 full-time teaching positions allotted spread over nine teachers, one part-time assistant, one very part-time teaching aide, one part-time clerical staff, and a full-time vice principal. There is an off-site, part-time principal who takes a largely hands-off approach to his position at Windsor House. All teachers are licensed through the British Columbia College of Teachers. The principal, one teacher and the teaching assistant are male, the rest of the teaching staff are female. There are no visible minorities or disabilities on staff; there are two openly gay teachers on staff. Staff choose to work at Windsor House because of philosophical alignment, however, there is a wide range of philosophy and disagreement within this alignment. A number of staff began at Windsor House as parents and have since become staff; some obtained their teaching license specifically to teach at Windsor House. Many of the staff members have children at the school.

**Parents**

Parents are a vital component of the school. Each parent is requested to provide a half days work per week to the school. Parents offer classes, assist administratively, fundraise, maintain and organize the space, provide supervision, conduct field trips, participate in meetings, mentor, play and interact with students. Parents also support and interact with each other, both through informal interaction and formal groups, such as the new moms group and the non-violent communication group. There are always parents around Windsor House. The request for parents participation assumes parents have the resources to afford this time, however parents for whom providing time to the school is not possible or desirable can meet with the vice principal or the

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14 I did not meet him during my time at Windsor House.
15 See Literature Review for more information about this range of philosophy.
volunteer duty parent coordinator to arrange an alternative or to become exempt from this requirement. I do not know how social pressures may be exerted around this. From the parent work log in the check in area, and from noting the parents I saw in the school it appears that there are many families that do not provide this time to the school, while many others provide much more than what is asked becoming highly influential in the space; there is an appearance of an ‘in crowd’ and ‘out crowd’ as a result of this.

In addition to these roles, there is an exceptionally active parents group at Windsor House, called the Society for the Advancement of Non-Coercive Education (S.A.N.E.); all parents are members of this group. Families are asked to place themselves on a sliding payment scale and donate $10-$60 per month per child to S.A.N.E. The money is used to purchase school supplies, school resources, and food to fill in for missed or forgotten breakfasts and lunches. As a result of this collective arrangement, the school is well stocked with supplies and students are not required to bring individual school supplies.16

Community

Item 1.1 of the Windsor House handbook begins: “Windsor House is a community as well as a school. It consists of students, staff, parents, graduates and volunteers” (Windsor House, 2003, p. 2). Most of the literature as well as the informal discussions refer to the school as ‘the community.’ Community is celebrated as central to the ideology and practice of Windsor House. I suspect a reason why it is such a cherished term is that it is used to encompass the holistic participatory multi-aged aspects of the school. While ‘community’ is the term chosen by the school, it is one I have chosen not to use; instead I use the concept of membership. While I do not wish to undermine the multifaceted interconnections fostered at Windsor House School, I am leery of the frequency of the term community in the public lexicon. Drawing from Matt Hern

16 This is a method by which Windsor House works to be accessible, it also fosters a sense of communal rather than individualized ownership.
in Making Space (1997), I understand that a school can be a vital part of a community, but cannot in and of itself be a community; community must be predicated on place and involve all interconnected aspects of that place. From what I have observed, Windsor House is positioned in a relatively isolated way from the wider community it is located within.  

Inclusivity is of stated importance to Windsor House:

We model questioning not only overt instances of discrimination and prejudice, but also the subtle assumptions that tend to permeate our society. We are committed to providing an accepting environment for everyone in our community. We welcome people with varied racial, ethnic and economic backgrounds. We support people with disabilities and people who are homosexual, transgendered or transsexual. We work to counter racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, and Islamophobia (Windsor House, 2003, p. 2).

In terms of the composition of the community and the success of its goals of being inclusive, it is my observation that there are more male than female students, especially in the older ages. The staff and daytime adult presence in the school is predominantly female. There are a variety of family structures at Windsor House. The literature and language does not assume that families are composed of two-parents (one male and one female) and birth children. There are a variety of single parent, guardianship, adoptive, same-sex, two parent, and three or more parent families, as well as a number of students who travel between different homes of multiple parents; this does not appear to be stigmatized. While the space of the school is predominantly heterosexual, there is a wide range of sexualities visible. This is noticeable in the library materials, in the teaching staff, and in the families at the school. Only once in my time at Windsor House did I hear

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Part of this may be as a result of a need to operate without drawing notice to themselves for fear of repercussions from school regulatory bodies.
someone use the word gay in a hateful way, and it did not pass without an expression of offence. While the visible ‘racial’ range in the school appears to be wider than the neighbourhood it is located in, the vast majority of students appear as White. While there is a wide range of economic and educational status within the school, the majority of the members of the school appear to be upper-working to upper-middle class.

The school is minimally accessible, in that it has an accessibility ramp granting access to most of the indoor spaces in the school. There is one member of the school who uses a wheelchair for mobility and who is a very active participant in the school. However overwhelmingly, the school is set up for visually, orally, physically and mentally ‘able-bodied’ people. That said it is evident that there is a wide and integrated range of learning dis/abilities in the school.

The school has had a long history of changes, crises and joys. There have been times of philosophical turmoil in which hearts and egos were bruised and many people left the school. There have been times of wondrous and exhilarating growth, and there have been times of slow and steady shifting. Change, forced from both inside and outside, has been a prominent and constant aspect of the history of Windsor House. Even now, as this paper is being composed, things at the current Windsor House have become dramatically different than at the time of this project.

This is Windsor House School.
Image 8: Couch in Windsor House Library
Literature Review

Scope and language

I identify Windsor House as a democratic free school and locate it within the history, language, and writings of the free school movement, within the wider context of radical pedagogy. In the discipline of educational studies there is an active interest in alternative education and some interest in radical pedagogy, however the praxis of democratic free schools is largely absent. It is my intention to centralize the pedagogy of these schools as politically and experientially significant to educational theory and practice. The scope of this review includes the foundations of the free school movement, the height of the North American movement in the 1960’s and 70’s, the modern day movement, and issues of power, politics, and space as addressed in the literature. This review draws primarily from texts directly out of free schools and is augmented with works about radical pedagogy. It is not intended to be an exhaustive survey, rather it is meant to untangle some of the threads and place Windsor House within the tapestry of free schools and radical pedagogy.

I identify Windsor House as a free school, however the school’s handbook explicitly states “Windsor House is not a ‘Free School’” (2003, p. 2), in this way I define Windsor House differently than they identify themselves. The criteria I use to determine a free school is that it is academically non-coercive (Hern, 2003), this means it does not prescribe, evaluate, or reward academic course or achievement, and that it is structured so that students have freedom of movement and may determine how to organize their days. The handbook suggests that the reason Windsor House says it is not free school is because the role of responsibility is prioritized (Windsor House, 2003, p. 2); I identify this as a strategic statement to counter prejudicial reactions to free schools as places where children can do what ever they wish without

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18 Educational Studies is the discipline in which I present and defend this thesis.
responsibility. Most free schools are clear to state that freedom does not mean unlimited freedom (Wright, 1989; Neill, 1960); prioritizing responsibility is not antithetical to being a free school.

While I refer to a 'free school movement,' this is an imprecise phrase as it implies a uniformity that does not exist. There is a diversity of overlapping and contradictory motivations, politics, and practices within the 'movement.' There is a strong neo-liberal, individualistic, conservatism at play that overlaps with leftist counter culture, socialist frameworks as well as libertarian and anarchistic frameworks. Because of these overlapping ideologies, the language around democratic and free schools is challenging. Most texts use words such as 'freedom,' 'democracy,' and 'natural,' yet the intentions and implications behind these words differ. The places of agreement and contradiction are entangled. While I do not claim to untangle them, I will strive to make transparent the position from which I interpret them.

The word 'free' in free school covers a wide territory of meaning within the literature. Most predominantly it implies a freedom from the fears, harms, and coercions of schooling. Central to this, is the freedom to think one's own thoughts and form one's own ideals free from anonymous or manipulative authority. To realize this, free schools are structured without prescriptive curriculum, mandatory classes, testing, grades, "the pressure of an academic timetable and its endless performance assessments, [or] constant behavioral monitoring and adult intervention" (Mercogliano, 1998, p. 40). Freedom of association and collaboration across ages, and across the boundaries of school and community are also advocated. Likewise the ability to determine educational processes free from the dictate of the state is important. A central division in the tapestry of free schools is whether or not freedom is understood as an individualistic or collectivist concept. Some understand freedom as something an individual strives for in terms of their personal comfort and psychology. While others understand that one cannot be free as long as oppression exists and see freedom as both a personal and collectively political journey. Both of these paradigms play out at Windsor House. I understand ideas of freedom without restriction to be neither achievable nor desirable. As well, freedom without
consideration of the context that supports it as false. Advocating for these positions stems from a politically dangerous, intensely individualistic neo-liberal framework. Life is inextricably and preciously interconnected and interdependent, I do not wish to embrace ideologies or practices that assume otherwise.

The internal democracy of democratic free schools refers to a strong, direct, or participatory democracy in which all members of the school have ample opportunity to exercise a certainty of influence over the conditions that impact their life (See Concept Box 2). Free schools are almost always democratic however, it does not mean that democratic schools strive to be free schools (Hern, 2003). All democratic free schools have a strong participatory democratic forum as a central component of their school. It is at this forum that wide ranges of decisions are determined. The jurisdiction of the forums varies from school to school; some things that may fall under it include the hiring and firing of staff, admissions, budgeting, rules and procedures of the school, space set up, conflict resolution and / or disciplinary actions. At some schools, participation in these forums is optional however, it is more common that attendance is mandatory. What is often inconceivable for people unfamiliar with democratic free schools is that this process involves one vote per person in a context where children and youth are the majority. This form of democracy is part of the practice of Windsor House. In popular discourse, the language of democracy is over used and exhausted to the point that it has become a term largely devoid of meaning. I continue to use the word and advocate for democratic practice because I hold on to a hope that despite the cooptation and implications of rhetoric, democratic practice still holds the possibility of being revolutionary.
Much of the language around free and democratic schools speaks of the notion of a ‘natural’ or ‘authentic’ self. This language is deeply rooted within a liberal notion of individualism and autonomy as it draws on the idea that there is an essential a-priori human nature that exists separate from sociological conditioning or construction. This framework is antithetical to most feminisms. Many feminists, when confronted with this language interpret it as absurd, limited, and harmful, and therefore they end their engagement with the ideas. I sympathize with, yet do not advocate for this reaction. I understand that while it is necessary to have a critical and skeptical eye, there are understandings, strategies and practices within democratic and free schools movement that are beneficial to anti-oppressive, constructionist, feminist positions.

**Foundations**

Radical pedagogy is concerned with creating dramatic societal change through “new forms of socialization that will encourage non-authoritarian and revolutionary character structures” (Spring, 1998, p. 9). Some seminal threads present in the tapestry of radical pedagogy informing democratic free schools include: anarchist-based modern schools, which organized anti-authoritarian educational structures as centres of social restructuring. John Holt whose

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**CONCEPT BOX 2:**

**DEMOCRACY** is the praxis of people participating in ruling themselves. Throughout its history it has been contested whether or not this is a good idea, who may participate, and to what degree. Deeply linked to the idea of democracy is the idea that people become fully human through participating in their political realities and achieving citizenship.

Richard Swift (2003) in his guide to democracy identifies two strains in democracy: weak democracy, which involves the idea that “a minimalist state should interfere as little as possible with the economic and political rights of individual” (p. 40) and strong democracy, which “emphasizes the self-rule of the political community and the equality of power” (p. 35).

There are two principal democratic practices, representational and direct. Representational democracy is the process of democratically determining a person to represent or rule the membership. Direct democracy is the engagement of ordinary people, representing themselves by voting on decisions. Direct democracy is mostly excluded from the large-scale public sphere, but is frequently used, to greater or lesser extents, on small-scale initiatives.
critiques of schools as institutions teaching failure and survival strategies rather than content lead him to become a leader of unschooling. Ivan Illich, the father of deschooling, who introduced a critique of schooling as producing passive people and advocated for an abandonment of practices and ideas of schooling. Paulo Freire who critiqued what he called the ‘banking system’ of schooling and advocated for a student emergent, inherently political critical pedagogy that would transcend the relationship of oppression. Myles Horton, The Highlander Folk School, and folk education more generally, which gave a hopeful face to the connection between radical school practice and radical social transformation. Lastly A.S. Neill, who, inspired by the emergence of psychology, created a free school intended to eliminate fear and anonymous authority.

The modern schools of early half of the last century are a “direct philosophical ancestor” of the free school movement (Miller, 2002, p. 113). They were founded on the understandings of social advancement through freedom of thought, equality of political power, and ownership of self (Spring, 1994). Their principal intention was to “abolish all forms of authority, political, economic as well as educational. And to usher in a new society based on the voluntary cooperation of free individuals” (Avrich, 1980, p. xi). This movement was emphatically anti-state schooling, which was seen to diminish the goals of social advancement by fostering uniformity of thought and belief, the internalization of laws, and control of the many by the interests of the ruling elite (Spring, 1994). Modern schools resisted what they identified as a central purpose of state schooling, which was the forming of obedient workers (Miller, 2002). Government and education were identified as the two major means by which power is exerted over people. Education was seen as the more powerful of the two, because “government must always depend upon the opinion of the governed” (Stirner quoted in Spring, 1994, p. 42).
The schools, included Leo Tolstoy's at Yasnaya Polyana in Russia (1859-1863), Francisco Ferrer's Escuela Moderna in Spain (1901-1906), and the twenty or so modern schools started in America by Emma Goldman and others of the Ferrer Association (1910 – 1955/61). Aspects of these schools include being structured without compulsory attendance or academic competition, an interconnection with a wider community, parent and other adult involvement, and learning by doing. The desire of the student was seen as the motivating element in learning (Avrich, 1980). Some of the historical and contemporaneous threads that shaped the schools included libertarian thought, freethinkers, secular school movements, socialism, and the American abolitionist free schools. The schools generally served as centers linked to activism around civil rights, unionism, and access to birth control. Unusual to the time, they tended to be attended and formed by people from both working class immigrant and middle class socio-economic locations (Miller, 2002), and they prioritized the co-education of girls and boys. Paul Avrich in The Modern School Movement (1980) states that when the Modern School Association of North America was disbanded, its momentum was continued with the wide range of free schools that emerged in the 1960's.

John Holt represents a path common to many people developing and practicing a radical pedagogical interest in the 1960's and 70's. The 1964 publication of How Children Fail rode on a tide of discontent with schooling. Holt's central question in this text was “of the things we teachers do, which help learning and which prevent it?” (1982, p. 54) From observing students in

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19 In 1906 the school had a student population to 126 students from an initial 30; it had grown not only as a school, but also as a centre of revolutionary action and as such was hatred by authorities for being anti-governmental, antimilitarist, anti-religious and a co-ed and sexually promiscuous environment; in 1906 it was forcibly closed (Avrich, 1980).
20 There was a great deal of variance by the schools administered by the Ferrer Association. While the intention was to expand across all ages, the majority of the schools were for younger students, and many of them were part time Sunday Schools (Avrich, 1980).
21 In the literature of the time, methods of learning by doing were sometimes termed ‘integral’ or organic education.
22 This text was reprinted with additional commentary in 1982.
math classes in terms of how they interacted with the teacher and the content, Holt came to believe that in school, children's first concern becomes self-defense against failing. This shapes all their actions within the school and effectively works to cut students off from their own common sense and curiosity. Holt came to assert that grades, tests and other calibers of success are unable to determine understanding or learning (Holt, 1982). A closely related concern was students' self-defense with regards to protecting their dignity. He argued that schooling provides a context in which the way to receive approval is to do, say, and be what the teacher wants. Because of this it is a context in which students are commonly obliged to "choose between our adult approval and [their] own self respect" (Holt, 1982, p. 238). Holt's conclusion was that most of what happens in teaching and schooling does not help learning, but rather works to diminish knowledge and reason. Most children in school fail to finish, or finish but fail to learn. Worse yet, some students learn through schooling to become chronic failures (Holt, 1982). "To a very great degree, school is a place where children learn to be stupid" (Holt, 1982, p. 263). Perhaps what carries Holt's work most significantly is a conviction that "under right circumstances they could and would do first class thinking.... We don't have to make human beings smart. They are born smart. All we have to do is stop doing the things that made them stupid" (Holt, 1982, p. 161).

Holt produced many books about the relationship between school, failure, freedom, and learning. Initially his work focused on school reformation, then on free schools specifically, but Holt's vision came to be that he did not see a place exclusively for learning. He saw the best place for children to learn as "in the world itself, in the mainstream of adult life" (Holt, 1982, p. 296). Holt became a major advocate for and contributor to, the discourse around home schooling.
and what is often termed ‘unschooling’. When the energies of the free school movement began
to dissipate, many free schoolers followed Holt in this direction.

Ivan Illich was principally responsible for influencing Holt’s abandonment of schooling
(Farenga, 1999). In 1971 Illich’s Deschooling Society was published giving voice and language
for many in the radical critique and resistance of schooling. A central argument to this work is
that school monopolizes the scope of legitimate knowledge by relying on the myth of scarcity of
information and promoting school as the only place to obtain this knowledge. Thus it fosters
individuals to develop an exceptional dependence on schools. Illich argues that the institution of
school teaches institutional values. It is through schooling that our selves and our societies
become institutionalized. This means that we, as students and as teachers, learn through
schooling to abdicate responsibility for our own growth, which promotes alienation from self and
dependency on a external official source. As a result we confuse teaching for learning, process
with substance, and become lost in a ritualization of process. In response, Illich calls for the
disestablishment of schools. This means not paying public monies or granting social privilege to
them. Connected to this, he makes a very intimate call to action when he urges unlearning
institutional values learned through schooling. This unlearning of schooling and disestablishing
school Illich calls deschooling. Illich credits Paulo Freire as highly influential to his ideas (Illich,
1971).

Paulo Freire is known for his ideas on popular education and critical pedagogy; his
most influential book Pedagogy of the Oppressed was first published in 1970. Core to Freire’s
work are his convictions that education is always a political process, social organization is seeped

23 The term ‘unschooling’ was used by Holt to describe home schooling in a manner that did not
reproduce mini schools at home (Farenga, 1999). It focuses on a ‘natural’ unfolding of education
where activities are “chosen and engaged in freely by the learner (Farenga). Unschooling builds
strongly on the precedents of deschooling, but the intention of Holts work was more directed at
an individual’s relationship with learning, while Illich was more concerned with the individual’s
relationship with institutionalization.

24 Freire was not a proponent of unschooling or deschooling. However his work focused on a
radical re-visioning of the purpose and process of education.
in oppression, and change is possible. He critiques the educational practices that are normally and almost exclusively adopted as being a ‘banking system’ of education. In the banking system students are seen as ‘empty vessels’ to be filled with preformed nuggets of lifeless and irrelevant information by teachers. This system teaches credulity and passivity. It promotes the illusion that the world is fixed, thus students must adapt to it, this drive to make students adapt manipulates, co-opts and redirects the experiences and needs of the student. The banking system is based on domination and false charity, in short, it teaches how to be oppressed and thus must be rejected. We cannot get to liberatory education through the practice of banking systems; we cannot become subjects through a process of first being objects (Freire, 1999).

Freire insists that education as a process of freedom must be embraced. This means students and teachers must work together in a mutual process to “affirm women and men as beings who transcend themselves” and thus transform the world (Freire, 1999, p. 22). The goal for this process of freedom must be to make a world where it is easier to love. This liberatory practice is achieved through ‘problem posing’ methods of education which are rooted unshakably in dialogue, trust, and the material realities of the participants. This path exists in learning to decode the limiting and oppressive framework one exists in which is done by perceiving the world and one’s place in it as a system of interrelational problems and learning how to transcend these problems. This is done for one’s self, with others. It cannot be done for another, and it cannot be forced. Essential to this is the aspect of what he calls true dialogue, which necessarily embraces challenge, is honest and continuous, includes all stakeholders, and is the foundation of all aspects of education and politics. Dialogue must start with faith, contain humility, build trust and be motivated by hope. It must be a co-intentional act of critical thinking that understands indivisible solidarity between the world and people and between thinking and action. It must understand reality as a transforming process with an unpredictable outcome. This approach to learning takes the form of what Freire calls ‘conscientizaco,’ which refers to “learning to perceive
social political and economic contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (Translators Note, Freire, 1999, p. 17)

Freire found a colleague in Miles Horton, founder and director of the Highlander Folk School who dedicated his life to the revolutionary potential of democracy, a faith that poor working class people should and could be in charge of their lives, and an understanding that civil rights cannot be exclusive. According to Horton there are two ways to have a revolution:

“One is that people are desperate, and out of desperation they act, that leads to fascism. People who are desperate will follow any leader that comes along.... People are still waiting for the man on the horse to save them, but that’s not the way to salvation, they have to save themselves.... If you’re going to do it not out of desperation then you’ve got to do it on the basis of rising expectations” (Horton in Moyers, 1981)

The basis of rising expectations involves a civic engagement with the circumstances of the system one is embedded in. This is done through side stepping educational systems that shape people to work within the systems and revolutionizing education processes democratically. Thus systems are creating by and for the people who are part of them. To Horton it was clear: human beings deserve working rights, civil rights, and health care; “the system should deliver these to you, and if it doesn’t you change the system till it does.... Nothing will change until we change, until we throw off our dependence and act for ourselves” (Horton in Moyers, 1981). The process of realizing change is to look at conflict as it already exists in the system and make that hidden conflict visible. Do the work of interpreting the conflict, and confront it at the level of justice to resolve it. This is the type of work, networking, and planning that occurred at Highlander. The school provided a non-prescriptive venue based almost entirely in peer-education. The operations of the school expanded the imagination of how authority around knowledge can operate in the hands of the people. The work that occurred in direct relationship with the Highlander Folk school included freedom schools, freedom summer of 1964, and
citizenship schools, all of which fed the flames of the revolutionary potential of direct civic action and served as a strong inspiration for democratic free schools (Miller, 2002). For Horton, doing work on the edge of social change provokes response and involves risk, it is inherently dangerous work and knowing fear is critical to it (Moyers, 1981).

A.S. Neill had a very different understanding of the need for fear. He was very interested in the emergence of psychology and the idea that individuals are formed and harmed through interpersonal relationships. In 1921, after working in other schools geared in response to psychology, and being greatly influenced by Freud and Reich, Neill founded Summerhill School. The intention behind the radical practice of the school was to create a school to fit the child's psychological needs so that they could live a life of happiness. To this purpose, Summerhill was to be the school free of fear (Snitzer, 1964). Neill saw the greatest inhibitor to emotional well-being as fear, he identified children’s fear as originating from adults’ punishment and disapproval (Neill, 1960). The pedagogy of the school worked to remove punishment and disapproval by restructuring authority to eliminate coercive tactics and anonymous authority as well as systems of evaluation where fear of failure is a threat.

In 1960 A.S. Neill’s *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child Rearing* came into print and quickly became a seminal text in the free school movement. It describes the school he built to fit the child, as well as his underlying reasoning behind the school. The two most distinctive aspects of this boarding school are that academics are optional and decisions about school rules, policy, and disputes are made through a process of participatory democracy. The democratic process and a related assumption of equality of power are central to Summerhill. The guiding principle is the idea that “no man is good enough to give another his ideals” (Neill as quoted in Spring, 1998, p.103). The heart of the structure of Summerhill is that students take responsibility for their own lives, action and education free from adult coercions. Neill famously distinguished between ‘freedom’ and ‘license’ thus: “in my school a child is free to go to lessons or stay away from lessons, because that is his own affair, but he is not free to play a trumpet when others want to
study or sleep” (Neill, 1966, p. 7). To Neill, freedom is self-determination; license is interfering with another’s freedom (Neill, 1966). Although Neill was not the only person practicing education in this way, or thinking these thoughts, his school is the most famous of free schools and the measure by which most free schools are compared. Neill’s deep commitment to individualized psychology greatly shaped the focus of the free school movement.

Central themes in these divergent theoretical threads are: an analysis that education is inherently political; a conviction that schooling is central in maintaining the normative oppression of the status quo; a desire to reduce authoritarianism and fortify dignity; a critique that the most important lessons are located within the material context of the student’s life; a trust of the student; a resistance to standard schooling; an uncommon respect for self-determination of the student; a vision of education as a path to fuller citizenship, awareness and humanity; a hope that social change towards justice is possible; and the idea that education is a critical link to that change. It is emergent with these ideas that the free school movement occurred.

**The Free School Movement**

The free school movement in the North America and Britain was at its most pronounced from the 1960’s into the beginning of the 1980’s. The precise number of schools is difficult to determine; numbers range between 800 and 1500 schools across North America. Most schools were small, with 20-60 students, many start up attempts did not get off the ground, many that only lasted a short while and most left behind little, if any, documentation. Despite this, a number of publications, both small and large came out at this time. Books on free schools most typically are written by a member of the staff as first person, day-in-the-life accounts depicting
events, students and motivations in the free school, or as journals working to create a dialogue between schools. Reading through the literature, two main emphases become apparent. One is the Summerhillian emphasis, which is largely psychological in intent and liberal in politics, which envisions the school to be about creating a better environment for the child enrolled. The other is a more politically engaged, radical politic where the intent is to work towards activating a better world for one’s child to grow up in. These differing emphases create a tension within and between the texts.

The motivation behind the free school movement grew from strong criticisms that standard schools are insufficient, inappropriate, and that they teach stupidity (Holt, 1982; Gatto, 1992), passivity (Illich, 1971), dependency (Illich, 1971), and erase motivation (Dennison, 1969). As the methodology of schooling was seen to be predicated on fear (Mercogliano, 1998; Holt, 1982) and “fear and learning make lousy dance partners” (Mercogliano, 1998, p. 67), it was determined that something radically different needed to be done. While these sentiments are common to free schools generally, some free schools articulated a radical structural and political critique of schooling embedded in an analysis of oppression. This stream was articulated by Dewey as an attempt to counter the mechanizing effects of society (Novak, 1975, p. 34), and “was part of a widespread movement for social change” (Graubard in Novak, 1975, p. 35).

Many streams of schooling make up the river of educational change at this time; Montessori, Waldorf, and open schools, represent just a few. While there are shared aspects amongst these streams of schooling, what differentiates democratic free schools most distinctly from these progressive initiatives is its commitment to deschooling (Illich), unschooling (Holt) and a refusal of the banking system of education (Freire). This commitment involves: eliminating

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25 George Dennison’s *The Lives of Children*, Jonathan Kozol’s *Free Schools* and *Alternative Schools*, A. S. Neill’s *Summerhill*, M. Novak’s *Living and Learning in the Free School* (notably this was also written as part of a graduate degree), and Nigel Wright’s *Free School: The White Lion Experience* are all examples of such texts.

26 Skoae: The Journal of Alternative Education (Albany), This Magazine is about Schools (Toronto) later to become Our Schools/Our Selves, and New Schools Exchange Newsletter (Santa Barbara), are each examples of such journals.
a prescriptive path, preset curriculum, ideas of linear intellectual progressions, and other bonds of dependency between student and teacher. This includes holding at the heart a dedication to facilitating self-regulation, and centralizing the concepts of freedom and direct democracy.

Ron Miller argues that the reason the ideas and practices of free schooling were well received in the 1960’s is because it was a time where the American mainstream middle class widely began to question the role and ideology of the state (2002). The voices and resistances of the civil rights movement, the women’s liberation movement, and the resistance to the American military in Korea and Vietnam resonated to a resounding pitch, and mainstream America began to seek avenues to counter what they identified as the flaws of their own system (Miller, 2002). This was coupled with a belief that revolutionary action would bring rapid societal change. Schooling, the social institution “in which culture makes its core values and vision of the future most explicit” (Miller, 2002, p. 2), provided an avenue to critique the role of the state, gave children what was seen as an alternative, and activated societal change. This was regardless of if one sought psychological and/or political change.

While the Canadian and American contexts are similar, there are a few distinguishing factors between them. Principally is the relationship to the state. In Canada, much social change organizing tends to become interconnected with and dependent on state funding. As well Canada and the United States have a different history when it comes to private and independent schools. As a result, many free schools in Canada became, or were initiated as, publicly funded schools.27 Likely, the schools’ dependency on state funding connects to Mark Novak’s analysis that, “most Canadian free schools began by leaning toward A.S. Neill’s philosophical position. They demonstrated a liberal concern for the individual student…” (Novak, 1975, p. 37). This stance is more likely to be acceptable to the state, then a more explicitly political one. In 1968 the Hall Dennis Report was produced by the Ontario Department of Education entitled “Living and

27 The relationship between free schools and public schools is addressed later in this chapter in Reconciliations.
Learning: report of Provincial Committee on Aims and Objectives of Education in the Schools of Ontario.” This proposed a dramatic change to state schooling that, if adopted, would result in standard schooling reflecting many of the practices of free schools. While never implemented, and widely dismissed, the report carried a legitimizing weight for many start up schools.

Toronto was a particular hot bed for free schools and the free school movement. In addition to a number of schools and educational adventures happening in Toronto in the 1960’s and 70’s, it also produced “This magazine is about schools” from 1966- 1969, this included contributions from and letter exchanges between key figures such as A.S. Neill, George Dennison, Marshall McLuhan, and Paul Goodman and served as a discussion forum for free schools and similar initiatives. It also worked as a notice board for communication of new schools and events across North America. In 1970, This Book is About Schools was published which was a collection of articles previously published in the magazine.

