

*The Missing Element to Achieving a
Citizenship-as-Practice: Balancing Freedom and
Responsibility in Schools Today*

ROCHELLE SKOGEN

*Campus Saint-Jean
University of Alberta*

ABSTRACT: The new Social Studies curriculum recently introduced in Alberta proposes to encourage students to affirm their place as citizens in a democratic society. Grounded in Biesta's (2007) argument that regardless of a Program of Studies' best stated goals and intentions, if a school is not structured democratically the chances of the program being successful are limited. In this article, I question what makes a school democratic as opposed to undemocratic by proposing that the new curriculum is grounded in a representational view of knowledge which leads to a document that is overly conceptualized and presents a view of citizenship as one that can be *achieved* rather than one that is *practiced* (Biesta & Lawy, 2006). I argue that it is the representational curriculum and the public school's organizational structure with its emphasis on *duties* and *responsibilities* and the virtual absence of *freedom* and *rights* that make these schools fundamentally undemocratic places. In order to pursue this line of inquiry, I juxtapose schools in the public system with a private school which claims to be a *participative democracy*. This juxtaposition revealed that a school that gives students freedom first and trusts that they will act responsibly with it, is more likely to lead to a citizenship that is practiced rather than one that is simply achieved. While it is not the intention of this paper, to recommend that all schools adopt the model of the private school in this study, it does help us understand why Biesta (2007) is not overly optimistic regarding schools being able to achieve a citizenship that is practiced as opposed to one that is achieved.

KEYWORDS: Social studies in Alberta, participatory democracy, citizenship-as-practice, citizenship-as-achievement, freedom and responsibility.

Thus a question facing today's curriculum of courage is: Freedom for what? Posing that question and pursuing its answers will entail courage – fearlessness and hope. Was it ever not so? (Couto, 2005)

Introduction

Recently the Province of Alberta introduced a new Social Studies curriculum, one that “encourages [students] to affirm their place as citizens in an inclusive, democratic society” (Alberta Education, 2005, p. 1). This statement closely reflects Marshall’s (1950) liberal democratic view of a universal citizenship notably “in relation to rights and freedoms of individuals in a nation state, [where] there is an inherent assumption that these rights function to equalize individuals ... [and] that citizenship [equals] full membership in a community” (Tupper, 2007, p. 260). In this paper, I ponder the extent to which public schools are in fact democratic places where students are free to act as citizens and enjoy full membership in the school community. As Biesta (2007) notes, “schools may have exemplary curricula for the teaching of democracy and citizenship, but if the internal organization of a school is undemocratic, this will undoubtedly have a negative impact on students’ attitudes and dispositions towards democracy” (p. 747). What does Biesta mean here by “undemocratic”? What makes a school democratic as opposed to undemocratic? In accord with Marshall’s statement above, *rights* and *freedom* appear to be central aspects of a democratic institution. But as John D. Rockefeller Jr. also said, one must not forget that “every right implies a responsibility; every opportunity, an obligation; every possession, a duty” (Rockefeller Archive Center, 2008).

In this study I considered how notions of freedom/rights and duties/responsibilities play out, both in the regular school and in a private school grounded in a Sudbury model. I start from the same premise as Lawy and Biesta (2006) that in the case of most citizenship education programs “current policy and educational practice have been informed by the idea of citizenship-as-achievement” (p. 41) rather than one of citizenship as practice. I extend this argument by deconstructing the reasons why a view of citizenship-as-achievement appears to be so prevalent in schools today and why I believe that this situation is unlikely to change anytime soon. Here I argue that it is the virtual absence of freedom and rights and the over-emphasis on duties and responsibilities in public schools that do not allow students to truly practice and understand what democratic citizenship is. To make this

argument I juxtapose schools in the public system with a school grounded in a Sudbury philosophy in order to examine what happens when adults give students a great deal of freedom and then trust (rather than expect) that they will act responsibly with this freedom.