Looking through the free school literature, I particularly sought out texts that had an explicit political stance, and worked to incorporate power analyses, particularly around gender and ‘race.’ What I found is limited at best. What follows is a text-by-text reading for these themes. In addition to these texts, some journal contributors such as Sarah Spinks and Satu Repo wrote articles explicitly looking at gender with themes such as girls developing professional aspirations other than mother and housewife (Spinks, 1970), advocating for sexual education (Repo, 1970; Spinks, 1970); however they are not approached in a particularly critical way. The questions they do ask do not seem to be expanded upon or to illicit responses from the dominant voices in the movement.

A.S. Neill’s Summerhill, as a revolutionary text, is limited. Throughout the text Neill has a desire of mastery. For each problematic circumstance illustrated, he has a definite explanation—which he comes to through psychology. This psychological framework is used in a manner that does not allow room for consideration of structural oppressions. Neill reduces racism

28 For more on Alcoff’s (1991) ‘desire of mastery’ see Knowledge Claims in Methodology.
to an individual pathology of misguided unhappy people. His theory is that people who are without fear are happy, and happy people who are able to independently contemplate their world, will have no need to cause harm to others and will thus transcend racism. This is a reductive and oversimplistic analysis, and perhaps what lead to Kozol’s assertion that Summerhill was one of the most racist schools in England (Miller, 2002, p. 71). The school was built on how Neill understood the needs of boys; while he states that the school probably works better for boys than girls, he does not explore this (Neill in Snitzer, 1964, p.16). Neither does he question or address the institutional or sociological division of gender roles, but assumes gender scripts to be inevitable. The school is a private school with a considerable tuition, it draws students from an affluent socio-economic standing. Neill does not ask nor address what possible connections there may be between Summerhill’s practice and ideology of freedom and socio-economic standing. A further limitation of Summerhill is that the issue of power in the democratic process is largely overlooked. Neill does not problematize what happens to minority concerns when practicing the rule of the majority other than to state that children in circumstances such as Summerhill are used to thinking beyond strictly individual needs and have a greater sense of community justice, unfairness and inequality. However, he does not expand on how this works or on dynamics of power within these processes.

Dennison’s The Lives of Children (1969) is distinct for the way the student is maintained as central to the school, pedagogy, and text. This book is a testimony to a school that revolved around the children. The relationship between student and teacher is centralized as core to the purpose of teaching. This text is also striking for the degree of humility, acknowledgement of imperfection and self-reflection Dennison demonstrates throughout the book. The First Street School, which is described in this text, was founded intentionally for the urban poor, it is located within a multi-racial, low-income neighbourhood in New York City’s Lower East Side. ‘Race’ and racism are addressed prominently in this text. Dennison believed that hatred based on race is a learned experience. Largely it is considered that racism will be diminished, if not eradicated,
through people becoming psychologically healthier the building of strong relationships and a greater sense of interconnection across races. Through this process it is hoped that colour, and thus, racism would disappear. Dennison identifies racism in his students strictly in terms of name calling and otherwise individualized activities. He does not address more systematic structures informing racialization and racism. Passages strongly adhering to stereotypically gendered typecasting and sexual division of labour are common, normalized, and unproblematized throughout the book. He describes female students displaying highly sexualized behaviours that are often symptomatic of having experienced sexual abuse, yet this is never discussed or identified as a concern. However economic class is seen as a complex issue that is actively worked with throughout the text. As is the often ageist relationship between children and adults, a power relationship not often addressed in educational theory or elsewhere, is critically and deeply engaged within this text as well as many texts of the free school movement.

Kozol’s *Free Schools* (1972) in many ways reads as a text on how to build a free school. In this text Kozol addresses the importance of building networks between free schools and how to address internal and external bureaucracy with little or no money. He is both dedicated to and has trepidations about the free school movement. Freire was a strong influence on Kozol (Kozol, 1972). In this text he maintains power, particularly racialized and bureaucratic power, to be of central concern. He intertwines an analysis of radical pedagogy with an analysis of systematic racism. He sees great harm in packaging the psychological retreatist Summerhillian approach as radical or revolutionary. He is highly critical of much of the movement, which he sees as white folks trying to abdicate their white privileged power and separate themselves from the system. He identifies the very ability to be in the position to retreat is “dependant on profiting from the consequences of...a structure of oppression” (1982, p. 19). Kozol’s intention is to reclaim the revolutionary potential of free schools. He suggests that for this to happen white

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29 This text was republished with the bulk of the content unchanged in 1982 as *Alternative Schools: A Guide for Educators and Parents.*
counterculture needs to acknowledge and negotiate in revolutionary ways the power that they have.

Kozol charges that the format of free schools, as commonly adopted in the white counterculture, ignores the pragmatic oppressions that many people, particularly poor and black students face. Likewise, it ignores the unequal consequences of their actions; particularly that poor black youth cannot so easily choose to join back into the system if they drop out. He advocates that building schools to fit the child (one of Neill's raison d'être) means incorporating an analysis of that child's structural location. To do this he recommends schools remain small and address the specific needs of the community they are located within. Kozol has more room for standard application of ideas around teaching and curriculum than many other advocates of free schools. Significant in this text is the theme of power. He leaves this warning for free school practitioners: "It is an unhappy truth, however, in many Free Schools I have known, that nobody wants to believe that power is a real thing, that it is so real that it exists even among ten people, that it cannot be ignored." (Kozol, 1982 p. 27). This is an apt description of my experiences and readings of free schools, certainly evident in the work of Dennison and Neill.

Nigel Wright's Free School: The White Lion Experience (1989) is a smaller publication about the White Lion School in England. This text is interesting because its author, a former teacher of the school, is highly critical of both the intentions and the results of the school. From its description, students at the White Lion were uncommonly unrestrained. White depicts a painful disconnect between the teachers' ideas of free and democratic schooling and the lived reality of it. He talks about the staff wanting very much for the school to be a parent participatory school, yet finding that most of the parents identified this as a sign that the teachers were abdicating their roles and responsibilities. This tension was further exasperated by the repeated mention that staff did not approve of the more traditional path that most parents asked the school to take on. As a result the leaders of the school were in the ironic and patronizing position of wanting to be democratic, but wanting the people to be different than they were. They did not
trust the people’s analysis of their situation. This highlights a common aspect to free schooling, and social change initiatives generally, which is the imposition of ideas to define another’s path to freedom. While antithetical to the hopes of the free school movement, this is none-the-less a practice that exists within it.

**Contemporary Free Schools**

Much of the life energy going in to the free and democratic school movement of the 1960’s and 1970’s has been re-routed. Largely it has gone into the explosion of the unschooling-home schooling movement and into initiatives to grow community schools and public ‘alternative’ schools that emphasize ‘child-centered education’ and community determined education. However free schools from the height of the movement still exist today. In Canada, Windsor House and Alpha remain as the schools with the strongest continuous practical links to free schooling. Alpha School, in downtown Toronto, has consistently struggled to be a radical alternative within the system, and has many members striving to return to its democratic free school roots, however it does not currently practice as a free school (Slashinsky, 2005). However free schooling has remained central to its purpose. Windsor House has gone through many phases around its free school practice. Currently, it is actively struggling with its board to retain its free school ways. A great deal of the forces which moved them away from free school approaches experienced by both of these schools are because of their position as publicly funded schools, and resultant school board co-optations and pressures to standardize. This is a fate experienced by most Canadian free schools, as a result many from the 1960’s and 70’s continue to exist in name today, but have, through the processes of public school bureaucracy, become almost indistinguishable from standard schools.
Other schools continue to exist. Summerhill continues to thrive, directed by A.S. Neill's daughter Zoë Redhead, it operates remarkably similarly to how it did in its early days (http://www.summerhillschool.co.uk). Texts such as Matthew Appleton's *A Free Range childhood: Self Regulation at Summerhill School* (2000) continue to come out of the school. Albany Free School, the school that Neill said its founder Mary Leue would be "daft to try" likewise thrives as one of the most impressive schools I know of (Mercogliano, 2003a). Recently Chris Mercogliano, a co-director at Albany has produced two books about The Free School, *Making It Up As We Go Along* (1998) and *Teaching the Restless: One School's Remarkable No-Ritalin Approach to Helping Children Learn and Succeed* (2003). *Making It Up As We Go Along* follows in the free school movement tradition of documenting the praxis of the school.

Central to The Albany Free School is the idea that freedom exists within community and that the notion of community is necessarily politicized. The school is not contained within the physical, run-down brick building it occupies; it is spread throughout the neighbourhood in all sorts of ways. Students apprentice, independently explore, steward, and participate in the community around them. Likewise the initiatives of the school include the wider community, in the form of community dinners, a birth support center, housing support, public events, and naturalizing public places. Race, class, sexuality, gender, age, physical and mental abilities are understood to operate on an individual and a structurally political level throughout the students and community.

Though this school is private, they have prioritized funding possibilities beyond tuition so that the school is accessible to all members of the community it is located within.31

*Teaching the Restless* is an unusual book to come out of free school literature because although it is implicit on every page, it does not directly address Albany as a free school. This

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30 Recent court battle with the British Department of Education and Employment over Summerhill's educational philosophy notwithstanding.

31 Tuition slides to zero and no family has been turned away for financial reasons. The strategy to support this rests on the founder purchasing the building the school is located in and the school community buying, fixing, and leasing surrounding properties. This is possible because of the inner-city neighbourhood the school is located in has a shrinking population and low property value.
book is about the praxis of interacting respectfully with children and youth that have been pushed out, thrown out or dropped out of standardized school specifically in relation to being coerced onto biopsychotic drugs. Mercogliano sidesteps standard school assumptions, and describes what he has learnt to be of service to these students. Albany forbids biopsychotic drugs and instead focuses on giving space for the emotional needs of the person. It is the only book in the free school literature that I have come across that backdrops the free school for such a wide spread issue.

In addition to the schools remaining from the 1960’s and 70’s, of which the above examples are only a few. There is currently another wave of schools emerging, the Sudbury Valley School (SVS) model is one stream of this wave. The initial school founded in 1968, has more recently triggered a number of schools modeled on it. To become a SVS interested parties can purchase the ‘Planning Kit’ from the SVS web site and follow the steps outlined (http://www.sudval.org). These schools are very popular with about thirty in operation and more starting every year. An array of small press publications emerged from the school. Following in the tradition of the free school movement most of these publications are written by members of the schools and focus primarily on describing the school and individual stories of students. While following closely to the Summerhillian approach, in the reading I have done of the SVS materials, I have not found credit given concerning the origin of their ideas. The SVS concept is presented almost as if it came exclusively from the minds of the founders. SVS works with a belief at children are best left to mature naturally, without the coercion of socialization. Within this vision the students are seen as free and independent individuals who together do not have a distinct school culture (Greenberg, 1995). Typically they have a highly prohibitive tuition rate and do not concern themselves with working towards being inclusive. Generally SVS schools intentionally strive to separate themselves from the larger political context they are located in. This is the stream of schooling that exhibits the elements that Kozol was so incredibly

32 Including the Canadian Fairfield School in Wolfville, Nova Scotia.
concerned about in Free Schools and Alternative Schools as “endeavor[ing] to exist within a moral vacuum” (Kozol, 1982, p. 19) and attempting to abdicate their inherent power.

Over the past few years, there has been an increased public interest in the praxis of free and democratic schools. I suspect this is largely in resistance to increased standardization and competition in schooling as a whole. This interest seems to have the greatest force, but is not exclusive to America. When I attended the 2003 International Conference on Democratic Schooling (IDEC), hosted by Albany Free School, there were free and democratic schools from a variety of philosophies from many countries. Across the world there are many similar initiatives. There is a great deal of interesting work being done in Asia around school and test resisting and free schooling (Nagata, 2002; Asakura, 2003; Tien, 2003); a wide scale democratic, anti-standardization schooling process happening in Israel (Hecht, 2003), and powerful participatory democracy and community appropriation of schooling in the Argentinean piqueteros movement (Bordeqaray, 2004).  

Recently there have been a small number of texts coming out which bring to the subject a larger and more historic or academic scope. John Taylor Gatto’s Dumbing Us Down (1992), Joel Spring’s A Primer of Libertarian Education (1998), Ron Miller’s Free Schools. Free people: education and Democracy After the 1960’s (2002), and Matt Hern’s Deschooling Our Lives (1996) and Field Day: Getting Society out of School (2003) are some examples. What these books offer are: a contemplation of the historical context of the schools and the ideologies shaping them, a wider consideration of the radical potential and limitations in free schooling, and a compassionate engagement with the relationship between schooling our children and shaping our society.

33 Soledad Bordeqaray, a woman involved with starting a participatory democratic school in Argentina as part of the unemployed workers reappropriation and resistant movement came with me to Windsor House for a tour of the democratic process used there. She found what she saw at Windsor House to have many similarities to what she was familiar with in Argentina.
34 Gatto’s work in Dumbing Us Down builds in many ways on the work of John Holt.
35 Hern’s work in many ways builds on the work of Ivan Illich.
In terms of how the literature of democratic free schools address space, I have not found a single text that centralizes it. However, neither have I found a text that does not address it in some way. Whether it is talking about the importance of informal drop in spaces (Appleton, 2000), or space where students have opportunity to try things out free from the scrutiny of adult monitoring (Mercogliano, 1998), the importance of being outdoors (Mercogliano, 1998; Dennison, 1969; Neill, 1960), or of getting out of the school building and into the community (Mercogliano, 1998; Dennison, 1969). A school being assigned a district school building (like Windsor House) is rare; most schools occupy houses, old reclaimed school buildings, people's homes, church basements, or otherwise make-shift locations. Some of the more affluent schools, such as Summerhill and Sudbury Valley make their home on large converted pastoral estates. Almost every school has encountered a battle in maintaining its space. Most are forced to dedicate time to the difficulties stemming from the pressures of building inspectors, zoning codes, and educational regulatory boards, which seem to be exerted with unusual fervor with regards to free schools. One of Kozol's more famous lines, that seems to have resonance throughout free schools is: "it is easier to start a whore house, a liquor store, a pornography shop or a bookie joint than it is to start a little place to work with children" (Kozol, 1972, p. 27-28). In the end, this is often what causes democratic free schools to shut their doors.

Reconciliations

There are many aspects of free schools that I find a challenge to reconcile with my hopes for radical pedagogy. A principal difficulty is the exclusionary and individualistic tendencies within the movement that often become a white privileged retreat from social justice action. "Let us not ignore that the fact that these [free schools] are largely white, middle-class ideas" concludes Mercogliano in Making It Up As We Go Along, (1998, p. 136). The free school movement has principally been lead, organized, attended and documented by white, middle-class
men folk. In my investigation into how democratic and free-schools self identify in regards to difference, ‘race,’\textsuperscript{36} sexuality, ability and class in their web presences\textsuperscript{37} (Mills, 2002) only Windsor House and Albany identified inclusively as a priority of the school. That free schools serve the interest of white middle class folk to the exclusion of everybody else is a most powerful and urgent critique of free schools. It is one I do not wish to undermine, for it needs to be earnestly considered, addressed, and overcome; I do not believe that the exclusionary history of free schools is inevitable in the future of democratic free schooling.

A vocal component of this critique is around the abandonment of credentials such as test scores, grades, and diplomas. An argument is made that forfeiting credentials is fine for middle and upper class white kids who have a network of social capital to prop-themselves up with, but in this racist, stratified society, the risk is much greater for people without this social capital. In this position there is often an assumption that public schooling, and its related credentials, provides a path to equity. Michelle Fine eloquently articulates this as a myth in her text Framing Dropouts (1991): Initially, she intended to look at why so many Black, poor students in the inner-city America do not finish school. Instead she shifted her research question to ask, why so many remain in school given the schools’ apparent commitment to their failure. One participant, working towards high school completion poignantly describes his motivation to finish school stemming from not wanting to become the Black man on the subway asking for change, yet being cognizant, even as he struggles, of the futility of his path, as he is aware that man likely has a diploma himself (Fine, 1991). The promise of schooling, for this participant, is vastly insufficient to hold the promise of equity.

\textsuperscript{36} All the free school literature I have found addressing ‘race’ addresses Black and sometimes White; no other racialized locations are addressed showing how severely limited this discourse is. In this section I use the word ‘black’ mirroring the literature, writing against the assumption of white yet doing so acknowledging its serious limitations.

\textsuperscript{37} This study looked at the web presence of thirty-five contemporary free schools, for how they self-identify, and what, if any, attention is given to prioritizing inclusively. It is limited by the fact that schools with more resources are much more likely to have web presences. Many of these sites have since added a standard ‘this school does not discriminate on the basis of race, colour, or gender’ in their admissions sections.
It is imperative to remember the promise of equity through schooling as a myth cloaking hazards. William Upski Wimsatt in No More Prisons (1999) addresses this in his chapter “That’s fine for white kids like you, but my children need a high school diploma.” He asks if the need for the diploma is real or if it is an addiction to school. While not dismissing public school transformations in entirety, Upski Wimsatt outlines how public school in general not only doesn’t work for structurally oppressed students but also causes damage. These damages include, but are not limited to the associated feelings of inadequacy, disheartenment, lack of esteem which results from dropping out or failing, “learning to associate being smart with being white” (Upski Wimsatt, 1999, p. 70), and “learning that we can’t believe our own experience” (Asiba Tupanhach as qt in Upski Wimsatt, 1999, p. 70). Upski Wimsatt writes that “young people are being taught to hate public life in pre-prison-like places called public schools” (Upski Wimsatt, 1999, p. 152), and highlights other, more strategic possibilities that are being tried: “There is a long tradition of black people educating themselves in prison or dropping-out of school and succeeding without a diploma.... Black families have always found secret ways to educate themselves, or they wouldn’t be ‘free’ today” (Upski Wimsatt, 1999, 68). Upski Wimsatt’s basic argument is that many ‘oppressed’ people are doing home schooling, self-education, and parent run schools, so it must be acknowledged as possible and supported. He doesn’t spend much time exploring barriers to doing it, asking why more people are not doing it, or addressing the possibility of the value of social capital of the credentials.

Free schools often dismiss the need and pursuit of credentials for good reason. When the questions are asked, what will assist our children, youth, and communities to thrive? (Hern, 2005) What will foster the growth of equity and a respect for diversity? It is unlikely that the rituals and curriculum of schooling will be the response. The drive to meet the requirements to achieve the credentials often diverges energies from, and obscures the ability to, identify and take action around the conditions of one’s context, inhibiting social change. What has been critically
overlooked in the history of free schooling is that sometimes, those credentials serve an important strategic purpose, allowing communities or individuals more options to thrive.

Wright in The White Lion Experience (1989) addresses how the mostly middle class staff were regularly at odds with the mostly working class parents around appropriate paths of action. The parents felt a need for greater conformity to standardization, which was dismissed as an uninformed position by the staff. This dismissal fails the very principles of participatory democracy and self regulation the school was attempting to realize. Unfortunately this is a story common to many free schools and radical education endeavors more generally. Kozol addresses this as a concern in Free Schools (1972) when he implores people involved in free schooling to consider the radical potential of assisting students in passing tests without subscribing to the related acceptance of that test as a measure of success. The Citizenship Schools emerging from the Highlander Folk School are an example of an efficient strategy to address the context of an imposed situation. Citizenship schools were a response to state laws that required ‘Negros’ to pass a literacy test to be permitted their right to vote. The schools were kitchen table literacy groups, which used the Bill of Rights as text and had the purpose of assisting participants to pass the test—not necessarily to learn to read. It was largely effective because it met the needs of that context (Bledsoe, 1969). Key in this is the role of self-determination within the strategy. There is no one path or point of entry in social change; unequivocally resisting credentials may not be the most prudent or radical path. It is imperative that room be made for multiple sites of action to occur simultaneously.

The relationship to public schooling is another point that is difficult to reconcile. Ron Miller, in Free Schools, Free People (2002), argues that the state is invested in maintaining a technocratic society, which is necessarily oppressive. As such, it is unable to support, or fund institutions such as free schools that are counter to technocracy. This argument was pervasive in the 1960’s and 1970’s free school discourse when it was seen as possible to escape from society
and government. At this time, particularly in the States, the vast majority of free schools were privately funded precisely because of this combined distrust in the interest in the government, and a belief that it was possible to step outside of that impact. Audre Lorde articulates this concern with partnering with the government most eloquently in her essay "The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House" (1984). Lorde states that working within the master’s house, and defining it as the only source of support, will never bring about genuine change. Instead, it will result in a diversion of energies and being subject to the “old and primary tool of all oppressors to keep the oppressed occupied with the master’s concerns” (p. 113). So often the result of state funding is the shape of the resistance movement begins to fit nicely into what the state is willing to accommodate. This presents the danger that our imagination is limited to what the state allows us to see as possible. It is often accompanied by a growing sense of dependence on the state for survival. Being state funded increasingly means being subjugated to high levels of centralization, standardization and bureaucracy, largely if not entirely, unrelated to the needs of the members of the school; a paradoxical dynamic to the idea of participatory democracy.

Windsor House, as both a state funded school and a free school, occupies a contradictory and precarious existence. As a result of being publicly funded, and the shifting needs of the state, Windsor House School has had at many times a great deal of its energies consumed in defending and fighting for its existence, energies that the members would much prefer to spend elsewhere. This has led to questioning their continued public funding. However, being publicly funded also means access to resources, benefits and money so that members do not have to pay for schooling, resulting in a significantly increased accessibility. Additionally, public schooling is where most kids, particularly those most oppressed, spend most of their time. Further, there is the hope that within a democratic state, it is possible to establish public institutions that work for the people of that state. The question has become how can Windsor House occupy its public school location most creatively and effectively. This dilemma has informed Windsor House’s position, which is to struggle for non-standardization within public schooling.
There is not an absolute path of grace through these dynamics. The questions of what it means to work for radical action towards equity and respect cannot be succinctly answered. It must involve multiple sites of action simultaneously, and movement towards fostering an interconnected web of self-determination. Windsor House is located within a tapestry of democratic free schooling and radical pedagogy; this is a historical, inspirational and problematic context. Developing a sense of this context can help bring awareness of weaknesses, a sense of connection, and clarity of intention into present work.
Image 10: Path Through the Blackberry Brambles at Windsor House.
Methodology

Audience

This thesis is about imagining and creating non-standard spaces, both physical and imagined. It is intended for a broad audience engaged with structuring space, and negotiating rules and authority. This thesis is intended for audiences of both the discipline of Educational Studies, and those involved with the practice and discourse of free and democratic schooling. It is not intended to be an argument for reforming standardized schools to be kinder and gentler. The shifted context of free schools in general, and Windsor House in particular, is not about “calling teachers by their first name and couches” (Field note, June 23, 5848). Advocating for these types of cosmetic shifts, often considered sufficient to make a school ‘alternative,’ is in no way the objective of this paper. This thesis is written in similar form to the texts from the free school movement of the 1960’s and 70’s; it has an explanatory power for an audience who is unfamiliar with the ideas free schooling and is written to explain the workings of the school in a way which people from similar schools may be able to identify and compare practices.

Last, but not least, the knowledge claims, representations, and explanations of this thesis are intended to “contain explanatory power in relation to the subjects/objects that they were designed to represent” (Skeggs, 1997, p. 21). While acknowledging that this is my own work and I do not speak for Windsor House School, it is my hope that the content of this project will have resonance within Windsor House and be of service there. In this way, the members of Windsor House School are an intended audience for this paper. This is a complicated position as it entails my speaking to Windsor House about Windsor House. Linda Alcoff, in her essay “The Problem of Speaking for Others” asks:

38 In a discussion about alternative education a staff member joked that the attributes of calling teachers by their first name and couches seemed to be sufficient for a school to be considered alternative regardless of the schools approach to teaching, learning, education or respecting students.
Is the discursive practice of speaking for others ever a valid practice, and, if so, what are the criteria for validity.... In both the practice of speaking for as well as the practice of speaking about others, I am engaging in the act of representing the other's needs, goals, situation, and in fact, who they are. I am representing them as such and such, or in post-structuralist terms, I am participating in the construction of their subject-positions.” (Alcoff, 1991, p. 7, 9 italics in the original).

Alcoff lays out four steps to assist the practice of speaking for or about another. The first, is to carefully analyze the impetus to speak; the second, is to do the real work of “interrogat[ing] the bearing of our location and context on what it is we are saying”; the third, is to be accountable and responsible for what one says; the forth, is to analyze and “look at where the speech goes and what it does there” (Alcoff, 1991). Inspired by Alcoff’s guidance, this methodology chapter outlines the intention behind my claims to knowledge, my relationship to the topic, the process behind the production of this thesis, and the beginnings of establishing a relationship of accountability to this work.

**Knowledge Claims**

The epistemological stance from which I make knowledge claims is founded on Donna Haraway’s concept of situated knowledge (Haraway, 1991). Haraway envisions a web holding all people, technologies, and life each with a knowledge base informed, but not limited to, their situated positions in the web. The objective of this stance, is learning to converse between positions in order to foster partial connections. “The only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular” (p. 196). In this model “accounts of a ‘real’ or ‘objective’ world do not depend on a logic of ‘discovery,’ but on a power-charged social relation of ‘conversation’” (p. 198). The entirety of the web is beyond the grasp of any position, thus knowledge claims are
always partial. Pursuit of “feminist objectivity” (p. 188), as Haraway seeks in this approach, lies in the pursuit of knowledge claims that have increased resonance through the web.

I am situated with partial vision. I have made partial connections with subjects of knowledge at Windsor House School who have enhanced what I have been able to see and understand. "We do not seek partiality for its own sake, but for the sake of the connections and unexpected openings situated knowledges make possible” (Haraway, 1991, p. 196). In this stance, it is imperative to understand objects of study as agents of knowledge and, as researcher, to leave space in the imagination, processes, and understandings for the unpredictable and independent humour and knowledges of these agents.

Both Alcoff and Haraway insist on an acceptance that errors are unavoidable and warn against fostering a ‘desire for mastery’ which involves “privilege[ing] oneself as the one who more correctly understands the truth about another’s situation” (Alcoff, 1991, p. 29) or as one who has a total knowledge of a position (Haraway, 1991, p. 195). Paulo Freire has similar concerns when he warns against seeking the comfort of closing oneself into “circles of certainty” and assuming understanding (Freire, 1999, p. 20). Drawing from Haraway, supported by the ideas of Alcoff, I do not claim to present an objective ‘real’ analysis, or to eliminate accountability by proposing that all knowledge claims are of equal validity. Rather the claims of knowledge I assert here are “tuned to resonance, not dichotomy” (Haraway, 1991, p. 194).

**Me**

Because traditional objectivity is not assumed, it is imperative that I am as transparent about my biases as possible. I have feelings of respect, gratitude, and care for the people of

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39 ‘Circles of certainty’ refers to closing or imprisoning oneself into a ‘truth’ from which escape is not sought or desired. This position results in one feeling threatened and defensive if that ‘truth’ is questioned (Freire, 1999). To Freire the role of the radical is to refuse circles of certainty and fully enter into reality “so that, knowing it better, he or she can better transform it. This individual is not afraid to confront, to listen [or] to see the world unveiled. This person is not afraid to meet the people or to enter into dialogue with them” (Freire, 1999, p. 21).
Windsor House. I have deep commitment to the ideas, practice, and future of this, and similar, school spaces. I see powerful work going on in these spaces that is worth note and celebration. I feel this way not only because they dare to go against what is standard, but also because of the strong ethic of care, and the nature of the lessons about self regulation and relational living that can be fostered there.

Overall, my politics and motivation within the discourse of free schooling are rooted solidly within a feminist socialist intention that is buttressed with regrettable liberal habits and an uncertain reliance on anarchist tendencies. I consider myself a strategic constructionalist; I take the stance that if there is a human nature that exists beyond the reaches of sociology, it is beyond our collective ability to identify it. As we cannot know the confines of our biology, it is strategically imperative to push the confines of our sociology. I position myself as a critical postmodern feminist with material leanings and have the goal of impacting change. This means I am dedicated to the practice of picking apart that which is assumed as normal, and that I refuse the master narrative in favour of fractured and partial narratives.

Advocating feminism means working from assumptions that power constitutes all dynamics and that interpersonal and structural dynamics inform one another. Hegemonic power functions through, but is not limited to, aspects of ‘gender,’ ‘sexuality,’ ‘ability,’ age, ‘race’, culture, and space. In any critical engagement it is necessary to tease out dynamics of power. While I embrace a postmodern frame, I understand that popular imaginings of reality form reality and must be engaged with in order to feel change at the day-to-day material level. While I understand life is not possible without inflicting harm and hurt, my goal is to change behaviour to minimize the harm inflicted.

40 The quotations around these terms are intended to indicate the term as a construct, and not a definite thing.
I am a White, Anglo, atheist, bisexual, middle-class, mostly able-bodied, thirty-one year old, Canadian female graduate student.\textsuperscript{41} Born in Nova Scotia, where my family has long standing colonial roots, my parents and I moved to Victoria, British Columbia when I was an infant. Victoria is a small, disproportionately wealthy, highly regulated, and calm island city. After two years of daycare, I began my formal schooling in the standard public school system. By the close of grade one, my father was determined to remove me from this process. His motivation came from his deep dislike of his own schooling experience, contact with Rochdale,\textsuperscript{42} reading A. S. Neill’s \textit{Summerhill},\textsuperscript{43} and his experience as a casual volunteer at a small free school in Lunenberg County, Nova Scotia. When I was seven years old, I started Sundance Elementary School, a Summerhill inspired progressive alternative public school that functioned with student-directed learning, a high degree of student mobility, an emphasis on emotional well-being, and without a system of evaluation, assessment, or prescriptive curriculum.

My mother had trepidations around Sundance’s pedagogy but took a leap of faith and agreed to try out the school because of how impressed she was with the kindness of the staff and the respectful ways in which they interacted with me. After six years at Sundance, I attended standard public junior high and high schools, then, a few years later, completed an honours degree in Women’s Studies at the University of Victoria. As a young adult I spent five years as a caregiver to an unschooling home learner. Later I spent a few years running a program in a public community school for the youth of two very small, racially stratified and isolated villages on the West Coast of Vancouver Island. Although children have always been a big part of my life, I do not have any of my own.

In my experiences with standard and feminist pedagogical practices I often found myself feeling frustrated and ill at ease; these feelings began my first day of junior high and became

\textsuperscript{41} Each of these identifiers is imprecise and contested.
\textsuperscript{42} Rochdale was a co-operative student run residence and free school university in the late 1960’s in Toronto, Canada.
\textsuperscript{43} See \textit{Foundations} in \textit{Literature Review} for more on A. S. Neill and Summerhill.
more pronounced through high school and into university. I attribute this to a disjuncture between the lessons I learnt about process, learning, and teaching in these settings compared to those I learnt from radical pedagogy. As a result, during university I began to focus my academic work on this disjuncture. Through this engagement I began to understand that many of my experiences and lessons from radical pedagogical praxes rested outside of what many of my colleagues were imagining as possible, yet may be of use in addressing their objectives of anti-oppressive education. I began to understand my situated position as a place from which to pursue communication that resonates across boundaries of pedagogical approaches. When I entered graduate studies in the specialization of Feminist Approaches to Social Justice in Education in the department of Educational Studies at the University of British Columbia my intention was to document radical pedagogical practices for those unfamiliar with them so that they could more easily be imagined as possible, and simultaneously to critically engage with those practices using the lessons of deconstruction I had learnt through feminist theory.

Shortly after moving to Vancouver for graduate work, I established contact with Windsor House School and requested permission to do a three-month, fifty-hour placement at the school for an elective course “Women as Agents of Change: A Practicum in Women’s Studies.” Requirements for this course included a journal, a cumulative report, and in-class presentation.\textsuperscript{44} The people at Windsor House graciously welcomed me to the school. While I was there, I was invited by the vice-principal and members of the staff to root my master’s thesis research at Windsor House.

Originating from American Black and Chicana feminist academics who identified their own racialization as significant sources of knowledge to bring into the research process (De Andrade, 2000; Hill Collins, 1999), it has become common practice for qualitative researchers to position themselves as ‘insider’ or ‘outsider.’ These terms are generally applied broadly to refer

\textsuperscript{44} There are occasional references throughout this paper to experiences and documents from the time of this practicum, however as I was not in the school as the role of researcher, these references are slight and unspecific.
to membership status about the group one is researching. Often this is unnecessarily reliant on an idea of a stable coherent self (Preissle, 1999) and provides little information to the reader. I am not an ‘insider’ at Windsor House; because I have no children I am not a parent, because I have no teacher’s license or position I am not a member of the staff; because of my age I am not a student. Yet, it is imprecise to position myself entirely as an ‘outsider.’ My social status is akin to the predominate members of the group. My educational history provides me with an informed knowledge base. My experience as a practicum student, Windsor House’s concept of community member extending to community volunteer, and the personal relationships developed through the research process (Preissle, 1999) each trouble the notion of my identifying as ‘outsider.’ That said, and bearing Stacey’s warning against the “delusion of alliance” (1988) that can occur within feminist practices of ethnographic research methods, I am not an ‘insider’ of the space I am depicting.

**The Topic**

My decision to ask the research question: *what lessons are embedded in the consumption of space at Windsor House* was inspired through my practicum. During that time I found myself gravitating towards structured events where I felt I knew what to do, and found myself uncertain as to how to engage with the apparent unstructured randomness of the school. Two related realizations occurred upon reflection of this. The first is that in my childhood, I excelled in this self-directed learning environment that was now causing me discomfort. The second was that other public spaces with mixed age, seemingly random activities, such as community centres, libraries, and parks do not inspire me to feel at a loss for how to engage. These two realizations worked together to lead me to understand that I had developed strong, visceral expectations about behaviour within a school building, expectations that I did not have as a child and that were being challenged at Windsor House. As Hern states: “people know, almost instinctively, how to act in a
school building” (2003, p. 76). This is the genesis that shaped my research project around the questions of what is learnt from the space of this school.

Academic processes and outcomes are conspicuously absent in this project. This is not because I do not value academic pursuits; nor is it because I wish to obscure or cloak how this occurs. Rather this decision is based on the observation that many conversations between ‘free schoolers’ and ‘standard schoolers’ revolve around the criteria established by the ‘standard schoolers’ as the most pertinent to education, specifically, curriculum achievement. While this can be an interesting discussion, it is a challenging one in which to communicate the shifted and distinctive educational context of free schools. Further highly controversial ideas, such as children not needing to be taught to read, inevitably become paramount in this discussion. This often sparks controversy, defensiveness, and fear, which severely limits the discussion.

For related reasons, I have made intentional choices not to unduly shape this project as a comparison with standard schooling. This comparison often results in a competition for notions of ideal pedagogies, a retreat to oppositional binary stances, and an inability to hear and speak across them. I do not intend to present the praxis of Windsor House as an ideal, nor do I wish to spend my efforts engaged in a competition for the best path for standardizing schooling. I do not support the idea that schooling ought to be standardized. In my choice to start with the school building, I am hoping to initiate this paper around that which has broad range familiarity. Through focusing on the subtleties of the school space, I hope to communicate the context and the forum in which learning occurs at this free school. This decision is predicated on my understanding that form shapes content, and that process is product (Freire, 1999).

My impetus to speak comes from a desire to communicate in a way that resonates with multiple positions in free schooling, standard schooling and feminism. My experience in each of these areas positions me to do the work of bridging between them. While I do not seek, nor hope for, a path of convergence between them, I do think that more information and clearer communication is useful. Additionally, but related, free schools often face external pressures to
conform and standardize. To contest this Windsor House and other free schools are working to create, and requesting the creation of, more documentation and opportunities to share stories. It is hoped that an increased provision of information will be a tool to better position themselves to advocate against the forces of standardization and for their continued survival. This thesis is intended to be of service to this hope.

Field Work

What constitutes ‘the field’ in this fieldwork is not natural or pre-given (Emerson et al., 2001). I limited the field to the documents, people and space of the Cloverley site, and adjoining parkland of Windsor House School. This same question could have been addressed with the field expanded to include fieldtrips, off-grounds activity, web presence, community events, and personal homes, all of which are integral parts of the space of Windsor House. My limits were based on the desire to make the scope of the project more manageable; as it was, the size and scope of the field was rather unwieldy.

Permission

With the informal invitation from members of staff at Windsor House to conduct research, I sought and received permission from the North Vancouver School Board, and UBC ethical review board. I then sought and received formal consent from Windsor House, in which the vice-principal agreed to oversee my presence in the school. Although this was sufficient to meet the requirements of the ethical review board, I extended the process of permission by writing into my project that fieldwork would be contingent on school council approval.45 On Thursday May 13, 2004 I went to Windsor House to introduce a resolution to allow the research to go ahead; although I was fairly confident it would pass, I was also nervous. The first thing I had to do was learn the process to introduce a resolution.

45 For details on the workings and decision-making structure of school council see Making Rules in Rules and Governance.
I approached a teacher familiar to me who was at the sign in sheets doing paperwork. She told me I needed to write the resolution out on a piece of paper—any piece of paper, write “B.I.R.T.” on the top to stand for “Be It Resolved That,” give the paper to the council, and be at council to defend it. As an afterthought she told me that because I am an adult, I needed three students to sign the bottom of it.

Feeling a bit sheepish, I walked up and down the hallway looking into rooms for students to approach. Most rooms seemed big and intimidating and I felt I would disturb a lot of people by going in and asking. It felt strange to have this work, which was so important to me, be at the discretion of a group of youth. I don’t know when I have been dependant on the approval of kids for permission to do something I wanted; times I have asked for input have felt more like my call than a structural requirement.

I went into the small Multimedia room, introduced myself, and said what I needed. There were six students in this room (age 13-16)- five boys and one girl. The girl and a boy were reclined in the far corner, he with his arm around her. Two boys were working on computers and two more were sitting on chairs behind them. In general the students all wore dark clothes, baseball caps, lots of denim, and baggy pants. They were not ‘clean cut,’ but rather had a sort of ‘alternative,’ even sullen edge. They seemed unsuspicious of me; I thought they would be suspicious. When I started telling them what I was looking for, they cut me off and said “sure I’ll sign” and got a pen. They were very friendly and receptive and made small chat with me as the card I had written the resolution on was passed around and signed by everyone.

Afterwards, while I walked down the hall looking for the student council meeting, one of the fellows who signed the resolution walked past me “Are you
looking for the council?” he asked. He showed me where it was (Flying Pig Room) and held open the door for me. (Fieldnote, May 13, 04, 389-432).

My resolution stated “B.I.R.T. Sarah Mills may conduct research for her M.A. on how Windsor House School uses space.” At council there was some discussion about this resolution. One person asked if they would be able to see what I wrote. Questions were asked regarding on what it would focus. A suggestion was made that I conduct the research in two parts, with the second part in the new location so that the effects of the forced move could be documented. Other than myself, there was one staff member and four students at the meeting. It passed five for, no against, with no abstains. The resolution was posted in the newsletter. By introducing the research as a resolution I embedded the condition that at anytime a counter-resolution could be passed revoking permission; this did not occur.

The week after the council meeting, I introduced the project at a staff meeting. There was a strong sense of timeliness expressed and lots of interest in expanding the research to include the next school space as well as requests to provide assistance in communicating with the school board. Feedback was positive about my intention to identify myself with a nametag. It was suggested I should differentiate myself from the North Vancouver School Board (N.V.S.B.) adding “friendly” to my nametag. With this in mind, I modified the sign on the door to include the statement that this is an independent project, not connected to the N.V.S.B. No concerns about my presence were expressed although a few members, through their body language, seemed unsure.

Because of the high degree of movement and the numbers of persons within the space, the standard practice of individualized consent was not used. Instead, I provided multiple ways for people to be informed of the research and to avoid participating. To this end, I placed an announcement in the weekly newsletter describing the research, posted a notice that research is

46 The school board’s recent audit and resultant ‘recommendations’ had brought many observers into the school. As a result, during the time of my observations the school’s continued existence was under threat. Because of this there was a tone of heightened anxiety about being observed.
underway on the entrance of the school while I was present, and wore a nametag which said
“Sarah, Researcher” while I was in the school. Anyone who wished themselves or their child to
be excluded, in part or in total, could avoid me, or inform me, and they would not be included.
Optional forms confirming exclusion were made available upon request. No person contacted me
to be excluded; I am unaware if people avoided me. Anytime I talked to someone within the
context of the research, I verbally confirmed consent first by telling them that I was doing
research and asking if they were willing to talk with me about it.

Methods

Ethnography is a social science research strategy focused on “making the implicit
explicit” (Stack, 2002) through the “recording of human behavior in cultural terms” (Wolcott as
quoted in Creswell, 1998, p. 39). Although this project does not have the breadth or depth to be a
full ethnography, it is guided by ethnographic motivations and uses the ethnographic strategies of
participant observation, observant participation, guided tours, discussions, and reviewing field-
based documents.

Participant observation is the dominant method of inquiry in this project; it involves
establishing a place within a field “on a relatively long-term basis in order to investigate,
experience and represent the social life and social processes that occur in that setting...”
(Emerson et al., 2001). For this project, I not only observed participants in the space, but also
placed a heavy emphasis on my own participation in the space. Loretta Lees (2001) argues that
looking at the inhabitation of space for relationships between built environments and social
practices necessitates the ethnographic researcher’s active and practical engagement with that
space. This is echoed strongly by Thrift who argues that in this type of work, there is “no hiding
place” (Thrift, 2000, p. 556), researchers “must become observant participants rather than
participant observers” (Thrift, 2000, p. 556; Lees, 2001).
I conducted forty-four hours of fieldwork between May 12, and June 25, 2004 in one to five hour durations. Thirty-nine of the field hours were spent during regular school hours; the remaining time was spent in staff and evening meetings. I participated in both informal and formal activities. Sometimes I was interactive in what was going on around me, playing games, participating in a lesson, digging holes, photocopying documents; sometimes, generally at meetings, I took a quieter approach; as participation in activities is not mandatory, this is consistent with regular use of the space. At all times I was working to understand and engage with the space by the norms of the school. I tried to follow the rules; I do not know if I did. I never had a complaint issued,\textsuperscript{47} and rarely did someone ask me to change my behaviour.\textsuperscript{48}

Initially, I had planned to conduct a series of interviews for this project. Because of a concern for time in the field, and the need to be physically in the school space, this idea transformed into conducting semi-structured guided tours of the school. I expected I would be able to conduct a number of detailed tours of the entire school and grounds, complete with stories and information. As the process of ethnography is dialectical and emergent there is apt to be some changes during the course of inquiry (Eder and Corsaro, 1999); this was indeed the case. The school was big, very big, with lots of small spaces. It quickly became clear that the length of time demanded for a complete tour was unreasonable to expect of any participant, and attempts even at partial tours resulted in superficial conversations; there was just too much to talk about. Instead, I asked people to take me to places where they spent time, and while in those spaces discussed them. The dominant questions that emerged were ‘who spends time here?’ ‘Who doesn’t spend time here?’ ‘Why?’ ‘What can you do here?’ ‘What can’t you do here?’ and ‘How do you know?’ Additional sources that contributed to my knowledge of the field include: weekly

\textsuperscript{47} For more information about complaints and knowing the rules, see \textit{Rules and Governance}.

\textsuperscript{48} Twice, I was asked to change my behaviour. Both times it was asking me to move a conversation out of a space others were trying to work in.
newsletters, Windsor House list serve, web archives, as well as the room memory walks and room use surveys conducted by Windsor House.49

Going into this research, my intentions were to participate and observe in the space in a range of places and activities, and to engage with people in the space about how they were using it. I hoped to spend time outdoors, in large classrooms, small rooms, planned activities, academic lessons, a variety of meetings, spontaneous activities and ‘hanging out’ in the space. I planned to spend some of my time in one place watching movement, other time being guided through the space by school members, and other time moving around the space on my own inclination. For each day of fieldwork, after having written up and reflected on my previous time at the school, I would develop a list of objectives for my day. For example June 4th my stated intentions for the day were to “take time out to write and do some of the following: attend school council meeting; attend a class; find out more room council times; follow up on ‘Sea’s’ offer to do a tour; check in with computer room guys” (Fieldnote, June 4, 04, 2310-16). Rarely did I follow the list. That day my end of the day summary of activities were “math class in the castle; chat with ‘Kay’ in flying pig room; puppet show in the cottage; write in castle; tour with parent ‘Elle’ in the art room; making bagels with ‘Tea’ in kitchen; write in library; chat with ‘Tea’ in quiet library; soccer in back field” (Fieldnote, June 4, 04, 2317-25). My decisions for my activities while at the school were based on a mix of my daily and overarching intentions and my response to the circumstances I found myself in. By the end of my fieldwork, I covered my objectives and was satisfied with my participation. If I were to do it again, I would add more time so that I could have conducted interviews. As it was, I was just beginning to feel I was getting my bearings by the completion of the fieldwork. Because activities are not standardized and use of space is so fluid, I cannot know what was occurring in spaces where I wasn’t observing.

49 These surveys were instigated and conducted by members of Windsor House School in preparation for their move.
Participants

As no people withdrew, my observations included all staff, students, visiting parents, and volunteers I encountered at Windsor House. Regularly, while I was participating in or observing an activity I would ask questions about the activity. A large amount of the information was gathered in these quick exchanges. With the exception of one person, who responded with closed body language and curt responses, everybody was open and receptive to my questions. I pursued conversations only with those who demonstrated responsiveness.

Ten ‘tours’ occurred during this fieldwork. Of the tours I conducted, five were with students, one with a staff member and four with parents. All the adults were female; three students were female, one male, and in a conversation with a group of five students, four were male. The students’ ages ranged between seven and sixteen. Eight of the people I talked with appeared to be White. The tours were initiated in a variety of ways; sometimes students approached me to ask what I was doing, I approached other people after contact was made through participating in joint activities. In general, because I am more comfortable approaching quieter people, in quieter spaces, the people I talked with were those not engaged in activities with lots of people. Also, I talked to people who took the initiative and exhibited signs that they were interested in talking with me.

Relations with people

Many people writing about methodology express a concern about disrupting the processes one is observing (Eder and Corsaro, 1999). Jane Rule dismisses this as a “worship of the objective that comes out of the fantasy fiction of science…. of course all present physics says the experimenter changes the experiment; there isn’t any way you can have an objective response so it is better to take responsibility for the fact that you are there” (Mills et al., 2003). Inevitability, my presence at the school impacted the school. However, the flexible structure, mobility, and spontaneity of the space curbed concerns about disruptions and being a burden.
Because of their lack of autonomy often due to restrictions placed on their movement, children and youth are particularly vulnerable populations with which to conduct research (Lipson, 1994). At Windsor House, because of their freedom of movement, and not being subject to formal evaluation, participants have an unusual degree of autonomy when it comes to entering and leaving the spaces. Students regularly exercised their mobility while I was observing. I interpret that it was easy for students to remove themselves from this research without negative consequence. This is not the only concern with doing ethnographic work with children. The related and principle concern is the power dynamic written into the age difference. The higher degree of autonomy in this setting did something to alleviate this; nonetheless it is an inevitable dynamic. To minimize this effect, it is often recommended that researchers do not adopt structural roles with authority, like teaching (Eder and Corsaro, 1999). For the most part I did refrain from these roles, however refraining from roles with authority is not effective in eliminating my power as an adult. Part of my observant participation at Windsor House was to engage with the school as a member. Students and staff often made requests of me because I am an adult. As a result I sponsored\textsuperscript{50} students outside, and on another occasion I sponsored students in the band room. Accepting these roles,\textsuperscript{51} at the request of members, was a way I demonstrated responsibility to the people in the space. It was important to fostering a reciprocal dynamic being an observant participant.

Earlier in the year of this fieldwork the North Vancouver School Board audited Windsor House. As a result of this process many substantive changes were being imposed on the school. One of these changes was the notice that Windsor House School would have to move locations before the next school year. In addition to the sense of loss at having to leave the Cloverley site, members of Windsor House were profoundly distressed by the proposed new sites that were not deemed feasible or appropriate to the needs of the school. They had entered a process of high

\textsuperscript{50} Sponsoring refers to a system of supervision. For more on sponsoring and licensing see \textit{Authority, Negotiation and Power}.

\textsuperscript{51} These roles are not exclusively for adults, older students sometimes take them on.
stakes negotiation with the board. The tension around this was a dominant presence in the school during this research. In this climate I was particularly sensitive to concerns about surveillance, anxiety of changes and exhaustion with workload. In response I clearly communicated the nature of my research, and was courteous in an attempt not to add to the level of exhaustion by asking for time and energy from those around me.

A personal challenge I experienced as novice researcher was overcoming my personal discomfort with the role of researcher and my need to observe and impose on people. Part of my discomfort was a resistance to ask people questions; I felt selfish and prying. I assume this discomfort was visible in my body language. I found these feelings dissipated when someone approached me to ask what I was doing and an opportunity was created to explain. Because of this I did not initiate any large-scale dynamic opportunities for participation in the research plan. Fortunately, over the time there I became increasingly comfortable in my role.

**Fieldnotes**

Fieldnotes are a written account and description to aid the process of bringing a version of participant observations to an audience (Sanjek, 1990); they are central to the ethnographic approach. Vocabulary and ideas about what constitutes fieldnotes are inconsistent (Sanjek, 1990a; Wolf, 1992). This project involves four stages of constructing fieldnotes. The first stage of fieldnotes is ‘mental notes’ (Emerson et al., 2001) or ‘headnotes’ (Sanjek, 1990a); these happen during the observation process without pen and paper and are the process of orientating the mind towards what will be written latter. ‘Headnotes’ constantly change as new information is gathered (Jackson, 1990; Sanjek, 1990a).

The second stage of fieldnotes are called raw fieldnotes (Emerson et al., 2001), jotted notes (Emerson et al., 2001), or scratch notes (Sanjek, 1990a). These are written “more or less contemporaneously with the events depicted” (Emerson et al., 2001, p. 353). Every twenty to seventy minutes of observation I would pause to write in the notebook I carried with me. My
jotted notes were written mostly in longhand, with some private symbols and abbreviation; they would include one or two sentences to assist with recalling later. I wrote them on site, but would generally withdraw to someplace more low-key like a couch in the library, or a relatively quiet room. I initially found it a struggle to find a place to write, and would often cut my days short because I was getting overloaded. At first, because it felt alienating and objectifying, I was uncomfortable writing in front of people, according to Emerson et al. this is not an uncommon feeling among researchers (2001). As I did not want to cloak that I was, in fact, a researcher producing a product from my observations, or that those observations would be taken out of the school for a public viewing, I continued to make these notes in public. By the end of my time at Windsor House, I was becoming more comfortable with this process.

The third part of my fieldnotes I also did by hand. These were written the same day and/or the following day as the field research, and completed before I returned to the school. This stage is sometimes referred to as "fieldnotes proper" (Emerson et al., 2001) and involves expanding the jottings into full sentence and what Geertz called ‘thick description’ (Eder & Corsaro, 1999). This is where the bulk of the writing and reflection occurred and was core in seeing changes in understandings over time. The forth stage of the fieldnotes is the creation of “fieldnote records” (Emerson et al., 2001) this was done during and post fieldwork. Fieldnote records involved the transcription, printing, and binding of the fieldnotes proper into a linear, ordered, and more permanent record. As the transcription occurred, some reflections were added, with dated notation. The final product is a one-hundred-and-forty-seven page single spaced document. Each stage of these notes is necessarily a highly selective process, (Emerson et al, 2001). Choices are made about what to include and exclude. Each stage is an “ordering of ‘what we know’” (Wolf, 1992, p. 91); and is authored with a particular purpose (Emerson et al., 2001).

My fieldnotes are loaded with detailed description of rooms, activities, movement, questions and responses. I included a number of what Schensul et al. call ethnographic mappings (1999). Almost entirely, my fieldnotes are inscriptive rather than transcriptive (Emerson et al.,
2001, p. 359). However, I inserted members’ terms and expressions as well as snippets of verbatim dialogue in my description. At times, I was privy to private information about people’s personal histories, opinions about others, and strategies of engagement about the forced move. This content, while it informed my knowledge of the space, has been excluded from this document.

Throughout my fieldnotes I included what Kirby and McKenna call ‘conceptual baggage’ (1989). This consists of including in the jottings and expanded notes reflections about my thoughts, feelings and personal assumptions. This is done prior to and throughout the observations and interpretations in order that “the researcher becomes another subject in the research process” (Kirby & McKenna, 1989, p. 32). Emerson et al., citing Lofland and Lofland, name three reasons for including myself, as researcher, in this way. One, is that my reactions may mirror others in the setting; two, they may provide leads; three, it may help to identify my biases, prejudices and changing attitudes (2001).

During my observation, while I was in the process of composing the fieldnotes, I felt as if I were gathering inadequate and empty description. My anxiety was reassured only marginally by the knowledge that this feeling is typical to the process of novice researchers. I found the process of recording thick fieldnotes immensely tedious, time consuming and unreasonably exhausting, however I was hugely enjoying my time at the school. The fieldnotes become the text on which the coding is based.

**Interpretation**

Jackson writes that the role of memory in and of itself becomes a type of fieldnote open for interpretation (1990). The relationship between memory and fieldnotes is entangled. When I read over my fieldnotes, memories are triggered which are filled with colours, textures, faces and emotions beyond the scope of the words of the text. Simultaneously, I often find contradictions to what I think I know in the details of my fieldnotes, and in this way they work to remind me of
aspects I had otherwise forgotten. An additional dynamic of the interplay of memory and fieldnote is the subtle yet pervasive way that my memory of the text begins to overshadow my memory of the lived experience; as I reflect on my time at Windsor House my memory is reshaped by the tone and content of the notes I created.

In all stages of producing and interpreting fieldnotes what I looked for was shaped by Dorothy Smith's concept of institutional ethnography. This is the study of the shaping power of structures (Smith, 1987; Campbell & Gregor, 2002) it looks at "what actually happens as those who live it experience and talk about" (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p. 52). Proponents of institutional ethnography understand "everyday life to be constituted by people whose activities are coordinated in specific ways" (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p. 69) and that mapping these activities and coordinations can offer significant insight into how "people are tied together in ways that make sense of abstractions of power" (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p. 17). Texts are seen as a prime component linking and coordinating people within institutions (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). Following in this tradition, I focused on the relationship between texts, activities, and concepts of what is possible within this institutional space.

Likewise, the field of feminist geography has significantly shaped my lens. I looked for who spent time where, who forced changes of location, how power was exercised to gain control over territories (Matthews, 1997); how people talked about the way the space is used (Frankenberg, 1993), structures of segregation (Frankenberg, 1993); expressions of anger (Blunt & Rose, 1994); when and where silences and speech happened (Nairn, 1997); and how and when spaces and activities were gendered (McDowell & Sharpe, 1997), racialized (Matthews, 1997) sexualized (Valentine, 1993) and classed (Frankenberg, 1993).

Before I began to code the fieldnote records I read through them twice, becoming familiar with their content and jotting notes about possible emergent themes. Then I coded for mobility, authority, rules, gender, names of spaces, methodology, intimacy, overarching thesis ideas, particular people, the hallway, scheduling, and feelings of chaos. I read through the
document once for each code. At the end of this process I found three principal emergent themes: rules, movement and authority. From these lists I developed chapter abstracts, then began to identify illustrative stories to give body to the chapters. This was then transformed into a first draft, which was edited and expanded to include political and pedagogical context. As Lees argues, ethnography is only useful in as much as it engages in a “critique of the politics of meaning” (Lees, 2001).

**Writing**

The style of this completed document mirrors my fieldnotes; both are a mix of what Van Maanen called “impressionist tales” which are “organized around ‘striking stories’ to draw the reader into contemplating the problems and puzzles of a story for themselves” (Emerson et al., 2001, p. 357-8) and “confessional tales” which highlight the voice of researcher and the research process (Emerson et al., 2001, p. 357). It is my intention to include myself, as researcher, in this text but to not create an “author saturated” text (Geertz as cited in Emerson et al., 2001, p. 361). Although I am the lens through which this is presented, it is not my goal to present an individual obsession, but rather to provide a critical assessment of this narrative (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1983). "The ethnographer is frequently engaged in something closely akin to narrative writing, pregnant with theme and argument" (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1983, p. 211).

Segments of fieldnotes are included in the final project; generally they have been edited grammatically. They represent a moment in time; they are no more or less legitimate than the analysis in which they are contained. They are not intended nor are they able to ‘give voice’ to the participants. They allow me a device to bring the reader into a moment of the school. This is not a collaborative project, it is my project; I am accountable and responsible for the words I put down (Wolf, 1992). That said, input and guidance from committee members, peers, and members of Windsor House are crucial to this process.
How to name, and not confine the experience to the limits of that naming, is a challenge in any descriptive process (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). While writing, I have worked to look for and include actions, understanding and ideas that resist or push the limits of the analyses I present. There are moments of contradiction throughout the description of the space; this is an important aspect of the space, which I do not want to erase in this telling of it. The epistemological stance of a web of situated knowledge necessitates contradiction and paradox. The concept of ‘paradoxical space’ has become central to much feminist and decolonizing geographies. Developed early in feminist geography by Gillian Rose the key point is that within a physical space occupants are envisioned as occupying several, often competing allegiances, motivations, and social spaces simultaneously (Rose, 1993); a result is that the space itself is envisioned and understood by its inhabitants in multiple, often contradictory ways. Windsor House is certainly a paradoxical space, further complicated because it is intentionally continually shifting and reshaping. It is my hope to reflect this in the telling of this document. Because of my methodology, this contradiction and sense of paradoxical space is achieved not by relying on voices but rather by disrupting the “sense of the whole that one carries around in one’s head” (Lederman as quoted in Wolf, 1992, p. 89).

This is a small qualitative study. It is not intended to tell a comprehensive or exhaustive story of the pedagogy of space at Windsor House School. This is a sampling, to be used to provoke ideas and reflection.

Accountability

"The researcher may be viewed as a valuable and coveted asset who can act as an advocate on behalf of the informant" (Lipson, 1994, p. 351). I think there was hope that I would be an advocate for the school’s relationship with the trustees, but I have not embraced this opportunity. This quite possibly compromised the ability for me to be of service to them. My decision was based on the amount of time and energy I opted to contribute to this particular
project; and a concern that, because of the size and time that would be involved, doing so would curry disfavour with committee members at UBC.