The paper is structured in the following way:

- (a) I begin by proposing that a representational view of knowledge (Biesta & Osberg, 2007) which I argue constructs the new Social Studies curriculum in Alberta has led to an over conceptualized document which is virtually impossible for teachers to unpack. Here I explain how this type of curriculum has led to a view of citizenship as one of *achievement* or of *outcome* rather than one that is actively *practiced* (Lawy & Biesta, 2006). I go on to argue that there exists a fundamental imbalance between freedom and responsibility in public schools and that this imbalance makes it highly unlikely that schools will be able to move from a citizenship-as-achievement model to one where citizenship is actively lived and practiced.
- (b) I present the Sudbury school and its unique philosophy in order to explore how freedom and responsibility are held in tension by the school's democratic organization. I then describe these organizational structures, proposing that it is these that allow the school to function as a *participatory democracy*.
- (c) I present an analysis of one particular structure at the Sudbury school – the School or Campus Meeting – that I witnessed and which I believe provides an example of a citizenship that is practiced in real and active ways.
- (d) I propose that a structure like the Campus Meeting is one way of opening up a public space where students can debate real questions that are important to them, which I tie to the question of “Why democracy?” and “Why do we want democratic schools?”
- (e) In conclusion, I note the importance of expanding our understandings of what schools are for and how they are structured organizationally in order to allow for a citizenship that is practiced rather than one that is simply achieved.

The Representational Curriculum and a Citizenship-as-Outcome

While the new Social Studies document claims to “provide opportunities for students to develop the attitudes, skills, and knowledge that will enable them to become engaged, active, informed, and responsible citizens” (Alberta Education, 2005, p. 1), one must wonder to what

extent these goals are realistic and/or even achievable when the only time students are called upon to reflect on these notions, is in the artificial environment of a classroom, in two or three, 50 minute classes per week. And while these are quite laudable goals, Tupper (2007) has suggested that in reality what we find in many Social Studies classrooms today is “indifference, a lack of concern, and even negligence caught up in its construction, and that because of this, many students leave their classrooms without fully understanding what it might mean to be and live as a citizen” (p. 259). Michael Apple and James Beane in their book *Democratic Schools: Lessons in Powerful Education*, speak of democracy as “the now half-forgotten idea that was to guide the purposes and programs of our public schools” (2007, p. 3). Biesta and Lawy (2006) have raised similar concerns in the case of Britain’s Social Studies curriculum, questioning the belief that strong citizenship will follow if and when students acquire the “proper set of knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions” (p. 72). The authors claim that:

For the most part education for citizenship has been seen as an exercise in civics education and “good” citizenship rather than as a way of developing and nurturing the social and critical capabilities of young people. ... The predominant emphasis has been upon largely technical issues – for example, those pertaining to the introduction of citizenship as an additional subject in an already overcrowded curriculum (see Garratt, 2000), and to technical improvements in the quality and efficiency of teaching and the materials used for teaching – rather than upon more fundamental questions about the quality of democratic learning or about the processes of industrial, democratic and educational change. (Lawy & Biesta, 2006, p. 39)

Biesta and Osberg (2007) have also criticized the way that curricula are constructed, stating that epistemologically they are organized around “a representational view of knowledge” grounded in the idea that “true knowledge is supposed to accurately signify something that is present and this something is independent reality” (p. 17). In the case of citizenship education, this has led to the idea of citizenship as the “*outcome* of an education trajectory ... or as a particular status that once achieved can be maintained, rather than to a citizenship that is *practiced*, or something that people continuously *do*” (Biesta & Lawy, 2006, p. 72).

I argue that the representational epistemology that constructs the new Social Studies curriculum creates a document that is over-conceptualized, over-generalized; with statements that are rarely if ever

unpacked. In this sense, the program is full of what McMillan, Singh, and Simonetta, call “holistic messages that, untied to something tangible and real, have little meaning” (2001, p. 93). Garratt (2000) has reached a similar conclusion in regards to Britain’s curriculum, stating that it is:

Too prescriptive and detailed. For example, within each of the published documents, knowledge, skills, and attitudes were separately delineated, with a clear identification of key concepts and ideas to be taught. The depth of substantive content within each of the documents reflected the input of the specialists who had written them. So, whilst it was envisaged that the themes might be better implemented if permeated across and through the curriculum, the level of expertise that this model presupposed far outstripped the knowledge, skills, and competence of many schoolteachers. (p. 328)

If we look closer at the curriculum statement presented in the beginning of this paper, whereby the goal of the new program in Alberta is to “encourage students to affirm their place as citizens in an inclusive, democratic society” (Alberta Education, 2005, p. 1), we might ask what is meant *exactly* by statements such as: affirm their place? To *affirm* can mean to *assert oneself positively* – asserting oneself can also signify to *state forcefully* and/or to *insist on one’s rights* (Dictionary.com, 2008) – when deconstructed a little then, to affirm might mean to take *positive action* regarding one’s rights. What these positive actions are and which rights the document is referring to, remain unclear. Next if we consider the word citizen – we can question: “What exactly is meant by a *citizen*?” “What does a citizen look like?” “Is everyone a citizen?” “If not, then what are they? – ‘Un’ or ‘Not’ – citizens perhaps?” “Have I ever met someone who is not a citizen?” “Is someone in jail a citizen?” “Where do we draw the line between citizen and not-citizen?” “What does someone need to do in order to be considered a citizen or not a citizen?”