The call for reciprocity is common to feminist practice (Lipson, 1994). During the process of fieldwork I worked to contribute to Windsor House by cleaning, assisting with the earthquake drill, providing a presentation about my elementary school to the staff meeting, responding to students requests for assistance with academics, sponsoring students, and playing and talking with students. It is difficult to identify long-term reciprocity at this stage in the process. It is my hope and intention to return to Windsor House as a volunteer, to create articles about the school, to make presentations of this document to Windsor House, make myself available for discussion, to give this document to the school library for them to make use of it as they like. Many methodologies and frameworks, especially feminist, insist on the need for a change as result of a work. I subscribe to this idea; yet, in this moment in time I am unable to predict this aspect. It is my hope that this document will be of service to Windsor House in both their communications with the outside world, and will inspire useful internal dialogue. It is my intention to follow Alcoff’s guidance and be accountable to where this speech goes and what it does there, that this work will not end with the completion of this thesis.

The three following chapters are the description of findings, and analysis. Each chapter is named for themes that I have identified as central to the pedagogy of space at Windsor House School; while they are written as distinct, they are integrally interconnected.
Mobility and Self Regulation

Children who are genuinely safe are those who are able to make thoughtful, responsible, independent decisions.

Hern, 1997, p. 155

First Impressions

My first and lasting impression of Windsor House is one of movement; my fieldnotes are full of comments about chaos and overwhelm. The philosophy section of the Windsor House handbook under the heading ‘non-coercive education’ states: “Windsor House students independently choose how to spend their time without interference from staff and parents” (Windsor House, 2003, p. 3). This ‘independent choice’ requires a high level of freedom of movement both with regards to people moving between spaces and the spaces themselves. This is the cause of the sense of chaos in the space, and central to what is radically distinctive about free schools consumption of school space. Freedom of movement connects to the idea of building the school to meet the needs of the child (Neill, 1960) and “being responsive to changing life conditions” (Miller, 2002, p. 66). It is a methodology to support ideas of non-coercive education, self-regulation, participatory democracy, and learning responsible decision-making.
When I visualize Windsor House I think of the hallway. It runs down the centre of the building like a spine, its energy reaches out into the rooms like a nervous system. I began each day there by walking up and down the hallway. The doors opening into it are in almost constant motion; most have windows that provide easy observation into the rooms. As I walked the hall I would look into each of the rooms, take in the general sense of the movement, and feel myself pick up on the rhythm of the school. This became a grounding routine that assisted me to transition into the space of the school and into the role of researcher. In this school of abundant activity, the hallway is the hub.

Despite its non-conducive size and shape, the hall has become the primary common space in the school, likely this is because it is the place that everybody has to pass through to get where they are going. Containing the chaos of the hall so that it does not bleed into all the rooms is a constant difficulty. I cannot recall a single moment when I was alone in this space. In my first morning of observation, between walking in the door and taking off my coat, I encountered approximately thirty people,
said hello to two of them, and talked with one six year old girl who confidently approached me asking "who are you?" (Fieldnote, May 19, 04, 1041). Usually there are people yelling and calling out. Once, in a relatively calm moment I observed a small child walk down the center of the hall calling "Lydia" more than forty times (Fieldnote, May 21, 04, 1243). People would regularly stop me in the hall to ask me if I knew where someone else was. Often people would be running while others, in an endless battle to bring calm to the hall would shout "no running in the hall" (Fieldnote, May 31, 04, 1632). Sometimes there would be people playing chess or chatting at the table or one of the benches. Once there were nine teenagers sitting on the floor in the centre of the hall in a shoulder massaging chain; they took up a considerable portion of the hallway; other people walked around them, making an occasional comment but apparently indifferent to this use of the space.

Two students said that the hallway is the place where they spend most of their time. Initially I found this difficult to imagine, as the hall is not really a room but a place people pass through. However, as I observed these students, I generally saw them in the hallway. Often they would step briefly into a room, but would usually soon leave without engaging, and return to the hall. It is probable that, as they themselves said, the hallway served as the primary space for these students at school. Both of them had been at Windsor House only a few months. I suspect that the time they spend in the hall is part of finding their comfort in the school and as they become more comfortable they will spend less time in the transitory space of the hallway.

Throughout the hall, and the school generally, there appears to be lots of people just wandering around doing nothing. It feels large, and crowded, with lots of unbeknownst activity; it feels warm, inviting, distracting, exhausting, exhilarating and buzzing with energy.
Mobility in Practice

The rooms of the school have their own histories of mobility built in them. At times in history, the office has been located in what became the Cottage Garden and the Multimedia room. The Ocean’s Eye Room, had been a theater production room, and the S.A.N.E room. The space at the top of the stairs going down into the other school space at one time was claimed and made into a room by a student who liked to spend time alone. The Space /Time room was barely recognizable from one year to the next. These changes have come in part because of the change in the number of rooms allocated to the school, but also as a result of the participatory democracy of the school. As different projects spring forth they require space. This space is claimed informally, through just setting up and using it, or formally by negotiating with school council. As spaces become more or less used, the space is changed to meet those needs. In addition, people come into one room and move supplies or furniture out of the room to somewhere else. A result of all this is a sense of physical flux.

A central theme of mobility regarding people is the movement of members into and out of the school. Mandatory and full attendance is a point of conflict between free schooling and public schooling, based on differing ideas of what constitutes safety and a productive learning environment. Marking a significant shift from standard schooling, Windsor House, like most free schools, resists compulsory attendance. As Dennison said: we cannot “enhance the moral prestige of school by basing the entire institution on the act of force which compels attendance” (Dennison, 1969, p. 88). Students are not obliged by Windsor House to attend school everyday, nor do they have to stay for a full day. Many families combine some form of home-

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52 The system for making and regulating rules is called school council and judicial council respectively. See Making Rules and Enforcing Rules in Rules and Governance for more information.
schooling with their participation at Windsor House; they determine the amount of attendance that will work best for them, inform the school when to expect the students, and notify the school if and when this changes. To keep track of who is in attendance, students, parents and guests are required to sign in and out of the building (Image 26).

Students accessing the wider community through fieldtrips and independent exploring is encouraged because it is seen as necessary in the development of a continuum of relationships, build stronger community, and break through the barriers between school and the ‘real world’ (Dennison, 1969; Mercogliano, 1998). In this vein fieldtrips were common. While the Windsor House Handbook mentions apprenticeships, a common element in free schooling, I did not see or hear about this occurring. This seems to be something that while supported in the paperwork, is not practiced.

When it comes to leaving school grounds Windsor House monitors the students more closely than other free schools. This could be partly due to its obligations as a public school; however, in comparison to standard schools there is a great deal of movement accepted. Students who wish to leave school grounds during school time need to obtain a license to do so; for this to happen they have to be of a certain age, have permission from their guardian, and approval by council. Generally these permissions are restricted to specific areas off-grounds, such as a nearby corner store, the city park at the far end of the property, or the shopping centre. It was clear that many students took advantage of leaving the grounds. Often I would see students on the bus, or

53 Many people I spoke with implied they did, or had done, this. However this aspect of the school was in jeopardy as a result of the NVSB audit in which item A.1 states: “a student must attend Windsor House full time except under exceptional circumstances” (Johnson, 2004, p. 16). It was made clear that continued funding is dependent on implementing these ‘recommendations.’

54 Many people I talked with confirmed that they integrated this flexibility into their family schedules. Comments like ‘I’m not usually here on Wednesdays’ and ‘we used to come just two days a week’ were frequent.

55 A license refers to permission to self supervise; it is issued by council and almost always about mobility and access to space. License as used in this Windsor House terminology is not connected to ideas of license as discussed by Neill in relation to freedom.
walking down the street during typical school hours. While there is a rush at the end of the day, students and parents come and go from the school grounds fairly continuously. Because my observations were limited to the Cloverley site, I remain unfamiliar with student behaviour off-grounds.

While at school, people have a unique range of choice in their movement. Other than the twice daily check in times and occasional mandatory meetings there are no schedule obligations, neither are there bells or a public announcement system to direct movement. Prescriptive scheduling is seen to be in conflict to student-centred education and anti-authoritarian ideas of self-government. As it is not assumed that learning takes place only, or predominantly, in classes, classes are not considered more important than non-class activity. For these reasons, students at Windsor House are not required to attend classes.

There is a formal school schedule of classes in the entrance area of the hallway (Image 25). It is assembled out of multi-coloured construction paper with paper dividers forming a grid. At the top are the school days of the week and the left hand column marks time increments. Filling in the grid are coloured pieces of paper that provide information about the activity, the person offering it, and when and where it is going to be (Image 13). There is no standard start or end time for classes so overlap is common. The Monday morning activities on the schedule are: Language tutorial, unicycle, science tutorial, slang teasers, and a Kelly News writing class.

56 Without a bell or P.A. system the twice-daily check in system, newly prescribed by the school district, presented a challenge to coordinate activities amongst the population. This was problem solved by a staff member walking down the hall with a portable tape player playing loud boisterous music. At this time, everybody has to pause their activities, go to their area, pick up their paper name card, and give it to their teacher to indicate their presence. As the bell is not heard outside, people who are outside or off grounds are expected to be aware of the time and return for check in. Mandatory meetings rarely occur. However, when they do, all people must attend them. Anyone can call one, if they get a dozen signatures of agreement. The person who calls the meeting begins to tell everybody that the meeting is occurring. This usually takes the form of walking down the hall and yelling "mandatory meeting in the BMR." All members are required to go directly to the room where the meeting is being held, telling anyone who may not have heard along the way.
Monday afternoons: School Council, BMR Roaring Animals, Intermediate WHIM, cooking with wee ones, younger students Literature, Art, French, Intermediate math, Rock Music History, and Piano (Fieldnote, June 23, 04, 5545-63). At any given time, less than half the classrooms in the school are slotted for regularly organized activities, this leaves a lot of space for activities that are not pre-organized. Anyone can offer an activity. These can be spontaneous or planned and may occur anywhere that is not already scheduled. However, parents or teachers offer the vast majority of activities listed on the schedule.

Significantly the schedule does not contain all the information necessary to know what it going on in the school. Information about classes and activities that are being offered only once, or that are temporarily cancelled are generally not included. Many rooms have their own schedules on their doors. For example the student-controlled "Unofficial Russian Embassy," has a schedule on the door with six weekly regularly occurring activities (Fieldnote, June 23, 04, 566-73). None of these items are organized or generally attended by members of the Russian Embassy room council, and none of these items are included on the large hall schedule. I do not know what determines what

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57 See Authority, Negotiation and Power for more on student-controlled rooms.
58 See Authority, Negotiation and Power for more on room councils.
goes on which schedule, or why they are not matching. Additionally, cancelled, moved, postponed or one time only classes often are not posted on any schedule.\textsuperscript{59}

Even though I read the newsletter each week while I was at Windsor House, I ran into difficulty with scheduling. Once I planned on attending a class that had been cancelled without my knowing it (Fieldnote, June 4, 04, 1337-45). Another time I went to a class, assumed it was cancelled because no one was there only to later discover the class had happened later than it said on the schedule (Fieldnote, June 16,04, 4355). Yet another time, I attended a large meeting that I did not know had been scheduled, but found out about when I saw people gathering together (Fieldnote, June 10, 04, 3639).\textsuperscript{60} I was not alone in my confusion with the classes and activities. Once, I watched a teacher spend twenty minutes rounding up students for an activity that presumably had been scheduled and forgotten about (Fieldnote, June 10, 04, 4518). Students expressed difficulty knowing when and where something was happening (Fieldnote, June 2, 04, 3091-96). It seemed to me to be crucial and difficult, perhaps impossible, to be 'in the know' about activities. While I found this frustrating, and some people complained about it, for the most part people seemed to know their own schedules quite well and this scheduling seemed unremarkable and comfortable to people at Windsor House. So while the schedule is prominent, and serves some use, it does not directly represent the activity in the school as I would assume it does. While there are great benefits to flexibility around scheduling, this structure can also engender feelings of exclusion from knowing what is going on.

When members of Windsor House arrive at school they may have commitments to a friend, a collective project like a play rehearsal, or the expectation of attending a scheduled class

\textsuperscript{59} Occasionally these make it into the newsletter.
\textsuperscript{60} During this meeting there were a couple of times when people asked if someone who was not there knew about the meeting, once someone responded that they would go and ask and another time someone responded that yes, but they would not be joining in because they were busy doing something else (Fieldnote, June 10, 04, 3639). This type of double checking and personal knowledge seems an essential way of dealing with the confusion about the scheduling.
or activity they regularly attend, however for the most part, their activities are not preplanned. People hang out in different spaces, organizing themselves in the spaces for themselves. Some hang out in the same spaces, like the students from the ‘Russian Embassy’ who said they never left that room\textsuperscript{61} (Fieldnote, June 17, 04, 5074) others move around a lot. The bulk of activity appears to occur separately from scheduled activities. Activities that do not make it onto the schedules are sometimes preplanned, through word or mouth or the newsletter, however most often they are not preplanned but occur in reaction to the environment or something that is happening in the moment. Typically lots of things are happening simultaneously in any given space. Walking into the library for example, it is common that a scheduled activity such as a writing class, will be happening at the same time that a card game and spontaneous conversations are occurring in other parts of the room, additionally there will likely be a number of people spread around the room independently reading.

Students determine for themselves which classes and activities they participate in, how often they attend them, and for how long they stay. This means they may not attend class, and often times enter into or leave an activity in progress. Not obligating students to attend classes is rooted in a pedagogical position where it is thought that learning happens best when each student is encouraged to pursue their own interests (Holt, 1982; Neill, 1960), and is not coerced. As Dennison stated: “education must be \textit{lived}, it cannot be \textit{administered}” (Dennison as quoted in Miller, 2002, p. 58 italics in the original). The student needs to be in a position to assess the value of the circumstance they are in. Prescriptive and compulsory scheduling is seen as unhelpfully authoritative and in conflict with the principal lesson of self-regulation.

\textsuperscript{61} However this was not entirely accurate, as when the fellows from the ‘Embassy’ told me this, we were having a conversation in the Temple of the Flying Pig, after they had been ousted from the Embassy for a previously scheduled activity.
Many, if not most, of the organized activities I attended involved people joining and leaving the session throughout. Likewise there is almost constant movement of people in and out of school council meetings. Evening adult meetings are similar; parents arrive mostly at the scheduled time although often the meetings start late. People come and go from the meeting to attend to a child, private conversation, or another matter. Children come into the meeting to sit for a while, ask a question of someone, or get something, and then leave. I found it surprising that I rarely heard someone who had come in later ask for information to be repeated, I found this high level of movement immensely distracting, especially in the beginning of my time at the school. As I spent more time there, I found myself becoming less responsive to other people’s movement and more able to focus on my own activities. As I did this, I became more at ease with the level of movement around me. However, although the level of distraction reduced, it never completely dissipated.

Classes, meetings and activities look different when people can leave and arrive throughout. With the highly flexible schedule activities can continue for a surprisingly long time. Often new people join so the faces may change while the activity stays the same. At the end of the school year, a time capsule project to commemorate Windsor House at the Cloverley site was instigated. What began as a small project, involving a handful of participants, grew into a memorial involving most members of the school. At some point it was decided that the hole to bury the capsule be dug six feet deep and six feet wide to resemble the Louis Sachar book Holes. For two days people dug, the faces changed, but the activity remained constant. In other instances both the activity and the faces can remain the same; the elaborate theatre productions, that have become a staple at Windsor House, are an example of this. Other activities can be short lived and incomplete, people may float about, trying out one thing or another, but not really

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62 See Age and Authority in Authority, Negotiation and Power for more about the relationship between teachers, students and mobility.
engaging. At the same time there is room and time for people to dedicate and commit themselves to long-term projects of devotion. Generally all these things happen at the same time, and most students do a little bit of each of these. Different people use the space differently; the self regulation around activity in the space is critical to imagining the space of Windsor House.

The high level of mobility is connected to the idea that people can best take advantage of their circumstances if they do not feel they have to be there. If they feel like they have to be somewhere then they spend their time thinking of, and often times trying, all the ways to get out of there, fostering a sense of restlessness and distraction what Mercogliano calls “captivity behavior” (2003, p. 43). If they feel like they have a choice to participate, and they may comfortably act on that choice, then those who do participate do so in a more active and present manner. Dennison and Mercogliano both talk about how ‘acting out’ and restlessness is a way for the student to say: “Deal with all of me! Deal with my life” (Dennison, 1969, p. 15). In a setting, where scheduling is loose and mobility is easy, time is afforded to ‘deal with’ the lives and battles in the moment as this structure allows space to attend to the emotional needs of the person, without subsuming them underneath the curriculum. For those for whom restlessness is seemingly constant, who may not be able to abide structured lessons, or participate easily in quiet spaces, this movement and access to spaces built for high levels of kinetic energy such as the BMR and outdoors, allows the students to find places to burn energy without disrupting others.

A result of this circumstance is that some particularly high-energy folk spend dedicated efforts working to negotiate access to these spaces. One remarkably dynamic and demanding boy approached me each day I was at the school, sometimes more than once, asking bluntly if I would sponsor him in the BMR. 63 He appeared fairly indiscriminant about whom he approached, and seemed willing to ask anyone likely able to be in a position to say yes. He was often refused

63 See Safety, Surveillance, Supervision and Sponsorship in Authority, Negotiation and Power for more information on sponsorship.
because he had a history of not respecting the conditions of the sponsorship. However most days he had at least one or two successes. For him, the majority of his time in the space of the school was negotiating spatial relationships to meet his high-energy needs. Although his behaviour continues to be annoying and high energy, there was room for him to regulate it so that it was not destructive to the space, others or to himself; the structure was built so that he could find a way to more or less make the space work for him instead of fighting against it.

The BMR\textsuperscript{64} is integral to the spatial relations of the space. Many young students, have lots of energy to burn, for the school to work for them, they need a place to do this. Not only does this assist them, but it helps the space work for everybody else, who is relieved of the exhausting and distracting circumstance of being held captive with this energy. The BMR is often a highly gendered and aged space with a strong predominance of young boys using it. Older people, who do not need as much sponsorship, and generally bring more structure to their kinetic energy, tend to use outdoors or the gym, for this same purpose.

An incident that stands out for me in terms of mobility and spatial relations occurred while I was in the Cottage watching a seemingly never-ending puppet show being put on by a slow succession of primary students. A young boy, about 6 years old, after being told by a teacher that he could not play with some blocks because another boy was playing with them already, marched out of the room closing the door with something approaching, but not quite reaching, a slam. About five minutes later he returned with another adult to advocate for him. This event was a crystallizing moment for me regarding mobility at Windsor House. This very little boy, to my observation, felt capable and entitled to leave the room and refuse to discuss it with the teacher. He seemed to feel no obligation to stay. By leaving the room, and finding someone he wanted to advocate for him he was able to attempt to resolve the situation in a way that provided him with

\textsuperscript{64} For more information about the structure of the BMR see \textit{BMR in Rules and Governance}. 90
more options than entering into direct conflict with the people involved, silencing his frustration, or stagnating the situation by sulking. He was able to seek resolution that worked for him without subjugating everyone else there to his anger. Additionally, I was struck by the role of the adults. The primary teacher did not go after the student, nor did she try to stop him from leaving. This six-year-old boy was enabled to determine how to engage in this conflict for himself, including the option, although he did not take it, of disengagement—something rarely afforded to young children. The mobility in the school allowed the boy to walk out of the primary room in the middle of a disagreement and have this be okay.

The structure of the school facilitated the movement of this very young boy. Physically, the primary rooms are nested in the centre of the school, this means there are many older students and adults surrounding the primary students, ensuring that when the student leaves this room, he remains observed. Because the adults and students outside the primary room do not have rigidly structured schedules they are required to follow, they are in a position to be available to respond to this boy’s immediate needs. Because of the structure of self-regulation, the other teacher was in a position to leave where she was and assist the boy. This scenario displays a high level of trust. Trust in the child to identify his own needs. Trust in the structure of the school to hold him in his anger. And trust that people will respond to needs as they are presented. This scenario is an example of how individual self-determination is negotiated with others in a shared space.65

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65 For more on negotiation of space see Negotiation and Territory in Authority, Negotiation and Power.
Limits and control of Movement

Windsor House is a strange combination of motion, chaos and limitation; despite the initial appearance of being out of control, there are numerous factors, rules and postings that restrict and direct movement. Mobility is crosscut and mediated by texts, schedules, safety concerns, members, board regulations, rules, consequences, conventions and free school ideology. Some free schools, such as Summerhill make the astounding (and to my eyes false) claim that they do not regulate behaviour (Miller, 2002, p. 53). Windsor House does not make this claim. Wright, of the White Lion Free School, claims that all free schools restrict movement (Wright, 1989, p. 27); I agree.

While freedom of movement is prioritized and impressive at Windsor House, it is not unencumbered. I observed remarkable demonstrations of forthrightness with people joining activities; rarely did I hear someone ask permission to join an activity, they just did. If there is no good reason to prohibit them, they cannot be excluded; there is a rule at Windsor House stating

Image 14: Stop, Do Not Enter Sign.

An example of a ‘good reason’ may be being in the middle of a board game, and needing to wait for the next round to join. However with the high level of mobility it is common that people join as they arrive and leave as they wish. Frequently even board games do not end with the same
The lived reality of this is not entirely smooth. Some people are intimidated, others intimidating. Some people are better at sharing or communicating. Some are more or less welcoming. And some are more or less comfortable in the space. All of these interpersonal factors impact movement in the space.

One structural aspect of how movement is restricted at Windsor House is with regards to who has access to the space. All students who meet the public school criteria are welcome to apply, but admission is subject to approval. The integration of new students is a recurrent challenge for free schools. At the 2003 International Democratic Education Conference a special session was held to discuss how schools strategize to integrate older students who have had years of traditional schooling. Generally it is felt that students who have a history of being highly controlled, push the boundaries of the free school environment with exhausting tenacity and have a difficult time respectfully interacting with other members of the school. To avoid this difficulty A.S. Neill did not admit any students over the age of eleven. Windsor House does not share this policy, yet the admission of older students from standard schooling is approached cautiously. To be considered for the school, all prospective students and their guardian must come for an interview, and spend a trial week at the school. If at the end of the trial they are still interested in attending, they may make an application.

Acceptance of the application is subject to approval. From what I gather, approval is at Helen’s discretion, and she makes this decision based on if she thinks the school has the resources to support the student. According to her, most students are accepted, but she is leery to accept too many older students from traditional schooling backgrounds at a time, as she sees them band together to sabotage their experiences in the school, and make unreasonable drains on the players as they begin with. Another ‘good reason’ may be that the person is not licensed to be in the space and therefore cannot participate.

67 See Making Rules in Rules and Governance.
68 This criteria is quite broad, and limited only to acceptable age and residency status.
school’s energy. While older traditionally schooled students are admitted, they are done so with an eye to keeping a sense of control over the dynamics of the school. This highly selective and fairly arbitrary process is one way mobility into the school is mediated. Windsor House accepts a high number of students who have been labeled as problems in other schools. Members of Windsor House suggest that in this type of schooling most ‘problem’ students find a path to becoming a contributing member of the school. Part of the way members of Windsor House talk about the school is as a place that provides an option for those in the public school system that are out of options.

When it comes to physically entering the school, the front doors are unlocked and often wide open. People come and go regularly seemingly making it an easy place to enter into unnoticed. One parent, when I asked her about if this raised safety concerns responded that ‘we know when a person doesn’t belong here or is new; their body language and the way they move is different” (Fieldnote, May 21, 04, 1399). In addition to this, it is a relatively small school so the faces quickly become familiar. My experience was that students and adults alike were comfortable asking me who I was, and what I was doing, demonstrating an active monitoring of who is coming and going from the school and claiming of the space as their own.

Like the front doors, much of Windsor House is a paradoxical combination of remarkably open yet highly mediated and restricted space. Helen’s office is an example of this. On her door shared with the main office is a small white piece of paper that reads: “DO NOT KNOCK. Try handle, if open poke head in. If locked, come back later. You may slip paper under the door” (Fieldnote, June 16, 04, 4695). This door was sometimes closed, and sometimes open; occasionally I saw people knock on the door, some of these times Helen opened it. Sometimes

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69 Other sets of doors going outside are often, but not consistently, locked. This always seemed a bit strange to me, because in practice the students often prop them open, leave paper between the locking device or take other actions to allow the door to be open from the outside.
she dealt with the requests, other times she asked them to come back later. Often Helen would be in the office alone, or with students or parents, and frequently students would be in Helen’s conference room alone. I never saw anyone going through Helen’s desk, even though there was no sign to say not to. One boy when I asked him where he generally spent his time he said Helen’s office “because I get in trouble a lot” (Fieldnote, June 17, 04, 5325). When I asked him if only people who get in trouble a lot spend time in Helen’s office he said no. Another student, an older girl who had recently left Windsor House but was back for a visit, said the difference she saw between Windsor House and other schools was that at other schools, people want to stay away from the principal, but at Windsor House students want to go to the principal’s office.

Like Helen’s office, many of the rooms have their own set of rules guiding access to that space; these are posted on doors and walls throughout the school. The Ocean’s Eye Room has a notice on the door “no one to use this room until [first] attend council meeting” (Fieldnote, May 31, 04, 1651).\textsuperscript{71} To enter the library, you have to be licensed or sponsored. If you are not licensed, and no one is sponsoring you or the room, you cannot use the room.\textsuperscript{72} On my first day of observation a young girl, about six or seven, walked me down the hallway, pointing to the doors as we passed telling me what was behind each one. “That’s the Library” she said, “Do you go in there?” I asked. “Sometimes, if there is a yellow piece of paper on the door” (Fieldnote, May 19, 04, 826). Despite my perplexity, she seemed quite certain this small bit of information was all I needed to access the room. I found it interesting as a not yet literate person, that she

\textsuperscript{70} This is a lovely example of how the rules at Windsor House are usually highly specific, designed to combat specific annoyances, and imprecisely followed. For more about rules see Rules and Governance.

\textsuperscript{71} This council meeting refers to a room council. For more on room councils see Authority, Negotiation and Power.

\textsuperscript{72} This is the theory anyway. While this room is one of the most clearly organized spaces in the school, I never quite figured out the system of access. Sometimes the room would be unlocked, open and unsponsored and people would go in and out, other times it would be locked, and other times it would be being sponsored. I could not find a pattern in how this was determined or used.
moved through this text-mediated space using visual clues rather than text clues to mediate her mobility.

People are often restricted from accessing spaces as part of a consequence.\textsuperscript{73} Being barred from going outside without adult supervision, going off school grounds, or from accessing specific rooms are frequent consequences. For example, if someone has a complaint\textsuperscript{74} issued on them for behavior while outside, they may be barred from going outside for a duration of time. Often stop or de-licensed signs will be posted on doors to indicate that a person is barred from this space (Image 15). While this has the potential for a high level of humiliation similar to the bounced check notice at the grocery store, the only times I saw this done was at the request of the student being barred.\textsuperscript{75}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{Image15.png}
\caption{Stop Sign Over Room Schedule}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{73} A consequence is a school council issued penalty in response to a complaint issued against someone for behaviour deemed deserving of reprimand. For detailed information on consequences and complaints see Enforcing Rules in Rules and Governance.

\textsuperscript{74} Complaints are the system by which students receive consequences.

\textsuperscript{75} In the cases I observed, the person who requested that the sign be posted was the person it was issued on. Often this is to help remind them, and to help their friends remind them, to reduce the possibility of re-offending and risking an escalating consequence.
If consequences and other tactics "seem to make no difference, and a person’s behaviour continues to annoy members of the community...the school council usually gives RESTRICTED ACCESS for a day" (Windsor House, 2003, p. 17). There are three levels of restricted access (RA); RA 1, the most restrictive, means that the student may only be at school as long as they are in a class. RA 2, “For people who can be home alone,” (Fieldnote, June 15, 04, 3945), they may only be at school to attend classes and activities that are adult supervised, and RA 3: “For people who can’t be home alone”, (Fieldnote, June 15, 04, 3947) they attend school full hours but must be under staff supervision at all times. In practice this often means they spend a lot of time in Helen’s conference room. Issuing consequences and RA is a blatant way that judicial council plays a strong role in controlling movement at Windsor House.

Another sign that was posted on doors restricting access was the sign stating: “stop do not enter unless you are going to clean up” (Image 14). I saw these posted a few times. These were not issued by council, but by staff. Apparently these are not stringently followed. Occasionally I saw people in the room, who did not appear to be cleaning it. Another time, I saw a staff member give permission for a small group of students to use a space without cleaning it, because they needed access to the computers in that space for something they were working on. Sometimes the room with the sign would be locked other times not.

Locked doors seem incredibly common at this free school. It remains unclear how this is regulated. Frequently it would be the Art Room, or the Library, or one of the small rooms that I found locked. Other times they would be empty and unlocked. I do not know why they were locked. The Green Key opens most rooms, although it does not open the kitchen, band room, chemistry room, Helen’s office, administrative office, or some of the other, more highly regulated rooms. Anyone can make an application to have a green key, and many students have successfully done so. The process to have a key is to introduce a resolution at council, have it
passed, agree to rules about its use and attend Green Key Meetings called when there is a suspected misuse of one of the rooms, such as a gigantic mess or a theft. Some students, such as those I talked with from the Unofficial Russian Embassy, preferred to not have a key to access the room they used, they said it was easier to find someone with a key to open the door each day, then to be bothered with the responsibilities of the green key. Frequently I saw teachers lend their key chains to students to open a room (Fieldnote, May 31, 04, 1648). The use of keys demonstrates a manner that while there is a great deal of regulation over the space, there are avenues by which to participate in this regulation.

The space has lots of freedoms and restrictions of movement that despite my best intentions I did not learn how to navigate smoothly. I found it hard to determine where I could and could not go. While I tried to follow posted information, it was imprecise and unclear. I never did discover if I needed permission to go in student controlled rooms. Sometimes doors would be locked, other times not. I do not know what determined this. It seemed because I am an adult I was not challenged or particularly monitored about my mobility. Other than locked doors, I could physically go anywhere without question. However, I was interested in discovering and following standard practice and convention, and to this end figuring out the limits and possibilities around my own movement was quite challenging. Some of the things that I found interesting about the level of mobility in the school is that it facilitated me being comfortable trying out spaces I was uncertain about, or thought I might be uncomfortable in, because I knew I could leave; this widened my association and comfort zone. Simultaneously, this freedom of movement allowed me to leave as I felt discomfort and I did not have to contend, or deal with that discomfort.

76 The Unofficial Russian Embassy is a student controlled room, not a large classroom.
Different spaces seem to have different levels of mobility permitted. For those spaces in which there is often a high level of dispute or safety concern, such as the band room, BMR or outside, there are strong regulations in force. Other spaces are often open and accessible until conflict inspires a restriction. Exactly how the nature of these restrictions plays out remains unclear. While freedom of movement is highly prized within free schools and Windsor House, it is important to consider that it occurs within a highly structured and regulated form that strives to foster self-regulation within an interconnected context.

**Self Regulation**

Self-regulation is the central purpose of free schooling. It is the hoped result of non-coercion. "Our first and foremost goal is to help children learn how to manage themselves and structure their own experience" (Mercogliano, 2003, p. 12). This is so for Windsor House as well; parents describe the school as “autonomy immersion” stating that it “produces young people who are able to plan, organize and persist to meet their needs” (Johnson, 2004, p. 4). This agenda of self-regulation rests on the presumption “that each and every individual is best able to define their own interests, needs and desires” (Hern, 2003, p, 140). One of the most impacting conversations I had at Windsor House was with Helen about what people learn from the space at Windsor House. She said that at Windsor House people learn the realization that it is their own life they are living, so they better figure out how to enjoy it (Field memory, June 23, 04). She told me how she repeatedly witnessed people come into the school, wander around, appear lost, and then slowly come to realize that it is their life to direct and begin to be able to enact their life in a manner they find fulfilling. This process Helen describes is the process of coming to self regulate. It means losing dependency on the school or teacher and learning to structure one’s own life.
I felt myself learn lessons about self regulation while at Windsor House. I found the way I regulated myself around movement in the school was to seek out the places where I felt most comfortable. Initially, it was the office, which is smaller, encouraging face-to-face conversations, often full of paperwork projects that I find easy to help out with and begin conversations. There is generally a higher ratio of adults to students in the office space and it is easy to involve myself in what is going on. From there I began to branch out and try out new spaces and activities. Over time my skill at determining for myself what I wanted to do and making it happen improved. In the beginning, I had felt uncomfortable and uncertain as to what to do with myself in the space and so I looked to Helen to guide me (Fieldnote, May 13, 04, 387). Significantly, Helen did not adopt the role of guide, although she was friendly, responsive and encouraging, she left me mostly on my own. With time, I felt my need for guidance and approval diminish.

Self regulation is generally understood as a highly individualized process. As such, there is a concern that this focus on the self could foster unflinchingly self-indulgent behaviour that is not responsive to unwanted or unsought lessons or information, particularly with regards to social justice issues. What is interesting about the context of Windsor House, and free schools in general, that I would like to explore more than this project allows, is that the lessons of self regulation do not happen in isolation, but in a context of an engaged membership of people sharing and negotiating space collaboratively. Thus, in this context, through the use of space, the lessons of self regulation are accountable to the diversity of people and needs present and deemed significant; this holds strong potential to learn social justice through practice.

**Tea, me, and self regulation.**

Though I have been familiar with the practice and ideas of self regulation most of my life, being at Windsor House inspired new lessons for me around them. These lessons came most
poignantly with my relations with Tea and taught me more about how self regulation may often be a slow and difficult process. Tea had come to Windsor House from a standard school earlier in the year. She was the student I spent the most frequent and concentrated time with during my time at Windsor House. Both her words and behaviour communicated to me that she had a great deal of violence, fear, unpredictability and sadness within her, learned from the context of her life and brought with her to her daily activities at school. Structural interventions had occurred in her life so that she was no longer in harms way, but she was living with the effects. She used a lot of aggressive language, talking about other people in the school as her ‘enemies’ and play-acted a lot of spying on them. On a few occasions when it was just the two of us she would act quite violently towards inanimate objects; this took the form of kicking balls, tearing and stabbing paper, and other activities that were not damaging to the physical space, but were strong expressions of emotion. Blunt and Rose (1994) suggest that expressions of anger show a comfort and sense of safety in a space. From what I observed much of Tea’s time was spent drifting, and she told me she was bored. 77

She seemed to be in pain and because of this I found it extremely challenging to be around her. I had deep desire to intervene, give her lots of attention, and make it better. Basically I wanted to make the pain go away, so that she did not have to contend with it, and that I would no longer have to be uncomfortable with it. As much as I wanted to make it all better, and eradicate the pain Tea was exhibiting, and as much as I felt almost obligated, as an adult, to do this for her, there was no way I could do this. As stated in the opening quote of this chapter, fostering greater safety in Tea’s life is connected to her being able to make decisions to find her own happiness and establish her place amongst others. My role in this was to listen, talk, respond to her, share activities with her, and allow her the time to hurt and to heal. As much as I may

77 Sometimes she told me she was bored only because her friends were away, that it was not common for her to feel this way. Other times she said it was common for her to feel bored.
want to, it is beyond my ability to make her pain go away. Attempts to do so may erase her pain from my sight, but could not eradicate it from her life. These attempts would also likely foster a sense of dependence.

The point of self regulation is that she goes through the process of learning that it is her life, and she needs to take responsibility for it. This means not developing relationships of dependence where other people tell her what to do. This does not mean that she is ignored, or not emotionally supported, or left without guidance or information, but it does mean she spends a lot of time by herself learning that she needs to make things happen for herself. This takes time.

One thing she was given at Windsor House was the gift of time to move through her pain, without pretending that everything was fine. Her emotion was given space. Mercogliano writes, “the heart of the Free School’s approach to fostering children’s growth...is to help them learn to deal with their emotional selves” (Mercogliano 2003, p. 41). Tea was going through the awkward process of figuring out her relationship to the context she was in. In this time she appeared lost and uncertain.

Over time, I witnessed, that her state of being lost was becoming increasingly intermeshed with moments of being connected. One way she did this was by attending organized activities or classes. She would also seek out and spend time in one-to-one contact with adults, whether it is her private piano lessons, or talking with Helen. Often she would spend time with the primary children in the Gazebo and Cottage Garden. When I would see her here, she would be smiling, younger children were excited to have her play with them, and she seemed confident. This was in stark contrast to her behaviour with students her same age or older, where she would talk to herself and other wise exhibit awkward behaviour. At the time I was there Tea would spend an hour or so a few times a week in the primary rooms, and probably about twice as much time in her peer groups. There is a strong parallel between this activity and Mercogliano who in Teaching the Restless talks about a student Damian who has difficulty behaving in nondestructive
ways at Albany, and who often seeks out the primary room where he can adopt a role of authority. “Just being in an environment where there is no external pressure...to succeed, or to socialize only with kids his own age, will slowly enable him to be more at ease, both with himself and with others” (2003, p. 41). The mobility to go between these spaces facilitates her moving between spaces of comfort and authority and places of fear and awkwardness. The mobility afforded to her in the school allowed her to experience all of these relations, Tea was able to move back and forth between places of knowing and not knowing and draw strength from one to bring to the other.

Writing about Tea is the most difficult part of this project. It is a relationship that is haunting and difficult to find words to describe. There are lessons in this relationship for me that I have not yet grasped, lessons about respectful relationships and respecting both her ‘natural authority’ and mine without dominating, patronizing or trying to ‘save’ her. I was uncomfortable with her strong demonstrations of emotion; I wanted it to go away so that I would not have to witness it. This was key in learning the lessons of wanting to save her, but realizing what I could do was support her in finding her path to figuring out how to feel happy about living her life. The best I could do was not deprive her of the space to live it, and negotiate that space with her respectfully.

**Mobility**

The high level of movement in the space fosters both a sense of chaos and harmony, it facilitates being able to respond to the energy of the moment, to commit and focus on activity without being called away, and opportunities to sample or try out new spaces and activities. It connects to learning to control one’s self in concert with others. Myles Horton describes democracy as a practice “where people have a way to control many facets of their lives; political,
economic, social and cultural. In so far as they are minimized democracy is denied” (as quoted in Moyers, 1981). Mobility is central to participant control over the conditions of their life. When strong direct democracy is valued, freedom of movement into, out of and within the space becomes a central practice in living that value. Likewise the flexibility of space structured into the school is deeply embedded in a democratic ethic. Part of participatory democracy is to construct structures that are responsive to the needs of the participants. As the needs of the membership are fluid and shifting, the structure of the space reflects that. The hope and motivation for participatory democracy rests on the idea that democracy and emancipation have a symbiotic relationship. The aspect of control over the conditions of one’s life is not limited to how one engages with a space (as depicted by mobility) but necessarily includes participation in structuring the conditions of regulating the space (rules and governance). This theme is the topic of the next chapter.
Rules for being in the Castle

Do not let anyone use your account.

1) Maintain good order - even if it is not your mess. If you enter the room and it is not tickety-boo, then you must either get the person who made the mess to fix it, or fix it yourself.
2) Put the chairs back at all times. Straighten chairs when they are out-of-place.
3) If you want to use a computer, you must get a licence, and a sign-on and password.
4) Do not rearrange the tables except for meetings.
5) Do not use this room for anything except academics and meetings.
6) Do not make loud noises, and be silent at the computers when a class is in session.
7) If there is a 'class in session' sign on the door, do not enter unless you are in the class.
8) Don't take anything, especially chairs, from this room unless you have permission from Helen.
9) Put the plug stops back in after using a plug. It is for the safety of toddlers.
10) Do not sit on the tables.
Rules and Governance

The curriculum of the school is making rules; once the rule has been made, it has had its use.
Helen Hughes, Fieldnote 06/23/04.

During my first visit to Windsor House School Helen Hughes arranged for two students to show me the school and explain to me how it worked. In the forty minutes the students and I spent together they highlighted the importance of the school and judicial council, and kept me entertained with a string of anecdotes about life at Windsor House. With what appeared to be great pride and sense of fun, they told me tales of inventive and seemingly ridiculous resolutions\(^78\) that were proposed and/or passed at school council. As we walked through rooms my guides would briefly tell me the purpose of each room, accompanied by stories of themselves or others having complaints\(^79\) issued on them for activities in that room. I enjoyed the tour. I felt excited and slightly nervous about my forthcoming time at Windsor House; I also felt confused. Towards the end of the tour, inspired by my uncertainty about what the rules are, and my trepidation about getting in trouble, I asked my guides how I should know what I can or cannot do at the school. They told me that I can do pretty much what I want as long as I listen; people will tell me when I am doing something that is not allowed or inappropriate and as long as I listen, and modify my behaviour accordingly, all will be well. I asked what would happen if I didn’t modify my behaviour. They shrugged, and without a sign of concern told me that someone would write a complaint on me. As someone who loathes getting in trouble, I did not find this relaxed and unspecified approach to rules particularly freeing or exciting.

\(^{78}\) The rules themselves are typically called resolutions.
\(^{79}\) Complaints are a formal way of enforcing rules. See Enforcing Rules in this chapter for more information.
For all my time at Windsor House my sense of what the rules are remains uncertain. While I have developed skills and knowledge to function as a participant of the school within its structure, I cannot with certainty, outline a list of specific rules. In the beginning I was under the impression that my uncertainty about the rules was personal, a result of being new and unfamiliar with my surroundings. This was, and remains, a significant factor to this uncertainty. However as I became increasingly familiar with the school it became clear there are other factors at play.

In an attempt to learn the boundaries of what was and was not allowed I began to ask: ‘How do you know what you can and cannot do here?’ ‘Can you do whatever you like here?’ and ‘What are the rules here?’ The responses were mixed. The instructions to relax, not to worry, and to listen to others in order to know what one can and cannot do, were by far the most frequent responses. This came from both students and adults in the school. Another common response to my questions was ‘I don’t know.’ This response came mostly from students. A few people, all adults, told me to ‘use common sense.’ I did not find this particularly insightful, as the sense that was common within Windsor House was precisely what it was that I was trying to figure out. My impressions of what was meant by common sense were to not cause any person or thing harm, clean up after myself, not to annoy anyone unduly and to be available to answer for or modify my actions. However this idea of common sense is vague, I was curious more specifically with the details; where one could go /not go, what one could do /not do there, and how people know how to behave in order to not get in trouble?

As I asked questions about what the rules are, it became apparent that there is no consistent knowledge of them. Most people seemed unperturbed about the prevalence of lack of clarity, while a few seemed awkward and shy about it; I found it rather fascinating. However, despite the uncertainty around specific rules, there is a common understanding that the school functions on a
vast amount of remarkably elaborate rules. The language of ‘you’re not allowed’ and ‘we have a rule about that’ is plentiful. As well, there are some overarching rules that are known and repeated frequently such as ‘no running in the halls’ and ‘you’re not allowed to exclude people.’ Although there are differences in the roles of adults, staff, and students in the school, there is a shared understanding that rules function for all members of the school, not just the students.

While at no point did anyone refer me to written documents in response to my questions about rules, there does exist a number of documents containing rules. The primary document is the Windsor House Handbook that is required reading for all new families at the school. This includes numerous rules and regulations around meeting procedures, anger management as well as behaviour for fieldtrip and other off-school ground times. For example the type of rules found here are: “If [students] go home early, then they must notify one teacher and sign out” (Windsor House, 2003, p. 18). “On fieldtrips, supervisors are the law unto themselves,” (Windsor House, p. 16). “If you want to be able to go to Park and Tilford or the Q, you must get a special license” (Windsor House, 2003, p. 20). These rules do not specifically address the day-to-day actions within the school. Rules that address this are posted on the walls or written in newsletters. The school is covered with posted rules; all rooms, including the front porch and some storage closets have lists of rules that guide behaviour for that space (Image 16; Image 17).

The posted rules are often recently posted. Most rules posted are printed by computer and contain modifications made with ink or crayon indicating that they are in use, however it was rare that I saw people refer to them specifically. Because of this, and because only one person I spoke with mentioned the posted rules when I asked about how they know what they can and cannot do, I do not think they are read, referred to or used with much frequency. It seems strange to me to

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80 The Park and Tilford and the Q are a nearby mall and corner store respectively, they are common places students go when they leave grounds.
go to all the trouble of posting them if they are rarely referred to. I suspect that there are many reasons for this; one reason is that with such an abundance of text it blends into the background and people stop seeing it. Another is that many members of the school are young and are not yet reading. Another reason, which I believe is the strongest, is that most members don’t consciously think about rules as the factor that guides their behaviour; instead rules are understood for the purpose of mediating conflict and safety, if there is no conflict or safety concerns, there appears to be no need for rules. In this way the rules more frequently indicate what is prohibited, rather than what is allowed. For example many of the rooms on the East side of the building have rules about the windows. In one room the windows must stay closed except in “extreme circumstances” (Fieldnote, June 23, 04, 5754) another room states that hanging or throwing things out of the windows is not allowed. The windows on this side of the school are of concern because they overlook the play area of the french school downstairs and there is a history of incidents of annoyance between the students of these two schools. However there are no rules stating that the windows may not be opened, or shouted through in the rooms on the other side of the school. There has been no such conflict with those windows, so there has not been a need to create such rules around them; people do as they see fit until there is conflict. Not all posted rules are as unequivocal as ‘No hanging out the windows.’ Most of them allow for a great deal of ambiguity such as only sponsoring “one overly aggressive student” in the BMR (Fieldnote, June 25, 04, 6473). Or they are peculiarly specific indicating that they have developed out of a particular incident like Hockey Rule #9: “No Chanting” (Field memory, June 17).
The big muscle room, or BMR, has the highest concentration of energy and the highest concentration of posted rules. It has no furnishings other than a small loft, a few benches along the wall, large pillows and big mobile blocks (Image 18). This carpeted room is perfect for running around and is the only space in the school where play fighting is permitted. This room is used mostly by younger students as a rumpus room.

On the wall at the entrance of the room are ten pages of rules addressing safety and supervision concerns (Image 17). The BMR is particularly stringent about sponsors. At Windsor House the supervision responsibilities are usually attached to the child rather than the room, this means that a sponsor generally sponsors particular people in the BMR not the room as a whole. People who wish to be in the BMR have the responsibility of arranging their own sponsorship.

I found the frenetic energy and the multiple rules and regulations of the BMR
rather intimidating and overwhelming. While I looked into the BMR every day, it was not a room I spent much time in. Despite this I was approached multiple times every day by younger students asking me to please sponsor them in the BMR.

On the next page are some of the posted rules guiding sponsorship and room use. In addition to these rules there are also charts indicating who is ‘licensed’ to sponsor and at what level. As is evident by the following postings (Fieldnote, June 25, 04, 6462-6525) there are a number of elements left unclear, or which are contradictory, in the posted rules.

Image 18: BMR Blocks
Some of the rules posted in the BMR:

“You must know all the names of all the students you sponsor”

Three Levels of Sponsorship
Level 1: Limit of 5 students. Imaginative games and fort building only. No wrestling, pillow fighting, or block jumping.
Level 2: Limit of 10 students. Tag games and block jumping. Limit of one overly aggressive student.
Level 3: Sponsor uses own judgment along with set rules on BMR.
There can be up to 3 level 1 sponsors at a time (max 15 students).
Or
There can be 1 level 1 sponsor and 1 level 2 sponsor (max 15 students)
Or
A level 2 on its own with any combination overseeing the room.

- No food or drink
- Take off shoes
- Hitting only with permission
- Nothing tied around neck
- No hitting on head or groin area
- Big blocks can only be piled 2 blocks high
- No pillows over the top holes in the block
- No blocking the loft off from vision or the entrance to the loft with pillows
- No gymnastics
- Lower windows must stay shut
- No climbing the windows
- One person on the loft ladder at a time
- No jumping from loft or ladder
- 5 people in the loft only
- No socks on blocks

“These are the rules for play fighting, pillow fighting and wrestling at Windsor House: The BMR is the only room in the school where these activities can happen. A licensed sponsor (licensed staff member) must be present and directly supervising.”

“If any of the rules listed below are broken, the person causing the offence may be immediately ejected from the activity or given one initial warning. (This decision is made at the sponsor's discretion)”
Making Rules

Part of the expression of democracy at Windsor House is that the rules emerge from an expressed need or desire and are made by those they govern. The central meeting at which this occurs is the school council, which meets every school day with the exception of Tuesdays; classes are scheduled to not conflict with council. The focus of School Council is to discuss, debate and pass resolutions. Passed resolutions become the rules of the school. Any member of the school may submit a resolution for consideration at council. As described in the methodology chapter, the procedure is to write on a piece of paper, “B.I.R.T” (be it resolved that), the proposed resolution, and your name. Adult members must have three student supporters sign the paper. The paper is then placed in the resolutions file in the office or given to the person chairing the council at the beginning of the meeting. The person proposing the resolution must be present at the meeting to discuss it; if they are not the resolution is left in the folder until another meeting when they are present.

Each meeting is chaired. Generally this is done by a single staff member who agrees to the responsibility for a number of months. Often the person chairing will be supported or substituted by a parent or older student. The person chairing the meeting reads the resolution out loud; a discussion then ensues which they mediate. Sometimes people at the council have questions or concerns to address. Sometimes stories and insights are shared about similar resolutions in the past. Sometimes friendly modifications are offered, which can be accepted or denied by the person who tabled the resolution. After the discussion the person chairing asks: ‘are we ready to take it to a vote?’ If there is agreement, a vote is cast by raising and counting

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81 On Tuesdays school is in session only in the mornings. The afternoons are reserved for staff meetings and consultations between staff, students and/or parents.

82 The personality of the person chairing impacts the tone of the meeting. While maintaining a single staff member as chair assists with knowledge continuity, it may restrict access for those who wish not to engage with the person chairing.
hands. Resolutions need two-thirds majority to pass. Numbers are counted for yes, no and abstain; there are no absentee votes. All members of the school can attend council and vote.\textsuperscript{83} Passed resolutions along with the numbers of votes are printed in the weekly school newsletter which are archived on the web site, other than that there is no formal record book of resolutions. Although it is possible to look up a record of resolutions on the web site, I did not once see or hear about anybody doing this. Instead rules are effective to the extent that they are remembered and enforced. This is perhaps the most significant aspect of the organization of this school space.

Attendance at school council meetings is not mandatory. The number and identity of participants from one meeting to another varies from as few as six to as many as thirty-five people. Usually there will be six to fifteen students, and one to five adults including one or two teachers. Although there are faces that appear frequently, it is generally a different group of people from day to day. That said there are many members of Windsor House who almost never attend council meetings. Occasionally there are more adults than students at these meetings but usually the number of students greatly outnumbers the number of adults. There is a tendency for the students who attend to be middle or older students rather than the youngest students.

The council meetings take place around an oval table. People sit at the table and around the room on the bookshelves or at other chairs. People join and leave throughout the meeting. Many people bring their lunches and eat. It is not unusual that there will be people writing resolutions, perhaps asking for spelling assistance and often receiving solicited and unsolicited recommendations towards their resolutions. There are side-conversations, but generally it is a

\textsuperscript{83} My voting privileges occurred with an odd mixture of formality and informality. Early in my practicum, when I was in attendance at a small council meeting, it felt odd to be present and not vote, and so I voted. The teacher chairing the meeting said that a resolution was necessary for me to be able to vote. The teacher then verbally introduced a resolution, everybody said yes, and the meeting continued. By that time I had already voted at other meetings without incident.
focused forum. There is no assured timeline granted to resolutions. When a resolution gets passed, it is not carved in stone. A passed resolution can be, and often has been, quickly overturned, replaced, or forgotten. Other resolutions seem to have a large cyclical pattern where the same resolution will be reinforced then retired time and time again. Sometimes this cycle is long, such as every couple of years, other times it is short. At times during the history of council there have been attempts to increase the number of people participating. Tactics used have included making council mandatory and adding ridiculous and controversial resolutions to provoke attendance. Neither of these tactics is currently used. People participate to the extent that they find it useful to them.

When a provocative resolution is being considered the number of people in attendance goes up. Sometimes it becomes clear that a longer discussion is necessary than the time allotted in school council and a special meeting is called. These meetings occur during school time and are announced in the newsletter so that more people can find out about it and attend. For example the list of 30 rules around hockey posted in the gym was passed by 30/0/0 indicating a fairly significant attendance which was likely discussed as a special meeting. Other topics that may be turned over to a special meeting are issues around repeated violence, theft or bullying.

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84 Provocative and controversial resolutions continue to be introduced. The difference now is that they emerge out of an experienced difficulty, not for the sole purpose of drawing a crowd.
85 These numbers are written as they appear on postings and in newsletters announcing new resolutions, they indicate the 'for'/'against'/'abstain' respectfully.
Council in Progress

A number of boys between the ages of ten and fourteen went through a spell of playing a game in the green space by the parking lot in full view of everybody entering the school. The game consisted of one boy being chased by all the other participants, who, while they chased him, hurled insults at him; it was always the same boy that was chased. A parent wrote a resolution to ban the game. Initially, her argument was a concern for the victimization of the boy being chased. This boy came to the meeting to express desire to continue the game and offense that someone else was setting the conditions by which he would be labeled victim. A twenty-minute discussion arose. People involved made arguments that it was not only the boys in the game that were impacted but also everybody who had to witness it. Concerns were mentioned about what neighbours might think and the school’s reputation. A great deal of concern was expressed around impact on younger students. A teacher suggested a ‘friendly revision’ that the game be modified so that instead of inflammatory insults, other yells were used. The game players said that would ruin the game. People expressed discomfort with the idea of a game where the point was to bombard another person with insults. It was clear that this discussion was not going to be resolved within the time of the school council meeting. It was proposed, voted on and passed that the game be put on hold for the rest of the week and a special issues be called for the following Monday.

Concerns around the school’s relationship with its neighbours and its public reputation are often expressed. Part of this stems from the need to ‘stay under the radar’ because of the school’s unusual and unfamiliar educational approaches within a system prone to standardization. Windsor House has suffered a history of often bizarre, often defamatory rumours about it.

Newsletters are issued on Fridays.
There is a lot going on in this scenario in terms of expressions of power, group process, and authority. I imagine an effect of this postponement was a loss of interest in the game, and thus the process of passing the resolution had the intended effect (of stopping the game) regardless of whether the resolution passed. This is one of the ways the abundance of bureaucracy can be powerfully wielded to impact and operate in a participatory democracy. The bureaucracy can be used to tie up the practice so to disable it. However I do not know if the members in fact stopped the game.

I find it significant that while it was likely that the resolution to end the game would have passed, a vote was not deemed appropriate because the discussion did not achieve an adequate sense of resolution. It seemed to be understood that passing a resolution without agreement from the people who are being asked to change their behaviour would be futile to living out the resolution. Another aspect I found significant was that ethical positioning was considered as intrinsically important to the decision; the concept of the resolution was not separated from ideas of how the members wanted to live as a community. The discussion covered ideas of false consciousness and who gets to establish whether the resolution passed. This is one of the ways the abundance of bureaucracy can be used to tie up the practice so to disable it. However I do not know if the members in fact stopped the game.

During this discussion, the meeting filled up with the boys involved. What was interesting was that they did not speak with one voice. It appears that one's personal opinion at council is taken seriously. When the meeting moved onto the next item of the agenda, most of the people left the room. They were not obligated to attend to business other that that which interested them. This is an example of how rules, mobility and self regulation interconnect.
Although the business of council is often serious, such as in the preceding example, the process of inventing defending and considering a resolution is generally addressed with creativity, experimentation and a great deal of play. Even the most outlandish resolutions brought to the forum of school council are discussed, taken to a vote, and if passed, implemented. At one meeting a group of older boys introduced a resolution to make it so that the people who volunteer to take messages from a meeting in process to people needed for the meeting, would have to be called ‘bounty-hunters.’ There was much laughter from the presenters of this resolution who were enthusiastic about it. They insisted it had to be a school resolution and not just something they did amongst themselves. This resolution did not pass because concerns were raised about introducing a label embedded with so much violence, and about needlessly forcing people to use a particular vocabulary. However, it was a small meeting, if the boys proposing it had brought a few more people with them it likely would have passed, despite one of the boys initially advocating for it, voting against it.\(^{88}\) The space to make bad rules, and play with the possibility of the outlandish is key to council working. Bad resolutions implemented can fail to solve the problem, trigger annoyance, get quickly over turned, and/or fall flat with people in the school refusing to adopt to it. This sense of playing with the possibility, and trying rules out is imperative to feeling like an entitled member of the process of democracy. It is an expression of real impact on and entitlement to the space. Living with the results of bad resolutions, brings insight into the process of making effective resolutions.

Play and experimentation provide the possibility of addressing real concerns with unexpected but effective solutions, and expanding the imagination of strategies for resolution.

\(^{88}\) This was met with guffaws by his collaborators. When they asked what was up with his vote he responded by saying it no longer seemed like a good idea. This was not the first time I saw groups of peers break ranks when it came to voting. I was impressed with these demonstrations of independence.
For example, a few years ago there was a fad of introducing wordy resolutions that exhausted the council and made everything take a long time. In response, a resolution was passed stating that all future resolutions had to be written in haiku format, this effectively nipped the lengthy prose in the bud. Later that resolution was modified so that resolutions did not \textit{have} to be written in haiku, but those which were, would be addressed first.\footnote{\textit{I was told that this resolution was still in effect, but did not see it used.}} It is this sense of play that engenders ownership and a functional material understanding of negotiating space with others. Participatory democracy means living with the effects of your actions and grappling with the relationship between the rule and the lived reality. This is why it is the process of making the rule, not the rule itself, that is seen as significant, and why it is important that the results of the process are changeable. Helen told me about how she has observed that sometimes, even if a resolution is not passed, the discussion of the proposed resolution is in and of itself sufficient to shift the behaviour that inspired the proposal of the resolution (Field memory, June 23, 04). At Windsor House, the rule does not exist for the sake of the rule, it exists to be of service in the negotiation of the sharing of space, if the rule is not working for those effected, then the rule is changed or dropped.

In addition to the school council meetings, and special topics meetings, there are other ways rules are made. All funding decisions need to go through S.A.N.E and occur at those meetings; resolutions that involve parent participation are also introduced and passed there.\footnote{These meetings follow the same protocol as school council. Rules are also developed in committee meetings or room councils, both of which are developed to tend to the needs of a particular space.} These many funding and administrative decisions seem to be made in this forum. I am unclear how much structurally protected influence students have over this. I didn’t see students voting at the parents/evening meetings. I do not have enough information to establish the finer details of this.