Such basic questions reveal the level of complexity of just two of the concepts embedded in the one statement. Rather than limiting the number of concepts and spending adequate time unpacking these, the document appears to endorse a smorgasbord philosophy, whereby the more we teach to students, the more they will ultimately learn, which somehow will lead to them being able to act as good citizens in the world once they graduate. Of course this is not unique to the Social Studies document, as most curricula tend to favour this type of glossy – glossed over language – that makes everything sound simple and one dimensional when in fact concepts such as democracy and citizenship

are anything but. This glossing over is often directed at parents and various educational stakeholders and serves to appease their fears of an inadequate school system that seems to be doing little to fix their young and the society in which they live. There is no doubt that it is comforting to read that in Social Studies students will acquire “the key values and attitudes, knowledge, and understanding, and skills and processes necessary ... to become active and responsible citizens, engaged in the democratic process” (Alberta Education, 2005, p. 1). But we need always ask what these facile statements really mean. How do students who sit passively in a classroom listening to a teacher talk about key values, become active citizens? Biesta and Osberg (2007) have argued convincingly for a shift in “the task of knowledge from the descriptive or representational mode (which they believe leads to a view of *citizenship-as-achievement* (Lawy & Biesta, 2006) or *citizenship-as-outcome* (Biesta & Lawy, 2007) to an interpretative mode which is more likely to encourage a *citizenship-as-practice*” (p. 18). Although Biesta (2003) has noted “that the educational responsibility for citizenship learning is not and cannot be confined to schools and teachers but extends to society at large” (as cited in Biesta & Lawy, 2007, p. 65) as he is not convinced that it is possible for citizenship to actively be practiced in schools as they are today. Cited in Golding (2008), Burgh et al.’s belief that “merely learning about democracy ... will not be enough. What is needed is that students both engage in self-governance *and* that they have support so they can improve their ability to self-govern” (p. 460) is instructive here as “self-governance” necessarily implies a level of freedom. From this I propose that the reason a view of citizenship-as-achievement is so prevalent in schools is because freedom is virtually absent there.

Too Much Responsibility – Too Little Freedom

Hence while I do agree with Biesta and Osberg (2007) and Lawy and Biesta’s (2006) argument for a shift to a curriculum that is grounded in an interpretative view of knowledge as it may ultimately permit for a citizenship that is more practiced than achieved, I do not believe that they have sufficiently deconstructed the problem. If we begin from the democratic principles of equality and freedom then the school, to be democratic, would need to give equal power to students and adults alike and more importantly provide students with freedom and rights and, trust *a priori*, that they will be able to act responsibly and dutifully with these rights. Some may believe that students do have a certain amount of freedom in schools – perhaps they can choose the form their assignments will take or they might be free to choose the theme of their

projects – but as we will see with the Sudbury model – this is but a thin gloss of freedom. How can it be said that students have any kind of real freedom when they must raise their hand before they speak; sit in a desk all day, and ask permission of someone in authority before they can leave the room? In all truth, when it comes to learning it is usually not students that decide what they will learn but rather a teacher who makes these decisions according to a prescribed document. But regarding duties and responsibilities – those things that counterbalance freedom – these are usually abundantly obvious on the school landscape.