\footnote{Because the person who introduces a resolution has to be present to defend it, having a resolution at the beginning can prevent having to sit through multiple other resolutions waiting.}

\footnote{Looking in the newsletters after this fieldwork, I see the trend of haiku returned.}

\footnote{Many funding and administrative decisions seem to be made in this forum. I am unclear how much structurally protected influence students have over this. I didn’t see students voting at the parents/evening meetings. I do not have enough information to establish the finer details of this.}
of topic, and are under the authority of the school council. Many individual rooms have councils that determine the use and rules for that room, it is these councils that are often responsible for the rule postings on that room. For example the rules about the process of checking books out of the library is tended to by library council not school council. The library has a particularly strong council, which has intentionally reduced the rules for that room to three rules written in haiku. There are also rules imposed on Windsor House from outside. To ensure public funding, Windsor House and its staff are under the obligation to follow a number of district regulations around safety and other standards. The rule of no smoking on school grounds for example, comes from the district.

Within the language of Windsor House there is a lot of interplay between the vocabulary of rules, resolutions and procedures; however there is some sense of distinction between them. The language of resolutions seems to primarily apply to rules that have been recently created. The language of rules seems to be for another set of overarching, firm rules. These rules seem to be the resolutions that have stood the test of time. For example, a common statement is: at Windsor House, we are not allowed to exclude people. The language of procedures is for outlining the course of action by which a solution may be derived for situations as they come up. The overarching or what I call super rules, such as not excluding people; seem to be understood as fixed and definite, and beyond the scope of change. Exactly were the divide between malleable and nonmalleable rules lies, and who sees what as changeable, is a source for further investigation.

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92 Complaints about room councils can be taken up at school council; school council does not oversee the details of room councils.
93 The three rules of the library are: “Furniture stays still. Trust in the wisdom of the library council,” “Silence must prevail. A quiet place to read is what must be maintained,” and “Eat at the table, on the linoleum floor, no crumbs must be found.” All rules set for the school apply to the library as well.
Over time the structure of council has changed, at some points it worked on consensus, at other times it worked with majority rule. Collaboration of all participants has always been central. At times, intervention has been used within a system. Six years ago the school experienced a crisis of existence in the high school level. Teachers and parents were frustrated and exhausted by what they considered a highly apathetic teen group that was causing a bad reputation for the school by their off-school ground school hour behavior. In an unusual and coercive move, the staff said they were unwilling to continue teaching the high school students, and shut the school down to them. Students were allowed to come to Windsor House only as long as they participated in what was to become known as the 'Long Meeting.' This meeting was a multiple week meeting in which guidelines and rules were negotiated between the members of the staff, parents, and high school students to address concerns and come up with a strategy for continuing the school.\textsuperscript{94} This constant change, intervention, and repeated cycles are not considered an impediment but rather an important part of the participatory democratic process. Power dynamics are always at play, the change and the discussion that forces the changes likely does more to curb these dynamics than striving to establish a perfect system.

There are other formalized conventions at Windsor House intended to support the members of the school and the democratic process, but which are not of themselves democratic. These are primarily the philosophy meetings and conflict resolution sessions. Philosophy meetings may be called by any member of the school and are generally held in the evening. They are intended to be “about what we believe—and how to bring either our actions into line with our beliefs, or our beliefs into line with our actions...These meetings are to share ideas, but do not attempt to resolve problems or achieve consensus” (Windsor House, 2003, p. 6). Conflict Resolution

\textsuperscript{94}The Windsor House web site has posted detailed minutes for this entire process.
Meetings are a convention intended to resolve conflict between the people who are experiencing it.  

I have a lasting image in my mind of walking down the bustling hallway, feeling tired by the noise and the movement of people all around me. Through a left ajar door of the Temple of the Flying Pig, I saw a small quiet group of students raising their hands to vote. I was impressed both by the intent and sanctuary that seemed to be in this room. This small group of people making the decisions for the running of the school calmed me. I was impressed with the rest of the school going on as usual while significant decisions were being made; leaving others to do that day’s work without everyone having to be involved with the details of every decision. Council is a tool that provides structure to the chaos and rhythm to the space. This moment, which is crystal clear in my mind, left me with a sense that something powerful was happening here, something connected to the relationship between the individual and the collective.

**Enforcing Rules.**

Judicial Council, called J.C., occurs after the resolutions of school council have been completed. It is a central system regulating how rules are enforced and conflict is addressed. The function of J.C. is to hear complaints and determine consequences. Any member of Windsor House can write a complaint on another member of the school. Complaints are written when one member is hurt or annoyed by another or witnesses someone breaking a resolution, and is unable to resolve the situation on their own. Complaints do not necessarily go against a known or stated rule; for example there is no rule that one is not allowed to throw paper airplanes at someone, but there is a stated mandate and general understanding that when you are doing something annoying or unsafe, you have to stop when asked. If someone throws paper airplanes at someone and will

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95 See *Enforcing Rules* in this chapter.
not stop when asked, a complaint may be written on them, but throwing a paper airplane at no one in particular, or a willing target, may be perfectly fine. Common complaints involve: an act of exclusion from a game; violence such as being pinched, punched or threatened; inappropriate touching such as grabbing bums; being pestered; using a space without being licensed for it; leaving a mess; or not following sign-in /sign-out procedures.96

Submitting a complaint involves filling out the first page of a complaint form, (Image 19) which are available in multiple places around the school.97 The form asks for a description of what happened, the name of the person filing the complaint, the name of the person the complaint is on, the name of any witnesses, and a proposed consequence; this suggested consequence is considered and occasionally implemented by council. The complaint is then put in the council folder.98 It is not necessary to come to council to defend your complaint, although council may send a runner99 for you if they require more information. On a given day J.C. may address between four and twenty complaints. The complaint is read out, consequences are suggested and collectively considered with regards to the particular individual and the context. Some complaints are simple, but some, because they involve repeated offences or seem particularly mean-spirited require a considerable amount of discussion. A person's file may be consulted to see if there is a history of similar complaints. When it seems like there is a tone of general agreement in the council, the consequence is put to a vote. Consequences pass by the same process as resolutions. The people implicated vote if they are present. When a consequence is

96 See Information Central in Authority, Negotiation and Power for more information.
97 Younger students, who are not yet writing, often ask older students or adults to scribe or assist with spelling with these forms. Often the request for assistance filling out the form is not accompanied by a request for assistance about the content of the form.
98 Often younger students hand their complaint to an adult to place in the council folder.
99 When council deems it necessary to have more information about a complaint a person from the meeting will volunteer to go find that person, this is called a runner. When a runner comes to get you, you are required to come to the meeting.
derived, a council member\textsuperscript{100} writes the information on the second part of the form (Image 20). The consequence is then run to the person receiving the consequence, they accept it or in rare exceptions come to council to present a case to have the consequence eliminated or changed. If the people involved in the complaint are present generally the consequence is not put to a vote until they verbally agree to the proposed consequence. It seems to be deemed futile to assign a consequence that is not accepted. Complaints and consequences are not published in the weekly newspaper. They are filed in the student's file in the unlocked cabinet in the school council meeting room. As far as I understand, there is no official process to ensure that consequences are followed. "We have no police system, so must rely on the good intentions of the people receiving the consequences" (Windsor House, 2003, p. 17). Nobody suggested to me that consequences issued are not followed, however I did witness particular surveillance of individuals with a history of complaints issued on them implying that the handbook statement does not necessarily or consistently reflect the practice.

An interesting side effect of this arrangement is that while there are conventions in arriving at a consequence, a person does not know the consequences for their actions ahead of time, nor do they known if there will be a consequence issued for breaking a rule.\textsuperscript{101} This uncertain arrangement can be restrictive because of the fear of not knowing the sources of trouble. It can also be embraced as freeing, such as the boys who gave me my initial tour, who said to do what you want, but listen for when it is bothering people.

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\textsuperscript{100} As with the resolutions, a 'council member' is any member of the school who is in attendance.

\textsuperscript{101} Allow convention seems to be that a person issues a threat of writing a complaint prior to writing the complaint.
There is a wide range of consequences. Some are creative and specific to an incident. For example Helen was given the consequence of replacing light bulbs. This consequence came in response to a complaint written on her that she had made a sexist assumption by asking specifically for boys to help her move something heavy. Changing the light bulbs was seen as typically male work, so it was deemed appropriate to the context. Common consequences are to be temporarily restricted from the room where the incident occurred, or to be de-licensed, which is to lose special permissions. For example if someone does not listen to their sponsor in the BMR, the council may decide that that person has to go a week without using the BMR. If a person does not follow procedure for leaving the school grounds, their license to leave grounds may be revoked for a specified time. In this way, complaints and consequences are significantly about negotiation of space.
Each student has a file in the unlocked file cabinet kept in the Temple of the Flying Pig where the meeting is held. As consequences are ‘community’ business, these files are open and accessible to everyone. They hold all complaints filed and consequences issued on that person. If a person has repeated complaints made on them, a red flag will be introduced (Image 21). This indicates a preset, exponentially increasing consequence with regards to any further complaints of a similar nature. Red flags are reserved for “red flag’ behaviours such as physical violence, intimidation, bullying, sexual harassment” (Fieldnote, June 15, 04, 3956), as written on outside of file cabinet), or behaviour that is deemed problematic that will not change. A red flag is issued so that further behaviour of a similar nature will be addressed with increased seriousness. Council can remove Red flags from a file; typically this is done when the person with the flag introduces a resolution that the flag be removed. For this resolution to be successful, council must believe the behaviour has changed, and the flag is no longer necessary.

![Red Flag](Image 21: Red Flag)

Judicial Council is not the only venue in which to address conflict. Other often-used options are conflict resolution and small group problem solving: sometimes these are formalized and sometimes not. They are generally used for incidents that seem to have an ongoing history.

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102 I do not know if teachers or parents have such files.
have a high degree of emotional upset, and/or are particularly targeted or mean spirited. Sometimes J.C. will require participants in a conflict to have a small meeting instead of, or in addition to, issuing a consequence. Sometimes staff or parents request these meetings, and sometimes the participants themselves request them. Conflict resolution and problem solving groups allow the participants a less public venue and a tighter influence on the outcome. Helen plays a primary role in mediating these groups.

While all these structural tools are in place, the preferred mode of action is for people to figure out a way to work things out for themselves in the moment. Sometimes this is simple, for instance a few times a person I was talking with and I were asked to move because our voices were distracting to others. This was easily done, and there was no need to evoke or create a rule. Sometimes people working things out for themselves can be more involved, like the following example which occurred midday in the Temple of The Flying Pig when a few people had been talking around the table:

**Boxhead**[^1] (aged 6) was walking on the table towards two loud young girls (ages 6/7?) who had settled at the end of the table and were beginning to unpack their lunches. Boxhead was walking with determination and certainty, making some sort of proclamation at the two girls. The girls looked at him. One said, "no walking on the table." Boxhead sat down on the table. A teacher and I were still in the room, so were a few older kids. None of us seemed to be responding to Boxhead on the table at all. I don't think any of the three involved in this interaction were particularly conscious of the adult presence being a factor in evoking or enforcing this rule.^[2]

[^1]: I assigned this boy this name because of an incident at the beginning of my fieldwork when he barged in on a conversation I was having with two girls wearing cardboard armor and bearing a long cardboard sword. Part of his armory was a large box on his head.
[^2]: I do not know if this is a rule or not, but it was evoked as if it was, and was not disputed.
Everyone leaves the room during or shortly after this so it is me, the two hyper girls, and Boxhead remaining. Boxhead is talking in a loud voice, banging his lunch box against the table and swinging it around his head. The girls are talking loudly, and their movements are dramatic and seemingly uncontrolled. The girls are not sitting down; they are at the end of the table eating a chip or a carrot at a time from their lunches and dancing around. Boxhead makes fun of their dancing. He swings his lunch box and it opens, everything falls out and makes a mess on the carpet. He then expresses a lot of hateful words towards the girls including “I’m going to kill you.” The girls seem unconcerned and unresponsive to his anger. The level of his upset concerns me; I ask him why he is so upset. He says that they [the girls] are laughing at him. As he says this, he begins to clean up his food, and repack his box without me asking him. I say, I don’t think they are laughing at you, and that they have been laughing ever since they came in the room.

He turns his attention back to the girls and expands on his “I’m going to kill you” by saying, “I hope you freeze to death.” He then begins to develop increasingly imaginative ways by which this could happen. When he gets to the point of sending them to the South Pole in their bathing suits, one of the girls finally responds to him saying that wouldn’t work because they never bring their swimsuits to school. “But,” he counters, “there is a swim trip coming up.” “Well, we’ll bring winter clothes.” “Well, I’ll set up an airport with security that will only let you through without winter clothes.” “Well, I’ll take a parachute and jump out before we get there.” “You don’t know how to jump.” “Well, my mom does, I’ll get her to teach me.” While this conversation of plots and sabotage is occurring, Boxhead is returning to his sitting on the table, his body and voice grow calmer and it seems he is happy to be having this discussion. He asks them to dance, and they do. (Fieldnote, June 4, 04, 2428-74)

In this example I interpret that Boxhead wanted to participate in the girls’ fun and was frustrated about how to make that happen. The girls, who are themselves a bold and dominate force in the school, seemed unperturbed by the Boxhead, but did not want him crashing their fun.
Resolving this conflict by turning his hostilities into a game that was fun for all parties is a path I find perplexing, unexpected, rather humorous, and slightly concerning, however, it seemed to work for all involved in the moment. My concerns rest in the possibility that often a gendered way girls predict and dissipate boys entitlement to space and their physical or confrontational stance is to appease them by giving them enough of what they want to prevent the possibility of violence. This is part of the way gender scripts operate. While this may not have been the dominant factor here, gendered power dynamics around negotiation of space are certainly present. A potentially hostile and explosive dynamic dissipated without adult assistance being sought, expected, or apparently desired.

**Living and Learning From Rules**

At Windsor House the rules operate in the absence of the members having consistent knowledge about what the rules are, and with ambiguous instructions about how to follow them. Members do not use rules as the primary factor guiding their behaviour; instead behaviour is reliant on contextual consideration and deliberation. The process of the system of governance and creation of rules is to find an agreed upon path through conflict. Rules emerge from an expressed sense of resolution by all parties; they are a process of negotiation. The rule itself represents a codification of the process; it is the process of negotiating the conflict that is meaningful, and the heart of the curriculum of the school. People participate in governance to the extent they find it useful to them, and the rules are effective to the extent that they are remembered and enforced. Embedded in this process is the lesson that rules are human made tools to provide a use, thus they can be malleable. The ideas of democratic citizenship rely on people being active in the formation of the structures that govern them. This system holds
powerful lessons about responsibility, participation, and negotiation, though it is not without its problems and tensions.

Richard Swift in The No-Nonsense Guide to Democracy (2003) suggests that active citizenship cannot be expected without at least some experience of direct democracy (p. 95). In the context of Windsor House where direct democracy is abundant there is a strong sense of citizenship. Because the rules are always a work in progress and they can be easily changed there is room for play and experimentation. This can foster feelings of ownership of and belonging to the space. There is something powerful about having a random, and sometimes ridiculous idea of one’s own become a rule, and then seeing how it manifests within the school. For those who participate, this fosters a sense of connection and responsibility to the surrounding people and space.

Because rules get taken up on an individualistic basis within their context, this fosters people seeing each other as individuals as they negotiate. Because these negotiations are happening in a collective context, these individuals are each accountable to the larger group. There are powerful lessons within this structure about learning that rules can be malleable to the needs of the people. That the structure can be in the service of the people, and ones' individual needs can be continually negotiated within the context of an interdependent and interconnected community. There are also abundant lessons about investing one’s self in the issues that feel particularly important to the individual and not opposing someone else’s interests needlessly. It seemed remarkable to me that through all this negotiation around rules I did not once hear anyone say, ‘That’s not fair.’ In this structure of governance fairness is built, not decreed.

Living with this state of rules is full of contradiction and uncertainty. A few students I spoke with expressed doubts that the system of writing complaints served a useful purpose. One student, who was new to the school, took difficulties she was having directly to Helen or another
teacher to address instead of using the complaint system. Part of this may have been bringing habits from her many years' experiences at standard school, or she may have felt that doing this had more satisfactory results. Another student, who had been at Windsor House for approximately four years, told me that it is “useless” to write complaints. (Fieldnote, June 2, 04, 2013). That they do not work to stop whom ever was bugging her. Instead she kept her head down and tried to be “invisible” to all but a handful of friends and “enemies” (Fieldnote, June 02, 04, 2065). She talked about Windsor House being a place of strangers, without connection.

That knowledge of rules is inconsistent serves both as an important function and a cause of concern. Often frustration is felt and expressed about how difficult it is to stay in the loop of the current changes. This is particularly strong, but not exclusive to, members, especially parents, who have a lot of physical distance from the school. Negotiating the balance between providing clarity to members so that they feel connected, and maintaining the benefits of flexibility is tricky work.

Rules, although a significant part of the school, are not the pinnacle of authority. Human interaction takes precedent. Hence the rules come second to the context of the moment. This is a circumstance that challenged my preconceptions. Circumstance and interpretation are written into many of the rules themselves. For example there is a rule for the front porch: “no swearing when any adult who might be offended is near” (Fieldnote, June 17, 04, 4823). One cannot evoke this rule absolutely, a consideration of context and the perspective of the person who swore, who was offended and who evokes the rule is built into it; discussion and negotiation are necessarily part of it. This call to be engaged and accountable, despite my good intentions, was one I found hard to live up to. This is exemplified in my fieldnotes:
The front porch was busy, mostly with what I would call the 'cool' kids. While Tea and I were talking, B-girl and another of her friends came up. Tea was eating Jell-O. Her arm was bumped and a big glob of the Jell-O fell onto the floor. Everyone giggled, then the other two girls left out the front door. A moment later Tea followed. Then I left the area. The Jell-O remained on the floor.

I feel regrets about my avoidance here. It was my responsibility to Tea and the processes of Windsor House to do something. However I didn't want to contend with the bitchiness of the girls or target Tea in front of them. As a result I am likely slated by B-girl as someone to be ignored. I worry about having not taken Tea seriously enough to engage with her about this, and with leaving a mess that would get progressively more gross, that someone else had to clean up. In retrospect, I should have said, I'll get the paper towels to help you clean that up, and went from there. (Fieldnote, June 17, 04, 4844-4863)

I could take the stance of being an uninvolved researcher/observer, but this was inconsistent with how I was in the space. Talking to the participants, threatening to or actually writing a complaint all were options. However, regretfully, I did not engage. I find it a great deal of work to be as constantly engaged with the people around me, and myself, as this structure seems to warrant. I have an inclination towards quiet isolation that this sort of community engagement seems incompatible with. I do, however, appreciate how the space pushes me to work with this important lesson.

This process of making and negotiating rules is the curriculum of the school; the tedium of negotiating rules is not extraneous to the activities at hand, but central to them. It is important to emphasize it is not intended that the rules be enforced in every possible instance; rather they are
to be used sparingly and only when the participants cannot otherwise resolve the situation for themselves.¹⁰⁵

“The spirit of the rule is more important than the letter of the law. Community members are expected to assist in enforcing a rule when the breaking of the rule causes difficulties in the community. A ‘code of silence’ is unacceptable, but one is expected to use discretion in ‘fingering’ culprits. If you get pleasure from ‘telling’ on someone, then you probably shouldn’t do it, but if you feel that someone’s behaviour is a problem to the community, you should file a complaint even if that person is a good friend’. (Windsor House, 2003, p.8)

Many, if not most, of the rules have to do with trying to foster a culture of inclusivity, flexibility and respect. The specifics of the rules, as they are always in flux, are less important than the intention behind the rules. Living in this arrangement necessitates a large amount of local cultural knowledge (often called ‘common sense’). The staff seems very knowledgeable of the rules; so do students and parents who are actively engaged in the school and have been there awhile. There appears to be a heavy reliance on oral history and memory which in some ways fosters an ‘in crowd’ as well as an ‘out crowd.’ Often students say they don’t know the rules. In my experience, students who were new at Windsor House were more likely to express this. Broadly, even when there is no knowledge of the specifics of the rule, there is knowledge of the process of the rules at Windsor House.

While records are maintained in the student’s files about whom complaints are written on, no records are kept for who writes complaints. It would be interesting to document the range of the population that uses the complaint system, as there are many complaints filed. I was surprised to

¹⁰⁵ While working it out for one’s self is preferred, I did not hear anyone in council ever suggest that a complaint should not have been issued. I see this as a method to combat hard to identify power dynamics that may be behind why the situation was not resolved. Filing a complaint is a way of asking for assistance.
see one young girl, approximately seven-years-old, who has many red flags herself, write a complaint on a girl who she called her best friend. Just a little while before I had seen her joyfully dancing with the girl she was writing up on complaint. She came into The Cottage, and calmly asked the teacher to help her with some of the spelling words for her form. She did not ask the teacher to resolve the conflict. The teacher did not make any attempt to dissuade her from writing the complaint.

Some rules seem to be less significant than others; for instance the rule about running in the hall, while commonly broken and often talked about, is infrequently taken to J.C. Rules involving a high level of dispute are heavily enforced. An example of this is the computer sign up sheet in The Castle. There is a form on the wall that outlines time increments, with maximum times allotted, for each of the computers. According to the information posted, people wanting to use a particular computer are supposed to slot their names into the next available time. Even though most of the computers are in use most of the time the sign out sheet is generally only used for the few newer highly demanded computers (Fieldnote, June 2, 04, 2166). Many times the threat of writing a complaint is sufficient for a situation. Often, I heard both students and staff threaten to write a complaint if certain behaviour did not stop. Witnessing is considered involvement and is sufficient to write a complaint, and threats to write complaints were also used by witnesses.

This system of rules and governance fosters inconsistency and uncertainty, as well as an emphasis on discussion, context, and relationships of negotiation between rule breakers and enforcers. At Windsor House, most people are both. The uncertainty serves a necessary function; it maintains a necessity to think about the situation at hand and reflect on what actions make sense. Pedagogically and politically, doing democracy is what creates democracy.
Through this deliberative, participatory process, in Freire’s (1999) terms, participants are subjects of their own experiences.

“The best rules are still the ones that learners make out of their own experience” (Holt, 1982, p. 181). Holt was talking here about gaining knowledge about the material world. It rests on the idea that people can only know what they understand or the correctness of their ideas by testing them. I understand this to apply to the core of rules at Windsor House. It is the process of figuring out, and testing, how to get one’s own needs met, while sharing space with others. It is a continuous work in progress. This demands a great deal of inter-personal interaction, personal accountability, and contemplation. There is a trust built into this process. Trust that people will take the process seriously, and trust that members of the school will monitor one another kindly and effectively. I have a lot to learn about relaxing about the letter of the law, realizing that the rules are tools to serve a greater purpose, and about listening and being accountable to those around me. Looking back on my initial tour of Windsor House, I think in a way, that is what my guides were trying to tell me—to trust the people around me.

The past two chapters have explored how mobility and rules are structured to foster self-regulation. The following chapter will explore the role of authority within space explicitly in terms of age, negotiating space, and the power of commonsense.
Image 22: Dividing Wall in The Castle
Authority, Negotiation, and Power

The thing they learn here is how to negotiate space with other people. This is the point.
Parent, Fieldnote, 05/19/04

Authority

Throughout this project I have worked to gain knowledge about how power and authority operate and are embedded in the space of Windsor House; this has been an illusive task. From the beginning it was clear that authority operated at this school in ways shifted from what I am accustomed to. Children and youth appear to assume and be granted authority with surprising comfort and ease. This was evident in my official tour guides being youth who proudly entertained me with tales of having complaints issued on them, and in the little girl who confidently walked up to me with her hands on her hips asking ‘who are you,’ positioning herself as someone who could monitor the space.

I use the word authority to refer to a person (or source of information) in a position to enforce or dictate rules, provide reliable information, have official power and/or knowledge worthy of respect. Free school literature often distinguishes between ‘natural authority’ stemming from experience and reliability, and ‘manipulative’ or ‘arbitrary authority’ exclusively serving the needs of the institution or person in a position of power; natural authority is established as something to be fostered while arbitrary authority is something to be eliminated (Holt 1982, Dennison 1969, Llewellyn 1997). I have two primary criticisms of this position. The first is that the idea of ‘natural’ is predicated on the idea of the innate and is thus inconsistent with

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106 For more information on complaints see Rules and Governance.
107 See The Hallway in Mobility and Self Regulation for more information.
ideas of social construction. The second is the problematic of conceptualizing that which is named 'natural' as oppositional to that which is named 'manipulative;' this overly simplistic binary does the disservice of providing the false sense of a safe position (named natural) from which to critique the other (named manipulative). Authority is more multifaceted, overlapping, and complicated than this distinction allows. Each is made too much of the other for a binary conceptualization to be useful. However, I understand the need to distinguish between authority for the sake of authority, and authority that stems from knowledge and experience. In this work I have borrowed from Freire who makes this distinction using the concepts of authority and authoritarianism (2001).

Matt Hern (2003) argues that all relationships hold multiple layers of authority and that it is essential people learn to distinguish and evaluate for themselves claims of authority. Standard schooling, by conflating being respectful with being good, meek, and rule obeying, obfuscates the ability to distinguish between claims of authority. In the authoritarian space of standard schooling, students are in a position of obligation to obey authority regardless of how they evaluate its value. As such they are restricted from responding to claims of authority based on its perceived value. The result of this circumstance is that all authority, by default, becomes manipulative. I observe Windsor House embracing authority and a non-authoritarian environment, intending a space that fosters a relationship to authority articulated in Field Day (2003) by Hern thus:

"I think it is critically important for kids to be able to see and feel and smell different layers and kinds of authority.... We all need to be able to develop bonds of trust, and learn to identify who we can rely on, who can support our own autonomy and not subject us to official or manipulative decision making.... That process should really be started as soon as possible, so kids can have the opportunity to make mistakes, find their way and author themselves" (p. 72-3).
Windsor House works to structure itself so that members have a relationship to authority where they are able to try out, question, refuse, and embrace claims of authority and people in positions of authority. Some of the ways it does this are: by building a space where members are collaborative participants in shaping that space; creating an organizational structure where members have access to multiple sources of authority and where they may refuse and seek out alternatives; reducing students’ dependency on teacher approval; and most crucially, positioning each member as a respected authority over themselves and the conditions of their life.

**Authority and Age**

![Image 23: Windsor House Posting](image)

The ideology of fostering self-regulation or ‘autonomy immersion’ (Windsor House Parents as quoted in Johnson, 2004, p. 4) necessitates decentralizing adult authority as it is typically practiced. The question of what to do about age-based authority is central to most writings about free schools and is an area where there are significant differences in intention within approaches. The Sudbury Valley School model promotes striving to reduce or even eliminate adult authority

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108 I am unfamiliar with the context this posting was used in. I first saw it as part of the end of year school clean up.
in the lives of their students, preferring an approach that leaves students to their ‘natural’
development and regulation “unhindered by adult interference” (Greenberg, 1999, p. 111). In this
setting parents are largely absent, while teachers have strong limits on the scope of interaction
with the students (Greenberg, 1995). I recognize this as a neo-liberal approach that dangerously
tries to forfeit the responsibility of socialization and which confuses freedom with license\textsuperscript{109}

Windsor House embraces a strong engagement of adults in the lives of the students while
simultaneously dedicating itself to fostering self-regulation. In a society strongly habituated to
adults’ entitlement to control children and youth based on age, negotiating the tensions between
adult authority, authoritarianism, and self-regulation requires a shift in the typical structure of
adult/child relationships. The role of the adult and the relationship between adults and
students\textsuperscript{110} are some of the most significant ways Windsor House creatively and strategically
negotiates authority. Members are serious about questioning the entitlement to authority granted
to adults and denied to children and youth based on age.

The intention is not to try to abdicate adult authority (something that is impossible), or for
adults to hold back from participating in order to produce a ‘learning experience’ for the students,
or to take a false charity\textsuperscript{111} approach by allowing students a say in the conditions of their lives.
The intention is to create a structure that fosters equitable collaborative relationships where all
parties can engage seriously and fully. This necessitates an explicit commitment to not being
ageist and involves continually adjusting and reconsidering the structure to counterbalance the

\textsuperscript{109} For more on license, in comparison to freedom see \textit{Foundations in Literature Review}.
\textsuperscript{110} I am using the word students, to encompass both children and youth. I acknowledge that this
is an uncomfortable term in the frame of deschooling, but this paradoxical space remains a
school, even as it embraces deschooling, and as such I am retaining the language of ‘student.’
\textsuperscript{111} False charity is used here to denote the patronizing condition whereby the person providing the
offering determines the nature of the offering, the recipients, the conditions of its use, and the
time of its removal.
wider naturalized habits of adults taking charge, and students faced with only the option of compliance or sabotage. This means considering all members: parents, students and staff—and striving for a space that works for everyone.

Collaboration between adults and students can be highly unfamiliar for everyone. It is often hard work for adults to imagine collaborating with children and youth; it involves having to learn to listen, consider, and often try out ideas and strategies that likely go against their sense of reason, while respecting their own knowledge for both its strengths and its limitations. It means letting go of control and outcomes, and considering that the adult may not always know best. Walking this fine line between autonomy and safety creates a constant tension. Freire articulates quite nicely the intention behind this collaboration: “One of the pedagogical tasks for parents is to make it clear to their children that parental participation in the decision-making process is not an intrusion but a duty, so long as the parents have no intention of deciding on behalf of their children” (2001, p. 97). While this intention is not age dependant, the particular shape it takes may look different for the very young compared to older children.

In the space of Windsor House, roles and positions of authority are in flux. One of the unique aspects of this school space is that adults are not necessarily or automatically assumed to be sponsoring. This experience was quite interesting to me. It made me uncomfortable as it placed me in the unfamiliar position of interacting with kids without being in control of their activities. Simultaneously, it felt quite freeing, because unless I explicitly took on sponsorship roles, I could move around the school without the restriction of not being able to leave children on their own. I, as an adult, could be rather childlike and rather adult-like depending on where I was and what responsibilities I took on in that place. Of course I was always an adult, and could not abdicate that ‘natural authority.’ My ‘adultness’ however, did not translate into being in charge.
I was not the only one to feel this. In a lengthy conversation with ‘Elle,’ a parent of two teenage children who teaches a class at Windsor House, the theme of multi-age relations was strong. She talked about how when she first came to Windsor House she was intimidated by the youth on the porch, but over time has gained “just the right amount of contact” so that she now feels she knows them as people (Fieldnote, June 4, 04, 2876). Elle placed a great deal of importance on her contact with the teens at Windsor House occurring in such a way that “I’m not an authority figure. I might ask if it’s all right that they [are doing something] but I’m not an authority. They learn that not all adults are authority figures” (Fieldnote, June 4, 04, 2861-63). Elle saw this as quite different than her friends outside of Windsor House who may only have contact with youth who are friends of their own children in their own home, where they are in a position of authority. When I asked Elle if this meant that she herself was also learning to interact with youth without taking on the role of authority figure, she agreed (Fieldnote, June 4, 04, 2843-68).

Students as well as adults can have multiple roles and levels of responsibility in the school based on where they are and what responsibilities they take on there. They may sponsor someone for part of the day in the library, only to be sponsored themselves outside later that same day. They may vote on a peer’s consequence in J.C. then spend time alone in a small room for another part of the day. Elle talked about a young girl who sometimes hangs out with her teenage daughter, having the opportunity to “try on the world of the 13 year olds” (Fieldnote, June 4, 04, 2878-81). Elle sees her daughter’s behaviour change in response to being a role model. Elle’s story reminds me how I have witnessed younger students, enter a space where there are older students, watch for a minute or two, and then leave again. I had thought of this as intimidation, which may be a factor. However, another possibility could be that the younger kids are checking out how life of the older kids looks and feels, and self-assessing if they are ready for it. Independent mobility between spaces and activities is central to facilitating the flux in roles of authority so its types and layers can begin to be felt. This movement between space and roles of
authority disrupts the practice of innately and automatically tying claims of authority to age. Additionally, those used to always assuming a role of authority are often in a position where they do not always have it and must respond to other's claims.

The flexibility of space allows students, parents and community members to be able to use the rooms for instigating classes and activities. This fosters a disruption of who traditionally has authority around knowledge production in a school, it interrupts the schooled lessons that learning is the product of teaching and professionalism (Holt, 1982) and that one must be dependant on authority for action to occur (Illich, 1971).

Dependence on authority is reduced through the elimination of grades and formal evaluation. As students' dependence on teachers' approval is reduced students have less to risk in challenging a teacher's authority. This frees up potential for challenging and disruptive interactions between student and teacher. Dependence on authority is further reduced through allowing maintained records about a person to be accessible to that person and their guardians. When teachers and schools hold secret files about students which are significant to their future, the student and family are in an uncertain and vulnerable power relationship with the teachers (Novak, 1975). The reduction of secret files reduces power imbalance. My understanding is at Windsor House few records are kept, and the majority of those records are public. J.C. records are kept in an unlocked filing cabinet in the meeting room. They are accessible to all members of the community; they do not form a permanent record and are kept no more than two years. In the office there is an unlocked drawer with family files, these are used primarily for a system communication between parents and families, and are readily accessible to anyone. In the secretary's office there is a locked filing cabinet containing student's files. These files are generally kept slight, and are available to the student to whom the file belongs, their parent(s), and staff. This transparency with record keeping diminishes the sense of the school as being a highly evaluative space.
Teachers have a unique role with regards to authority. While they are required to follow the rules, they are generally the ones that are seen to hold the knowledge about what the rules are and have been. They also have particular responsibilities around safety and providing structure that students do not have. The ‘stop rule’ means that when a teacher uses the word ‘stop’ it is because there is an issue of immediate safety concern, and all people have to immediately stop what they are doing. Teachers are hired by the school board and have more responsibilities to the school and to the students. Generally they are seen to have a strong authority; their voice and comment carries weight. The structure of the school is such that students have a bureaucratic option to challenge their authority. For example a student could write a complaint that a staff person had abused the stop rule. In practice students do not often issue complaints on teachers and parents. Consequences issued to teachers have to be considered in terms of the potential impact on students. The high degree of mobility also allows the student and teacher options in avoiding interaction when there is a conflict of personality.

Being a parent participatory school, parents have a great deal of access to official sources of authority. They teach class, facilitate council meetings, allocate funds, promote the school, do media relations, write handbooks and other guiding texts, organize and maintain the space, interact with the students, and do office work. The parents, particularly through S.A.N.E., have a strong structural authoritative role in the school. The functioning of the school is dependent on the role of the parents. In standard schools, parents are often helpers with little or no official access to structural power, at Windsor House parents are in positions of power and have high degree of responsibility.

A teacher being barred from a room in which they often organize activities would greatly impact those who participate in those activities as well as the teacher.

However, some spaces are clearly under the jurisdiction of one particular adult, the band room and school council (facilitated predominantly by one teacher) are examples of this. As a result, participating in these spaces would be close to impossible without contact with that instructor.

The Society for the Advancement of Non-coercive Education is the parent’s group at Windsor House. All parents are by default members of S.A.N.E., some are more active than others.
Helen’s Authority

Helen Hughes is a gigantic force in the school. She is a charismatic leader and central personality in this parent participation school. She is the founder, and she is in charge. Externally, she is uniquely accountable to the school board as being responsible for the site. Within the school, she is very much accountable as the leader. She seems to have super power when it comes to authority. She is well respected and can make calls that are fairly inconsistent with the rule system. Her voice carries most weight in meetings with staff, parents and students.

Intermeshed with the participatory democratic practice of the school is a stream of hierarchical authority, of which Helen is the pinnacle. This is a significant point, one that I do not see as contradictory to the intentions of the school. Helen claims the authority she has, but builds structures that diffuse it and ensure public accountability. Because of the structure of the school, her leadership is dependant on the membership of the school. However when there is a deep conflict, which there has been, it is Helen’s school and she remains while other people leave.

Helen is constantly in motion and continuously called on for assistance and insight. She is exceptionally dedicated to the school, skilled at supporting students and wins trust and confidence with ease. After directing this school for 35 years she has an easy confidence and finely honed skill that is truly impressive. She is often laughing, and while she never has long to be in one place she will often take a moment with almost everyone. She is an administrator who has a clear knowledge that the best way to structure the school is so that people may access it for themselves.

Interestingly she was never promoted beyond vice-principal, I suspect that this was a way to keep her in check.
Before going to Windsor House I had assumed from reading the handbook that the rules and conventions would apply to me irrespective of my age. While in the school I found myself wanting to believe this was what I was experiencing. I found however, that I was less scrutinized with regards to mobility, access to spaces and what I was doing. It was also readily assumed that I was able to take on responsibilities because of my age.\textsuperscript{116} It became clear that despite the way the handbook talks about the school adults are able to operate differently than students in terms of rules of mobility. It appears that sponsorship and licensing apply exclusively to students while parents and teachers seem to be exempt. I had assumed that adults had to follow the same rules as students when it came to licensing and permission to sponsor. However, I did not see any evidence that this was the case. Adults seem to have relatively uninhibited access to most of the school and are able to sponsor having to be licensed themselves. This is an area where there are inconsistencies between the way the school is talked about and the way it is lived.

At Windsor House there is a system that allows adults to have authority as well as the opportunity to exercise discretion and a sense of control over adopting roles with particular responsibilities. While there are dramatic differences of authority based on age, there are structural checks that work to counterbalance adults’ tendency to move towards authoritarianism in their relations with children and youth. Students, who typically have little structural authority, are allowed venues for publicly keeping in check adult authorities through the participatory democracy system. They also have many opportunities to try on and assume roles of authority, as well as, opportunities to negotiate, refuse, and sample claims of authority.

\textit{Safety, Surveillance, Supervision and Sponsorship}

\textsuperscript{116} Factored into this is the consideration that I had become a regular face in the school and was seen to be responsible.
Walking along the edge of the field toward the school from the back playground I see across the field two girls balancing and playing on a narrow fallen tree where the field and upper forest meet. They look to be about nine-years-old, they are the only two people I see. From the distance I stand, the seen is silent. I am struck by the apparent tranquility of the image. It seems to me, that I am seeing a version of what is nostalgically called 'the good old days' when children could explore the woods without fear. This inspires a sense of peace and hope for me. (Fieldnote, June 16, 04, 4338).

Refusing the 'Lord of the Flies' theory of what happens to children left on their own, students at Windsor House spend a great deal of time with what at first appears to be an absence of adult supervision. The distinction between notions of safety and surveillance at free schools connects to the idea that safety is constituted through people being able to identify dangers and take action to change or avoid those dangers. Rather than fostering a relationship that is dependant on external authority to determine degrees of safety, it is expected that students are most safe when they are able to self regulate without harming themselves or others. Fostering this requires that the student feel a strong sense of entitlement in the processes, ownership of the space, and connection to a web of support. At Windsor House there is a purposeful, intricate, and rather amorphous structure of supervision and safety predicated on a foundation of collectivity, and fostered through participatory democratic governance, freedom of movement and practices of negotiating space.

Chris Mercogliano argues that too much supervision presents a risk to children; he puts forth that the “rise of the number of distressed children who have a hard time controlling themselves” (Mercogliano, 2003, p. 25) is largely derived from the lack of risk taking resultant from the rise of programmed activity. This argument, that not having practice at controlling
oneself makes it difficult to do so, suggests that children who have opportunities to control
themselves consequently learn about how to do so. It is clear from observing at Windsor House
that they share this understanding. This is not to suggest that supervision does not occur, or that
safety is only achieved through leaving students to learn the skills to fend for themselves. What it
does suggest is that supervision and safety may look different than expected and may not always
involve a one-to-one, adult-to-student negotiation.

A tension continuously negotiated at the school is fostering safety through removing
contact with danger, and fostering safety through encouraging self-regulation. Trust is a core
theme in this negotiation; trust that our children have the ability to regulate themselves, and
students learning to trust themselves. After all, as Freire states: “If the people cannot be trusted,
there is no reason for liberation” (1999, p. 110). Part of growing up is learning to give and
receive this trust. William Wimsatt Upski argues that there is a close relationship between
notions and practices of freedom and notions and practices of fear (1999). This is something that
echoes throughout free school literature, perhaps most clearly when Mercogliano states, “the
antidote to fear is trust” (1998, p. 68). These tensions between roads to safety and between fear
and trust are played out in the physicality of the space. Building a structure to foster self-
regulation means trusting members to have the space to practice regulating themselves, like the
girls regulating themselves in the upper forest.

Many physical aspects of the space are built to foster members of the school to use the
space as self-regulating agents. Aspects of this include unmediated access to many of the
supplies, access to bureaucratic processes and a reduction of the omnipresence of surveillance. A
significant part of how this is done is through the physical creation of lots of small spaces. The
rooms off the world room, the multiple classrooms, more rooms than teachers, the way many of
the big spaces are divided with shelves and other structures to shape them into multiple spaces:
these all provide students with many places to spend time so that they are not directly in the line
of sight of adults. This allows students an opportunity to experience being trusted to regulate
themselves. However these small, seemingly private spaces are couched within the larger adult-saturated space. Many aspects of the space have a built in supervision element to them. As an example, the cottage garden gazebo in the primary room has the feel of a private small room. It has four walls and a door that closes it off from the rest of the space, however the top half of the walls, above the heads of most of the people using the space, is glass—making it easy for observation. As well, this entire space is contained within the primary room where there are always adults; anybody coming and going from the gazebo has to pass through them. The windows in the classroom doors, the small nooks within the larger rooms, the classrooms having windows large enough to monitor much of the outside play areas: these are all ways in which both observation and private space are fostered.

Most spaces are organized so that members can access the space and equipment without being dependant on someone else. For example, the toys in the cottage garden are all organized in bins on shelves, each is labeled so that anyone can know where things go, and the bins have open tops so that the toys are visible to those who cannot read. All the little kids’ toys are on low shelves accessible to little people. The expansive props room is a locked room, however, once access is gained, supplies are all meticulously labeled in large storage boxes with a borrowing system similar to a library so that someone may borrow the supplies without going through another person or having to defend their reasons for wanting those supplies. Much of the space is like this, for instance the kitchen is not openly accessible, and requires licensing, however once a person has pledged to use the space responsibly, follow the posted rules, and they are trusted in that pledge, access is fairly direct.
Because of the way texts, rules, and spaces are arranged there is lots of room for subjective interpretation—members have to figure out and negotiate for themselves, in relation with others, what they are going to do. Dorothy Smith (1987) argues that through participation people are brought into line with ruling ideas. “Some elements of ruling arise formally and explicitly through legally binding discourses. Often ruling happens less explicitly as people consult their own understandings of prevailing and dominant discourses and act accordingly” (Campbell and Gregor, 2002, p. 41). Smith suggests that part of diminishing institutional power is to make “texts that work outside ruling positions, to help them recognize their own participation in the relations that rule them” (Campbell and Gregor, 2002, p. 129). This is what appears to be happening with Windsor House. The system of using the space has embedded in it a sense of implication and responsibility. As such even if one rarely participates in the ruling system of school council one is continuously participating in the relations that rule them. School council, though integral to the functioning of the school, is not where most relations of ruling occur. These occur outside council in the negotiation of space. The school itself is a democratic space, of which the democratic council is but a part.
Many of the bureaucratic organizing texts of the school are publicly accessible in the area I refer to as ‘information central.’ This is at the entrance area of the main hallway. It holds the schedule (Image 13) and student sign in-sign out clipboards (Image 26), which are organized so that people can enter and leave the school without necessarily going through another person. They address the bureaucratic need to maintain knowledge of who is in the

\[117\] For instance, once I had received permission to be in the school, I signed in and out of the school through the parent/visitor clipboard, I did not check in to the office.
school, while facilitating a high degree of autonomy with regards to movement. As a result of the requirement that everybody sign in and out of the school, everybody uses this space, at least a little. Information central also holds the parent duty roster, outdoor licensing information, off school ground licensing, notice about emergency procedures, upcoming fieldtrips and other information. Members of the school claim the space for conducting their own business as is evident from Image 26, a school-wide invitation to an upcoming party. Information central is a way that Windsor House organizes its space to be administratively transparent and accessible, facilitating a more diffused authority structure with which to foster a direct participatory democracy.
The system of licensing is part of the regulatory supervision structure built to foster safety. The process to become licensed is determined by that area’s room council.\textsuperscript{118} If a person suffers a complaint in that jurisdiction, they risk losing their license as a consequence.\textsuperscript{119} Individuals apply for licensing on their own behalf, and as a result people have different combinations of licensing. Many spaces have a posting which lists who is licensed for that area. These lists are predominantly for spaces that usually do not have direct supervision, like the front porch, outside, the smaller rooms, and the gym. I only saw these lists used once,\textsuperscript{120} it was a student whom, when Helen told him he could not be on the front porch, pointed to his name on the list to say he could. Helen looked, and then said there had been a mistake. Helen is part of the porch room council, but presumably so were the people who added his name to the list, unless he cheated the procedure. This is an interesting moment of authority and bureaucracy coming together. Interestingly, Helen’s word was stronger than the paperwork, and the boy had to leave the porch area. I did not see any evidence as to how these lists are maintained; I am not aware that the room council for the front porch meets. Perhaps it is as simple as going to someone on the council (their first names are listed on the licensing sheet).

\textsuperscript{118} If there is not an active room council for that space, then it gets taken up at school council. For more information on room councils see \textit{Negotiation and Territory in Authority, Negotiation, and Power}.

\textsuperscript{119} Although it is room council that issues the license, school judicial council may take it away.

\textsuperscript{120} People may not use these lists often because they arrange to put themselves on the lists and so they know if they are on it.
This seems to be another instance of local knowledge. I spent some time on the front porch without being asked if I was licensed; this was likely a factor of both my age and that my behavior was not causing a disturbance.

It is difficult to determine how meticulously this system of licensing is followed. In my experience it can also be used rather indiscriminately as a way to monitor behaviour. I did this with two girls who were switching on and off the stage lighting, an activity I found particularly annoying. I looked at them and asked, “Are you licensed to be here?” In response, they giggled and left. The boy I had been sitting with said “I’m not licensed either” to which I shrugged. I wasn’t licensed either—I didn’t know if I needed to be or not. Perhaps it is only evoked, in the same way as rules, when there is conflict.

An additional formal aspect of supervision is sponsorship. Most rooms have multiple members who can be sponsors. Some rooms, may be sponsored as a whole so that anyone can use them, the art room and the library are both examples of this. When someone is sponsoring, their name is posted on the entrance, people entering that room implicitly agree to be sponsored by that person. Other spaces are sponsored on an individualistic basis.121 For example younger students are not allowed to receive licensing to go outside on their own. Thus they need a sponsor to supervise them outside. I found the system of sponsorship to be rather confusing. The Windsor House handbook states: “Only supervise activities and people that you feel are safe and you are comfortable with” (Windsor House, 2003, p. 14), this allows a fair amount of personal discretion. A young student, Lake approached me to supervise her outside. I said I wasn’t sure if I could, we asked a teacher who said yes and told us to fill out the outdoor sign out sheet. I was surprised by how few people had signed out on this, especially given the number of people outside. While outside, I was asked to sponsor more people. I was sponsoring four out of the seven people playing on the Hill; the others were self-sponsored. When I came inside I found that some of the paperwork had changed, but not consistently with the changes that had occurred

121 See BMR section in Rules and Governance for an example of this.
outside. This is a circumstance of paperwork not being in synch with actions. It seems to operate, as all the rules do, where jurisprudence is focused on places of discord.

While outside, Lake announced, 'I'm going inside.' She was standing at the bottom of The Hill, I was sitting on the top. "I was unsure of protocol around safety—should I trust her to go inside? I wanted to talk to her about signing back in—'We had signed out together, shouldn't we sign in together'? But now I was with three other students. Lake made her announcement and turned to go" (Fieldnote, May 19, 04, 1214). I didn’t call after her. When I came back inside Lake was in the office with a complaint form, she told me she was looking for someone to scribe for her. I said I could help her. She asked me to write a complaint on another student who had poked her when she had been heading inside. In the incident, she had threatened to write a complaint, but they had not apologized. At no point did Lake ask me to resolve the problem, she did not seem particularly upset. Apparently sponsoring her outside did not mean mediating her behaviour. I was not someone to turn to for assistance as a mediator; after all she did not know me.

Parents’ high involvement is key to the functioning of supervision in this frenetic space. Despite the claim of not policing, there is an authoritative, supervisory feel that comes from the strong adult presence in the school. Teachers, adults and students are continuously informally monitoring spaces and behaviour, creating a tension between private space and surveillance. Examples of this are plentiful. While I was in the Kitchen with Tea,122 three adults in the twenty minutes looked into the room, when they saw me they kept going; while Tea may have been unsupervised, she was highly monitored. Another example of how this works occurs when I was alone with a parent in the art room. The art room teacher came in and set a student up to do some painting, the teacher then left and the student stayed and painted. The student was either licensed

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122 Helen had given her keys to her to make her and her brother a bagel. One of the ways Windsor House ties to be equitable is to ensure that food is always in supply for students who may have forgotten or been unable to bring lunch from home.
or had special permission to be in that room without sponsorship.\textsuperscript{123} After a while, the student finished painting and got up to leave. The parent asked him if it was all right to leave all the supplies out on the table like that. The student responded that it was, that the art teacher had plans for the supplies (Fieldnote, June 4, 04, 2977-86). The parent said okay and continued talking to me. During this time, although we were the adults and were in the same room, his being in the room was not contingent on our being there, yet we participated in the monitoring of one another (mostly the parent of the student). On another day two older boys were walking ahead of me in the hall, they were talking and swearing. A parent in the hall ahead of them looked at me and then, in a strong disciplinary moment, told the students to “watch their language”\textsuperscript{124} (Fieldnote, June 2, 04, 1971-72). These types of examples demonstrate how the adult presence creates a highly monitored space.

An interesting facet of the use of space, surveillance, and authority at Windsor House is that it is a context where the parent has structurally weakened power because the students could refuse the authority or write a complaint on the adult without academic consequence. In this way, while it is the adults who do much of the monitoring, students can use the system to monitor-back and counter balance adult claims of authority. Likewise, sponsorship, supervision, and surveillance are not the exclusive territory of adults. With multiple age groups all sharing space students are constantly under the vision of older and younger students who have and use the weight of bringing disciplinarily measures on one another.

The way the space is set up fosters a collective monitoring of a collective space, what I understand as collectivist supervision. There is a sense of ownership and responsibility in which

\textsuperscript{123} Neither the parent or I had put our name on the door to sponsor the room, nor had we agreed to sponsor the student (we were not asked) by the norms and rules of the school it would not be assumed that we were sponsoring the student.

\textsuperscript{124} I had not seen this parent before. I assume that she had not see me either. With all the stresses of the audit and forced move their was a heightened concern with observation. I assume that she thought I was someone from the district that she wished to impress. When she told the students to watch their language, she stressed that it was because there was lots of people observing in the school.
all members have responsibilities and claims to authority within the space. The intention is that each person is an authority in the space and that likewise others are authorities. Windsor House walks the fine balance between trust and the scrutiny of many eyes.

**Negotiation and Territory**

Negotiating space, and claiming territory are a predominate occupation of members of Windsor House. Signs of it are everywhere, they can be seen in the constant presence of young people asking to be sponsored in the BMR, the young boy leaving the cottage over the dispute with the toy, the rules as codifications of some of these negotiations hanging everywhere, the sign about knocking on Helen’s office door, and the boy and the dancing girls.

The front porch of the school is a beautiful example of a negotiation of space between different sets of needs. As noted, it is a popular hang out for teenagers, probably because it provides the best vantage point to see the comings and goings of the school without having to be directly involved. Some members in the school, mostly adults, would like the youth to stop sitting on the front porch because they feel uncomfortable passing through them to enter the school, or because they have concerns for the school’s reputation. As a result, the front porch is a place of relatively constant contention. Through its history a number of regulatory conditions have emerged, including the creation of a front porch room council.\(^{125}\) The front porch is now a licensed area, licensees agree to the set of rules posted on the porch;\(^{126}\) most teenagers at Windsor House are licensed.\(^ {127}\) The license gets used as a bargaining chip to regulate behavior; for example youth are allowed to be on the porch, but if they suffer a complaint while there they risk

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\(^{125}\) The room council has seven students and Helen on it.

\(^{126}\) On June 17, 2004 the posted rules for the front porch were: “Porch-Just sit and talk. 1. No water balloons 2. Even if it is not your garage you have to pick it up—de-licensed if garbage is there. 3. No banging on walls 4. No spitting 5. No swearing when any adult who might be offended is near 6. No horseplay 7. No bikes on porch” (Fieldnote, June 17, 04, 4815-29).

\(^{127}\) Seventy-three student names were listed on the license sign hung by the rules by the front door to the porch. Plus seven names which had been crossed out (Fieldnote, June 17 04, 4828).
losing their license. Instead of unilaterally removing youth from that space, or forcing the adults
to transcend their worries or prejudices, this awkward, frequently contested, sharing of space is
negotiated. Negotiating space is the primary occupation of Windsor House.

Frequently, these negotiations are more spontaneous and less formal than the above
element. It is often said of democratic and free schools that more than half the time of any
activity is spent on the negotiation and discussion of rules and conduct. As Freire so eloquently
states: “freedom becomes mature in confrontation with other freedoms” (2001, p. 96). This is
why the making of rules is the point of the curriculum and why rules are inconsistently
remembered, followed, or enacted. The point is the process of negotiation, not the product of the
rule. A ball game I witnessed provided a good illustration of this on the fly negotiation. Each
inning provided an altered team composition. Each play involved deep discussion of interested
folks at home plate, with liberal advice being yelled out from onlookers (sometimes players) in
the trees. It was an amusing portrait of a highly regulated, negotiated anarchy amongst children
and youth. Watching it, and numerous other such negotiations, it became clear that individualism
and collaboration are factors that are dependant on one another. For people to collaborate
effectively, it helps if those involved are able to articulate, understand, promote and defend their
needs and abilities. However this individual awareness only becomes mature as it is negotiated
through collaboration.

This is a rather extraordinary, potent and messy process, one that comes with
complications. The interplay of power and acquiesce in these negotiations is one such
complication. The following example illustrates how the intent and letter of the rule can be
followed while power operates through the negotiations. I was in the nest in the world room with
three young boys (aged 7-8). They were telling me that this, the cottage garden, and the BMR are
the places that they hung out in the most. We were playing an in-house created board game that
like many of the activities at Windsor House seem to never end.
A new boy (age 7-8) entered The World Room and walked around the back of the nest and into the little hall there. When the first boy, the one who had been the most in control of directing the game saw him, he said “Does anyone feel like ending the game?” I said I did.

1st boy: “We all have to help put it away” and we all started cleaning up. The new boy asked “What are you playing? Can I play” and began to climb into the loft.

1st boy: “We’re just putting away the game”

The new boy enters the loft

1st boy: “You can’t play, we’re not allowed to be in the same room together”

New boy: “that’s only if we’re annoying each other”

1st boy: “You’re annoying me, and you’re annoying my backpack”

New boy: “It’s only intentionally annoying each other”

New boy settles in, the other two boys (a little younger) begin to play the game again including him.

1st boy: “but we need to put it away

me: “can’t someone else take responsibility for it?”

1st boy: “okay” he tells them where to put it away in the flying pig room, repeats that it has to go away and threatens to write a complaint if it is not put away properly. It doesn’t appear that anyone is listening to him.

1st boy asks me if I will help him fill out some paperwork. I say yes, and we leave into another room (Fieldnote, June 17, 04, 4894-917).

Clearly new boy and 1st boy had a history of difficulty with one another. They had a clear sense of the parameters and they had to figure out how to negotiate within them. In this scenario 1st boy was able to save-face and avoid violent conflict (something he had a history of with 2nd boy), however I do not believe that he was able to get his needs met. New boy joined the game with disregard for 1st boy’s attempts to dissuade him. I believe that awareness of the super-rule of not being able to exclude impacted the way these boys were interacting and likely prevented 1st boy from saying that he did not want new boy to join the game. As a result 1st boy was effectively pushed out of the game. His options were to include the boy, or leave. He left.

This scenario is heavy with power and history. Without knowing the history of these two boys I do not know if 1st boy’s acquiescence is typical for them. It raises a number of interesting questions about how power plays out in negotiating territory. It seems likely that some people
end up acquiescing more and being more accommodating. I wonder if this is identified as a point of concern, monitored or intervened in? Part of the script of being a girl is to appease, I wonder how gender plays out in the spontaneous negotiations. As people play out these negotiations, they do so with all of the scripts they have adopted. I am not aware of any structural counterbalance for this gender script. While this is beyond the scope of what I was able to address in my time in the school, it raises concerns. These patterns of acquiescence and scripts are in no way unique to Windsor House, however what is worth being mindful of is the question of how they play out in this unique space.

There is a sense of territory that plays out at Windsor House. There is a common understanding that certain spaces are where certain people hang out. There are stories of 'hostile takeovers' where one group of people occupy a room, then make a claim that the room council is not using the room to the full potential, and try to become the new room council. I did not witness any of these hostile takeovers, though the students told stories of them with great gusto. The 'super rule' of non-exclusion, as well as the room schedules being able to be reserved by anyone (who goes through room council) are structural elements in place to counterbalance this. How is territory claimed in ways that reproduce hegemonic power structures? It is predominantly White space with a sense of girls vs. boys. Some spaces in the school are clearly more gendered.
The Library, for example, has a very strong room council, which is almost all girls (ages 9-12), and the Ocean’s Eye Room, a student controlled room is also all girls (ages 7-9). Both of these spaces are highly organized and embrace a strong bureaucracy. These girls have claimed these spaces by buying into the school structure and using that structure to exert territorial control. The territories that are predominantly male, such as the Russian Embassy and the Multi Media room, are less reliant on school structure, instead they are more likely to assume an entitlement to the spaces they use. This suggests the possibility, that those whose scripts make it more uncomfortable to claim space, use the structure to reinforce their claims. The girls who claimed territory seemed to do it by using the school structure. I wonder what happens to those who do not buy in to the structure, and do not have powerful scripts of entitlement to fall back on. I fear they are like Sea, and feel invisible. The practice of freedom and mobility is curbed by territory.

Territory is exerted structurally as well. Each staff member has a space that is their room, generally these are the main classrooms. Exactly how this works, is not clear or standardized. The teacher controls access, organization, and guidelines for that space. No teacher spends all of their time in their space, and access to the space is not dependant on that teacher being present, although what allows access is often inconsistent and unclear. Room councils control other rooms; these are usually composed of students, but sometimes parents or staff may sit on a room council. Having an adult on the council, can give more legitimacy at council, and be a weight against others who wish to take control of a room. Room councils operate under the jurisdiction of school council, they must follow the school council’s resolutions, and complaints about the

128 The door of the Ocean’s Eye Room (Image 28) is a scrumptious example of a negotiation of space. Adults insisted that visibility through the window be maintained, while the members of the room council wished to have a sense of privacy (Fieldnote, May 21, 04, 1397). As a result the window is covered with the exception of a paper flap which can be lifted by teachers, parents, and room council members only (Fieldnote, May 21, 04, 1321-23).

129 A student controlled room is a room that is run by a room council of students.
control of a room can be taken to council. While room councils are not allowed to exclude members, they tend to have small and consistent membership, indicating a high degree of exclusiveness.

Use of the room schedule can be another way to ensure a claim on school space. Activities that have been scheduled take precedence so that they may ask those not involved to leave for the time booked. Those who claim space predominantly through their sense of entitlement, then have to acquiesce when the structure infringes on their space. Those who do not buy in to the system either push and push until they themselves are pushed out, or they start to figure out a way to not bother people so much, or, as Sea said, they become invisible. The structure is a tool that is not inherently freeing or constricting; it has the potential to be used and wielded in many ways.

Windsor House's occupation of the Cloverley building itself is a constant negotiation. A great deal of external authority is exerted on the school. The public school system, through the federal and provincial ministries, regulates the district boards and trustees who coordinate allocation of space, hiring and firing of staff, safety regulations, curriculum delivery and evaluation, all of which has to be negotiated. The presence of the board, and a feeling of vulnerability under this jurisdiction is a constant concern; the potential for jeopardy is ever present. The operations of Windsor House are inconsistent with the fervor around standardization, and as a result find themselves located within “an occasionally hostile system” (Hughes and Carrico, 1996, p. 139) reluctant to cast too much attention on themselves for fear of backlash. This could be a reason for their relative isolation from the wider neighbourhood they are located in. This feeling of ominous surveillance is not uncommon to free and alternative schools. Alpha School in Toronto, a public alternative school well informed by their free school roots, also has a concern for their relationship with the board and feelings of vulnerability running under the surface of everything they do (Slashinsky, 2005). At Windsor House the imposed authority coming from the district was certainly making itself known in the time I was there, since that
time, this has only increased. That said, when I asked for permission to conduct my research at Windsor House, I asked about any potential vulnerabilities or concerns that may be had with a researcher within their school and Helen’s response was ‘we are proud of what we are, we have nothing to hide.’

**Troubling the Power of Commonsense**

I am working with an understanding of power that sees “questions of meaning, interpretation and identity [as] political issues” (Blunt and Rose, 2003, p. 9). I understand power to be about one set of people controlling and shaping people, space, and nature, as well as their meaning; and has both the capacity to prevent things from happening as well as make them happen (Blunt and Rose, 2003). Power is contained in a broad range of sources, full of fusions, paradoxes and complexity. It is a force that is difficult to name explicitly, and often becomes so normalized as to seem inevitable and natural. As Valentine states: “the strength of the assumption of the naturalness of ... hegemony, is that most people are oblivious to the way it operates as a process of power relations in all spaces” (1993, p. 286). Spaces are imbued with ideological frameworks that have understandings of power structures with regards to sex, gender, age, race, ability, who belongs, who is entitled, who is missing, and who isn’t. Power is invested and expressed through everyday spaces through territorial power, such as who gets control over what spaces, how space is negotiated and claimed (Matthews, 1997), through practices such as leaving or not participating (Costello, 2001), and through exclusionary practices such as making others invisible (Valentine, 1993).

The panopticon, an architectural device that Foucault famously discusses in terms of power (1972), is useful to consider in relations to schooling. Intended initially for prisons, the central principle is visibility. From a central point of observation the guards view the prisoners;

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<sup>130</sup> However it was soon applied to other institutional settings such as schools and hospitals.
the prisoners, from their position, are unable to determine when they are being watched. Because
the prisoners are always highly visible, they have to work on the assumption that they are always
being watched. The result is that the prisoners begin to self-policing and need less and less
observation. The physical space is key to this arrangement; while the person in authority may
change, their positional relationship to the prisoners does not. This omnipresent penalizing
authority structure is often used to describe standard schools. The architecture of the central hall,
centrally located office, classrooms with desks in rows facing the authority figure all structure
themselves in a way to be a constant reminder of the presence of the authority and have the
culturing effect of people in these spaces policing themselves accordingly. Hern refers to this as a
"panoptical imprint" which he describes as the effect whereby: “people who have been
rigorously schooled reflexively believe they are always being watched, monitored and evaluated.
Schools and schooling lead us to believe that we are always under surveillance, and whether or
not it is actually true is insignificant, it is the impulse that the schooled person necessarily
accepts, and adjusts their behaviour accordingly” (Hern, 2003, p. 144).

At Windsor House the panaoptical gaze has been shifted. Despite the architecture of the
standard school building they dwell in, a centralized authority cannot observe the entire space.
The mode of dwelling allows for a sense of privacy gained from small spaces, the option (for
many) of leaving the property, subjective interpretation of rules, and a relatively non-litigious
environment all contribute to diffuse\textsuperscript{131} the gaze of authority. Costello’s idea of the omnioptigon
is a useful device to consider in terms of these shifts. Carrie Yan Costello in “Schooled by the
Classroom” (2001) looks at the hidden curriculum in school dwelling and introduces the concept
of the omniopticon to describe the workings of power in the circle approach adopted by schools
working to reduce hierarchical authority. She discusses the “full presence of horizontal power

\textsuperscript{131} The word diffuse is carefully chosen; it is not intended to suggest that hierarchical authority is
made to disappear. As in photography, a strong light source casts a direct, obvious and harsh
light on the subject. A mechanism is added to diffuse that light so that it spreads out; the diffused
light retains a direction and a source, but the impact is harder to pinpoint and creates a softer
effect.
relations" in which "each student [is] continuously responsible for the disciplinary gaze of every other student" (p. 57) and argues that the power of communal disciplinary tactics such as these can create a pervasive sense of being watched that can be "an even more effective disciplinary mechanism" than the panoptigon (Costello, 2001, p. 57).

This idea of 'communal disciplinary tactics' bears significant consideration within the context of Windsor House which through its rules, mobility, and consumption of space conveys the "nonhierarchical socialization message that what occurs in the classroom [school] is a communal responsibility" (Costello, 2001, p. 56). The circle at Windsor House is not only the literal sitting in circles at meetings and activities, but also the collective monitoring of the space. It has a dwelling practice that depends on people watching one another, bearing responsibilities to each other, and regulating each other's actions. This structure of the disciplinary gaze has potential to exert a strong coercive force.

To a large extent Windsor House has disrupted the sense of being watched. The omnipresence of the disciplinary gaze is alleviated by the sense of privacy garnered from the small spaces, not being too stringent with the implementation of letter of the rule, and the maintenance of a top down power structure. While the idea of communal disciplinary tactics with regards to actions seems to be acknowledged and to some extent minimized at Windsor House, what does not seem to be publicly grappled with is communal disciplinary tactics with regards to language. At Windsor House there is a strongly dominant discourse. Aspects of this include: unflappable positive praise of the school and democratic process; framing the school as "having no concept of 'entrenched principles' but [instead] reflecting the views and concerns of current community members" (Hughes and Carrico, 1996, p. 137-138); and, perhaps above all, a

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132 Although it must exist, it was not something that I felt in my own experience, nor did I hear others talk about it. However people whose behaviour is largely considered to be annoying or concerning are monitored with a scrutiny I did not experience.

133 Helen and the staff maintain a hierarchical authority (diffused though it is). Though interestingly this hierarchical authority it rarely acknowledged in the way people talk about the space, it is a strong component of living in the space. See Helen in Age and Authority for more exploration of this theme.
dominant language of 'common sense,' 'the community,' and 'we.' These ways of talking about the school were almost entirely without fracture.

Reasons Windsor House may desire a strong 'we' are because there is something distinct going on in the space of Windsor House and this is one way to name it, also because there has been so much adversity being faced by outside forces, which can spark a sense of unification. This language is highly problematic.\textsuperscript{134} While it is important to "rigorously evaluate any practice in the light of commonsense" (Freire, 2001, p. 60), the concept of 'commonsense,' is not without its problems. As Freire argues, while commonsense is necessary, it is not enough, we must continue to question that which is held as common and sensical (Freire, 2001). Commonsense, a concept of great importance at Windsor House, like 'we' and 'the community' rests on an assumption that there is an inherent natural reason at play, which is shared by everybody. This ideology of commonness is of itself an 'entrenched principle.'

I propose that this uniformity of language is a problem at odds with the intentions of the school. The consistency of this language creates a power-filled, coercive force to become part of the 'we.' The language of having 'no entrenched principles' assumes the 'we' to be natural and inevitable rather than itself being an ideological stance. The result is that it is difficult and uncomfortable to speak out of sync with the 'we,' and when one does all other claims have to stand in relation to it. The impact is that other voices are silenced or marginalized, differences can be erased, and invisibility is fostered. It is important to be mindful of how this pressure to conform to the commonsense may reproduce hegemonic systems of power. The school "cannot abstract itself from the socio-cultural and economic conditions of its students, their families, and their communities" (Friere, 2001, p. 60). People bring into the space all the power placements from outside. The space of Windsor House may make some significant changes with regards to

\textsuperscript{134} I use the overused term problematic as drawn from the work of Dorothy Smith, to mean an identification of structural power problems, which may not yet have been posed, that are latent in the actualities of the experienced world (Smith, 1987, p.91).
power, but it is still located, educated by and perpetuating the wider context it is located in. Windsor House is embedded in a larger apparatus. Relationships of power are still there.

There is an interesting assumption commonly made throughout the discourse of free schooling, which is that the difficulty and failure experienced by a person within the space is generally understood to be symptomatic of not yet having arrived at self regulation, and that drifting without purpose is a temporary stage indicating a process of healing. It is understood that over time discomfort and disconnection in the space will dissipate for the betterment of the person experiencing it. This is an assumption, that while I see myself reinforcing it in this writing, I am also skeptical of. Sea’s statement of feeling and trying to be invisible, and stating that at Windsor House most people are invisible (Fieldnote, June 2, 04, 2063) is deeply unsettling and offers an important challenge to this assumption. It may well be a result of being outside of the ‘common’ of commonsense and having not come into the structure by embracing it or challenging it.

Ruth Frankenburg makes a compelling argument that ideology can supersede material experience when it comes to memory and description (1993). I argue that the language of ‘we’ and ‘the community,’ which is so pervasive at Windsor House, are closer to an ideology than to a close description of the state of things. Its impact is a coercive pressure to conform, undercutting the core intention of self-regulation in community; this is further heightened through the discourse in the school. Frankenburg (1993) reminds us there is a risk that without intentional intervention, we will not learn to see who is missing from, or are invisible within, those spaces. It is assumed that who is present is everybody who should be present, so that it becomes commonsense that everybody is at the proverbial table. The language of ‘we’ and ‘commonsense’ perpetuates the invisibility of hegemonic power and inadvertently restricts

135 The two most notable are the constant troubling of assumptions of entitlement to authority based on age and creating a structure that those with typically less power can use and shape to keep claims of authority in check.
unlearning these structures. Windsor House has people who feel invisible within it, additionally, it is a mostly a white middle class endeavor. Not everybody is at the table.

This paper rests confidently on the assumption that the intention behind Windsor House is to foster self-regulation that is mature in its awareness and relationship with others. I support wholeheartedly this intention and commend the commitment, imagination and hard work that is, and has been, dedicated to fostering this. Embedded in the social space at Windsor House is a way of talking and presenting the space with such certainty that it is intimidating to voice a dissenting sentiment. I do not believe that this is the intention, but it does appear to be the impact. For self regulation or freedom to mature, it needs the intricate negotiation of relationship with others; it needs lots of divergence of voices. Disrupting the uniformity of voice is one way to intervene. The potential of the school rests in its ability to incorporate and respond to diversity. Drawing from Horton a path to better democracy is doing the work of making the hidden conflict visible. While power is an ever present force and cannot be eradicated with good intentions, it is malleable. Democracy that can hold equitable change is dependant on dissenting voices. Windsor House moving further towards living its ideological position needs more room for these voices.
Image 29: Hopscotch Game on Back Exit Path
Summary of Findings

This thesis is a close look at the implicit and explicit lessons embedded in Windsor House’s use of a standard school building. It looks at how dwelling practices connect to cultural meaning and ideology. It focuses on where one can go (mobility), what one can do (rules), how one acts (negotiation), to whom one is accountable (authority), and underlying intentions (self-regulation). From my observations and contemplations, I put forth the following findings for consideration, discussion, and creative negotiation.

1. The politicized practice of Windsor House’s dwelling at Cloverley fractures the signifying practice of the school building, expectations around behaviour within such a building, and serves as a reminder that standard school space is malleable rather than inevitable. Rooms are themed and people move between them sharing resources across a wide range of ages. The bulk of activity occurs separately from scheduled activity and does not occur in concert. Unreserved space accommodates this. Though in many cases mediated through paperwork or committees, members generally do not need to go through another person to access supplies, resources or much of the administration. Neither are they dependant on an official to initiate activities or classes. This eliminates many factors of dependence written into standard schooling, effectively rewriting one of the strongest schooling lessons.

2. The apparent chaos of movement has purpose. Mobility is a large part of how Windsor House uses space. People come and go from the school, classes and activities on their own agenda; however adults have more mobility than students. In places with large safety concerns there is a strong awareness of rules around mobility. In the places with less safety concerns and potential for conflict, there is less attention to making or enforcing rules around mobility. Though staff bear more responsibilities, mobility is collectively monitored. A key purpose of the high levels of mobility is negotiating claims of authority and reducing the strength of authoritarianism. The movement of a person connects to their autonomy and self-regulation. The movement of things and rooms connects to members’ sense of ownership and entitlement to the space. This all connects to embedded lessons that the space is built for the people, not the other way around, and as such, engenders a sense of entitlement.

3. Small spaces are important. They allow students alone time and space to get out of the ruckus. They allow a place to feel removed from direct surveillance and because of this foster self-regulation. By providing access to office spaces, other small rooms and building nooks and crannies into the big rooms, Windsor House works to deflect the panoptical imprint that generally accompanies standard school buildings.
4. **Navigating the school is dependent on knowing local knowledge.** Despite the abundance of paperwork, Windsor House relies heavily on oral history and memory. While for most people this presents few problems, for those who are new, quieter, part time, or less active in the school, it often presents difficulties. This fosters a sense of an ‘in-crowd’ who know this knowledge, and an ‘out-crowd’ who is unsure of it.

5. **Through negotiating the texts and spaces with others, members of the school are implicated in the relations that rule them.** A great deal of room exists for subjective interpretation in the way texts, rules, and spaces are arranged. Members have to figure out for themselves, in relation with others, how to interpret them. In doing so they enact and internalize the ruling dynamics. Smith (1987) argues that this sort of participation brings people into line with ruling ideas. In the space of Windsor House, because of the constant need to negotiate space and rules, participatory democracy is saturated throughout the space. Members enact it even if they do not attend council.

6. **Collectivity and individuality are co-dependent entities.** Freedom as embraced at this free school means self-regulation within in a collectivist negotiation. Windsor House practices a collective use, negotiation, monitoring, supervision and responsibility for the school space. It is this collective care that allows the individual to have a high level of autonomy. Selfish individualism is curbed through collectivism. “Freedom is not the absence of limits. What I have sought always is to live the tension, the contradiction between authority and freedom so as to maintain respect for both. To separate them is to provoke the infraction of one or the other” (Freire, 2001, p. 99). Freedom in this way, as practiced at Windsor House, is perhaps best understood as a “collectivist freedom” (Hern, 1997, p. 54). Freedom and self-regulation mature through being accountable to a diversity of needs.

7. **Participatory democracy is dependent on the high degree of mobility and self-regulation.** These aspects promote autonomy and diminish coercion allowing members to participate more fully as individuals, or in Freire’s terms as subjects, in the collective democratic project.

8. **The strong hierarchical authority of standard schools is diffused at Windsor House so that there is more room for people to be authorities over themselves.** This is done through: emphasizing authority of self, and working for that to be real rather than charitable; transparency of paperwork, folders, and other ruling systems; allowing people to move away from, and seek out alternate claims of authority; creating flux in terms of who has authority in what places; setting up the space so that people are less dependent on others to accomplish their needs; allowing access to shaping the rules; instigating normative structural processes that allow and encourage people to challenge impositions of authoritarianism; giving structural room to refuse authority; and creating structures where people are called upon to defend claims of authority. While adults and teachers have more and different authority than students, and a hierarchical authority is retained, those claiming authority are held to public accountability to defend it, and people with less claims to authority have structural options to challenge claims of authority. These structural checks are used to counterbalance adults’ tendency towards authoritarianism in their relations with children and youth.

9. **Horizontal power structures are not inherently or necessarily freeing.** This structure brings with it the scrutiny of many eyes, and can, if not kept in check, exert coercion to conform.
10. Rules are understood for the purpose of mediating conflict and safety, if there are no concerns then there is no need for rules. They are codifications of process not a source of absolute authority. For the most part people do not know the rules, and for the most part they are comfortable with that. Rules are not read, referred to, or used, with frequency. Instead they are effective to the extent that they are remembered and enforced. Most people do not consciously think about rules as the factor that guides their behaviour. Some restrictions around rules, mobility, and access to space are arbitrary and opaque, while others are consistent and transparent. Governance exists and rules are evoked to be of service to the people they govern, they do not exist for their own sake. There are a great deal of rules, yet they are given low priority in determining actions. People, as individuals with needs, are given higher priority than bureaucracy. This connects to the radical potential of Windsor House, what Horton called a revolution through rising expectations: expecting the system to be of service to those it governs.

11. Windsor House is a paradoxical space. It holds a tension between private space and surveillance, and walks the fine balance between trust and the scrutiny of many eyes. It embraces deschooling within public schooling. In this paradoxical space harmony and conflict seem to live inside of one another. It appears that Windsor House is not concerned with seeking absolute resolution from these tensions, but instead has accepted living in this unsettled, contradictory and complex terrain. This is a way Windsor House works to evade illusions of mastery or circles of certainty. It inspires great invention and provides hopeful potential for navigating the difficult terrain of working to be more inclusive.

12. Outside pressures are a key factor in shaping the space. The sense of pressure, restriction, observation, surveillance, and potential for penalization from external sources (reputation, school district) effectively brings a standardizing force into the school. This can be seen in many of the ‘recommendations’ of the 2004 audit which result in severe restrictions or eliminations of many of the unique ways Windsor House uses space and puts at risk much of what is politically hopeful about Windsor House.

13. There is a coerced conformity within the dominant language of community. The centrality of the language of ‘community,’ ‘we,’ and ‘commonsense’ presents a unified force that is difficult to interject a dissenting voice into. The language of being without entrenched principles works to cloak what those entrenched principals are. The dominance of this language is a homogenizing presence in the school. This is one way Windsor House does not evade falling into circles of certainty.

14. Invisibility is a factor. Windsor House processes and structures have room to incorporate and respond to people who resist and act out against the system; the collectivism of the space, and horizontal power structures are able to respond and regulate this behavior. What seems to be less in place is a way to respond and include people who intentionally or otherwise do not connect to the system by becoming invisible.

15. Power operates through the frequency of acquiescing, and being accommodating. Power scripts that are already written in the larger culture are brought into this space; hegemonic power is not erased through good intentions and is in operation at Windsor House. The

136 See Knowledge Claims in Methodology for more information about Alcoff's 'illusion of mastery' and Freire's 'circles of certainty.'
school structure is evoked both to impose hegemonic power (adults with the game with the boys) and to counter it, (girls using it to entitle themselves to space, students using it to challenge adults). While the structure has the potential to be a tool to counter balance power norms, this is not inherently so.

16. *Windsor House practices a strong faith that democracy and emancipation have a symbiotic relationship.* In a participatory democracy, the practice is accountable only to those who engage. The system is dependant on people buying into it; this is part of its inherent flaw. Those who do not buy into it, or are invisible to those who do, do not participate in building it. Those who do not build it are less likely to feel ownership and entitlement to it, and more likely to opt out of it. To ensure a better democracy, and in this ideology, a better emancipation, it behooves the project to facilitate the engagement of more and diverse voices.

17. *The sense of play that permeates the school widens the sense of what is possible and expands the imagination.* Experimenting, pondering, and puzzling through ideas and problems is a frequent activity at Windsor House. The perfect system is not the goal, revamping the current situation to make it better is. The constant change and repetition of rules is not an impediment, but rather an important part of participatory democracy. Because resolutions lose their life if they are not useful, there is room to play and experiment. This fosters a sense of engagement. Serious consideration of ridiculous ideas facilitates inclusion and can sometimes provide useful components that may not otherwise have been considered. In the making of bad rules, there can be important lessons about making good rules. Doing democracy is what creates democracy. This involves making room for the ridiculous possibilities of people’s imaginations. The outcome of participatory democracy cannot be predicted.
Concluding Thoughts and Recommendations

Windsor House's position as a deschooling school within the public school system is not a simple location, but it is an important one. It is in negotiating this contradictory location creatively, with an eye to increased social justice that this space holds its potential and its inspiration. Windsor House stands as a testimony of devotion, creative political action, and hope. There is a structure of practice where good work can and has been done. It has built itself with a history of responding to needs as they arise, and developing structures that can be evoked to interrogate and counterbalance typical relations of power. It is these structures, and the dedication behind them, in which lies a great deal of political hope.

For Windsor House

Windsor House raises the important question of what it means to facilitate children to have a sense of entitlement to be subjects in their own lives and communities. It is crucial that this question be considered in relation to a complex concept of community. The political hope of this sense of entitlement is relatively slight if those children are already in position of power and unable to see the invisibilities around them. In this context the result would likely be an exacerbating of privilege. However there is a great deal of hope if this includes a complex concept of community. Drawing from Haraway (1991), this means striving for increased resonance and accountability across the web of existence. Concerns about the atmosphere of exclusion and invisibility are the most pressing obstacles (See Findings #4, #13, #14, #15 and #16). To this end I make the following recommendations:

137 Although these recommendations are intended for a specific audience, they are not exclusive to that audience.
138 See Knowledge Claims in Methodology.
Recommendation: Expand the 'community' by breaking the sense of 'school' down and building stronger interconnections with the context that Windsor House is located within. Apprenticeships, stewardships, participation in community events and local political negotiations are some ways this can be done.

Recommendation: Investigate how language, and practice may contain assumptions that 'everyone' is on board. Actively look, and begin to name places for invisibilities. Who is not taking part? Who is missing? Why do they not participate? These are questions of future work.

Recommendation: At an internal level strive for a less exclusive sense of 'community' and work to make room for more voices and differences.

Recommendation: While a dependence on local knowledge is likely inevitable, work to increase awareness of how this may be exclusionary.

Recommendation: Critically engage, with an eye to transcend, the liberal retreat focus that has saturated much of the free school movement. This involves focusing less on sanctuary and retreat from the world and more on working towards a wider scale collaborative project to create a better world. A critical engagement with these histories is recommended.

A significant reason for entering into the public school system was to be more accessible to a diverse population. Ironically a considerable factor informing the homogenous voice at Windsor House is the position of the school to be on the defensive because of its struggle for survival with administrative bodies within the public school system (See Finding #12). Although this struggle is important, it is imperative to be mindful of Lorde's (1984) warning of becoming occupied with the 'masters concerns' at the expense of one's own.

Recommendation: Minimize, as much as possible, the energy being put into negotiations with the district. Put this energy instead into building and expanding strengths.

Windsor House currently operates with a fantastically flexible system that has built itself with a consideration to how voices that do not usually get heard (children and youth) can be supported to exercise real power over the conditions of their lives (See Finding #10), and hold those who exert authority over them to a high level of public accountability (See Finding #8).
Windsor House has a legacy of trust, invention, care, and dedication. It has an intentional commitment to be inclusive. This is a powerful and hopeful legacy to draw on.

- **Recommendation:** Take strength in the system that exists. Place considerable thought into how ideas and practices of this system can be expanded to embrace more and diverse voices.

Windsor House has built a intricate mode of dwelling within this school building which fosters self-regulation, collectivity, and the powerful democratic lesson that systems ought to be built by the people they impact (See Findings #2, #3, #5, #6, #7, #10, #11 and #17).

- **Recommendation:** Maintain access to small spaces.
- **Recommendation:** Maintain the sense of playful experimentation.
- **Recommendation:** Maintain the abundance of unscheduled space and time.
- **Recommendation:** Maintain the high levels of mobility and control over rule making.
- **Recommendation:** Maintain the room for interpretation and negotiation in rule structure.
- **Recommendation:** Maintain structures that foster accountability to those who are impacted by actions.

### For Education Generally

That which is assumed to be 'common sense' in standard schooling is not necessarily 'common sense' at Windsor House. Common sense is not an unequivocal or universal state; it is a practice with intention. Windsor House serves as an example of deviation for education generally. This is important because it inspires questions about what standard educational practices are predicated on— and if they are necessary. Windsor House serves as a reminder that there are other ways.

- **Recommendation:** Let go of common practices and ideas that are not working; it is not necessary to keep trying to force them to work. Rethink the basics keeping in mind that what is common is not inevitable.
Windsor House has created a non-standard space through honing and wielding standard resources. They have not waited until better resources came along, but made use of what was available, building something that works to respond to the emergent needs of the people involved.

- **Recommendation:** Put effort into playing with possibilities of the resources that are at hand. Consider how to use these resources to their best ability.

- **Recommendation:** Develop, share and record as many stories as possible about non-standard practices and locations so that the imagination about how to use resources and space may be expanded.

A political hope within the use of space at Windsor House is the creation of non-authoritarian change. It is my hope that shifting the conversation out of the realm of curriculum achievement and evaluation and onto the embedded lessons of the intentions and practices of the space (as I have done here) shifts the conversation to a powerfully political place. Lessons from space of Windsor House focus around democratic practice and entitlement, negotiating the tension between the individual and the collective, and building processes and spaces that meet the needs of the people rather than people to meet the needs of the structure (to reverberate on a famous A.S. Neill quote). In a society that promotes a devotion to democracy, these are critically essential lessons, ones that hold potential for social justice.

- **Recommendation:** When one is tempted to use the language of ‘democracy,’ ‘student direction,’ and ‘student control,’ interrogate how that language translates into practice; the use of space is fundamental to that consideration. Who can leave, stay, shape, or speak in that space? What are the limits? Why do they exist? How may they be transformed? Ask how the space can be used most democratically?

- **Recommendation:** Those interested in anti-oppressive pedagogy ought to look to free democratic school practice for important lessons about shaping collaborative space.

- **Recommendation:** At every stage of education, teaching, study, and administration, the question must be asked how can greater autonomy for all participants be supported.
Windsor House stands as testimony to the strategic negotiation, contradiction and compromise that is the hard practical work of making change. It is a demonstration of how change happens and what it means to live that change. Windsor House inspires questions about policing and risk taking for schooling that transgresses standard practices. The risks of being shut down or co-opted at the hands of regulatory bodies permeate all work on free schools. The question must be asked about why deviations from common educational praxis are so readily seen as a threat.

- **Recommendation:** Advocate for non-standardized schools and educational spaces.

Windsor House’s raises questions about what it means for a deschooling school to occupy a typical school building. If it occupied a different type of space, it would make more tangible the paradox of a deschooling school. Windsor House as a symbol draws from its location in a school building to obscure the question of whether or not it is, or ought to be, a school. Its existence is buttressed by schooling’s monopoly on education.

- **Recommendation:** Advocate for non-school educational spaces.

A next step is to look at how endeavors such as Windsor House may be better supported. Part of this must be an emphasis on de-standardization of schooling. Not as a liberal everybody for them self approach, which ignores economic limitation and political oppression and uses the idea of better economic choice as the path to liberation. But instead by considering de-standardization as a path to foster relationships and communication between schools that occur as negotiations between autonomous entities in relationship with one another.

- **Recommendation:** Dramatically enhance structural process for trustees, districts and ministries to be accountable to the people in the educational system.
• **Recommendation:** The task before radical educators is how to simultaneously diminish a dependant and paternalistic relationship to the state, while embracing systems of accountability that keep in check inequitable claims on power and access to funding.

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**For Imagining Space**

Freedom matures in negotiation with other freedoms. This means that building one's own freedom is dependant on respecting another's. The place to start from is respecting both one's own and other's authority over self. The lessons from looking at how Windsor House organizes its structure and negotiates authority transcend the specifics of school space and serve as a symbol that a change is possible. Looking closely at Windsor House inspires thinking about creative use of space and resources at hand beyond what is common. The space and the story of Windsor house are important because they have the ability to expand what may be imagined as possible with the resources at hand.
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