The problem with many of the key ideas in the new Program of Studies is that they start from the assumption that students have equal access to power and that they enjoy rights and freedom in the school environment. The fact that schools are hierarchical places where adults have most of the power and students have virtually no freedom at all seems to have escaped the curriculum writers. In this regard, Tupper (2007) has gone so far as to say that the very idea of “democratic education” is nothing more than “a fallacy, operating as a convenient cloak to discuss inequities and injustices that permeate curricula, classrooms, educational conversations, and understandings of citizenship in care-less ways” (p. 260). So while the curriculum may teach in superficial ways about freedom it certainly does not allow students to live an important part (rights and freedom) of what democracy is about. How are children to become responsible when it is expected of them before they have really learned what this means? I question whether *freedom* is not a requirement to learning responsible behaviour? As it is now, students are expected to act responsibly in schools – and if there is any learning that occurs – it happens through negative consequences being doled out for breaking the rules. In this model, children are not trusted to be free because there is the underlying assumption that children are (by nature) not able to be responsible, which is likely why schools are built around so much control: the bell rings and everyone moves from one place to another in an orderly fashion ... students wait for the clock to strike 3:00 before they are free to leave the school grounds ... silence is valued in many classrooms with students sitting in ordered rows. And if a student is not orderly when the bell rings, or does not sit quietly when he or she is supposed to, then a negative consequence such as detention (a word resembling prison lingo), or being yelled at by an adult is likely to occur. But here I propose that it is not the fact that there is a consequence attached to the violation that is the problem (as we will see with the Sudbury school as students there receive consequences also) but that it

is the way in which these violations are perceived or understood by the adults in schools. We must ask how schools would be different, if making mistakes was viewed as a normal and expected part of learning to be a responsible citizen, rather than being trained to behave appropriately through a type of reward-punishment behaviour modification program. Are we so sure that children cannot act responsibly when given freedom and rights? It is difficult to answer this since it would mean re-thinking the way schools have been structured for a very long time. And of course for a school of 500 or 3000 students giving a great deal of freedom would pose quite a challenge. For this reason, it is not the point of this paper to state that *all* schools should adopt a model based in freedom but rather it is to consider what happens to the learning of a democratic citizenship when a school puts “freedom at the heart of the school [because] it is grounded in the belief that freedom belongs to students as their right” (Sudbury Valley, 2007).

Sudbury Valley School: The First of its Kind

The first Sudbury school was founded in 1968 by Daniel Greenberg in Framingham, Massachusetts. At the time, Greenberg (1995) had been asking himself questions such as, “What is the best way to teach, or to learn? What subjects should children learn? How responsible are children? How much of a say should they have in what they do? How should schools be run in a democratic society?” The establishment of the Sudbury Valley School was, for Greenberg, the answer to his questioning. In a nutshell, “Sudbury Valley School is a place where people decide for themselves how to spend their days. Here, students of all ages determine what they will do, as well as when, how, and where they will do it” (Greenberg, 2005). According to its founder, “Sudbury Valley School was consciously modeled on the American experience” as he wanted a school that reflected the same ideals as those of the Founding Fathers, the first “[being] the fundamental equality of every individual that lies at the heart of the American belief system” (2005). Interestingly the new Social Studies document (Topic A, grade 6) asks, in the section titled: “The Local Government,” that students “draw conclusions about the rights and responsibilities of citizens” (Alberta Education, 2005, Elementary, C.47). So we might ask how the guiding principles at the Sudbury school are different from those in the official Program of Studies. It appears to come down to how the word *citizen* is defined in both, specifically *who is* and *who is not* to be considered a citizen, as well as how the notions of rights and freedoms are

understood. Is it not possible that the reason schools cannot in reality accomplish the goals the Social Studies curriculum sets out for them, is that in order to “affirm their place as citizens in a democratic society” students must first be considered citizens (which I will argue they are not) and secondly *be* in a democratic environment (which I argue public schools are not).

To Be or Not To Be a Citizen

Historically and according to most understandings, children in general have not been considered citizens. This makes a certain amount of sense when looked at from Marshall’s democratic perspective which considered three types of rights in regards to citizenship:

Civil rights: That is the rights necessary for individual freedom ... such as liberty of the person, freedom of speech, thought and faith, the right to own property and to conclude valid contracts, and the right to justice ... *Political rights* [as in] the right to vote and to stand for political office ... and *social rights* which include ... the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security ... the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in the society. [Italics added] (Marshall, as cited in Biesta & Lawy, 2006, p. 66)

It is obvious that according to this definition, children can only be “citizens-in-the-making” (Marshall, 1950, p. 25) and not full citizens since they do not have access to many of these rights and neither would we expect them to assume such things as contractual responsibility or to hold office until they are adults. And while Biesta & Lawy (2006) have argued that this Marshallian view is “associated with a particular understanding of what it means to be a citizen and is tied to a developmental and educational trajectory and a commensurate set of rights and responsibilities” (p. 42) which they see as leading to a view of citizenship-as-achievement or outcome, I see that at the very least Marshall’s “citizen-in-the-making” implies a modicum of participation on the part of students, whereas most Programs of Study position the student as “not-yet-being-a-citizen.” Be that as it may, Biesta & Lawy (2006) importantly note that a:

Citizenship as outcome, fails to recognize that young people always already participate in social life; that their lives are implicated in the wider social, economic, cultural and political world; and they are not isolated from these processes. In effect, being a citizen involves much more than the simple acquisition of certain fixed core values and dispositions. It is participative and as such it is

itself an inherently educative process. It is about the transformation – through critical enquiry and judgement – of the ways in which young people relate to, understand and express their place and role in society. (p. 73)

Here I would go one step further and argue that participation in and of itself implies a certain level freedom and that in not recognizing students as citizens (not even in the making), has greatly contributed to how schools have structured themselves throughout history – as hierarchical places where adults have power over students and where students have virtually no freedom or rights. Being that this is the case, it should now become evident that the goals described in the new Social Studies curriculum in Alberta, are incongruent with the actual structure of most public schools, a situation which should then help to clarify to Biesta and Lawy’s argument that it is unlikely that schools as they are today will be able to shift from a view of citizenship-as-achievement or outcome to one where citizenship is practiced. The unlikelihood of this shift, is what led me to study the Sudbury model as it allowed for the consideration of an alternative structure, one that most public schools can not offer.

A Presentational Epistemology or Radical Freedom?

In the Sudbury model students “choose where to be, who to be with, and what to do; [and are] *completely free* to change their choices as many times as it occurs to them to do so during a day, a week, a month, or a year” [Italics added] (Sudbury Valley, 2007, p. 6). Greenberg accomplished this level of freedom by rejecting all forms of official curricula and direct instruction. Following from the Aristotelian belief that all human beings are naturally curious, Greenberg felt that “people learn constantly, as an innate part of living” (p. 2) and hence he wanted “to get away from any notion of a curriculum or ... school inspired program” (p. 3). Fundamentally he believed that “if people are allowed to follow their innate instinct to increase their understanding of their environment, the outcome w[ould] be a life of intense exploration and growth” (Greenberg & Sadofsky, 1992, p. 5).

This view of knowledge and learning could be said to reflect what Biesta and Osberg (2007) have called a “presentational view of knowledge” which was how children learned before formal schooling was introduced sometime after the 15th century. As Mollenhaur (1983) pointed out “before children became confined in schools they learned about life through direct and immediate participation in the existing ways of life” (cited in Biesta & Osberg, 2007, p. 22). In the same way

Dewey pointed out “that there is a marked different between the education everyone gets simply from living with others and the deliberate education offered by the school. In the ordinary course of living, education is *incidental*; in schooling, education is *intentional*” (Cremin, 2007, pp. 1546-1547). It is true that according to this definition most of the education that happens at the Sudbury school is “incidental” in nature. As well there is little doubt that it is this move away from an education that is intentional and the lack of a formal curriculum that most disturbs people about the Sudbury model. In seemingly going back to an *archaic* form of education (which in fact was not schooling), many question whether a Sudbury school can even be called a school. I suppose that whether we understand it as a school or not depends on our definition of learning. If we perceive learning as only being possible in a classroom with a teacher instructing students in various subject matter and then testing them on this knowledge; then no it is not a school. But if, on the other hand, we view learning as something that happens naturally, spontaneously, and between people of various ages, then it is a school. A lived experience that I observed at the Sudbury school may be instructive here:

We were called, all of us to the pond behind the school by one of the staff members and a student to view a science/welding experiment. As we stood, adults and children at the end of the pier, one five year old wandered down to the edge of the water. A teenage boy joined him on the sandy bank as we stood and watched in fascination as adult and student set up the experiment called, “How to walk on water”. A pair of Styrofoam blocks were fastened to water-skis and welded together. The adult waded into the pond pushing the device in front of him while his student watched from behind. I noticed out of the corner of my eye, the little boy by the edge, begin to throw clumps of earth into the water. Gently, the older boy standing beside him touched his arm and said: “We shouldn’t throw dirt into the water because it holds up the hill and the grass and the house. If the dirt is all gone into the water we’ll have less room to run and play tag.” I watched the little boy look up at the teenage boy with great seriousness as he let the earth fall from his hand. I listened to this exchange and thought: “That teenager just taught that five year old the concept of erosion and I can see that he actually understood. What was it that I just witnessed? Was it learning? I turned back to the water to watch the staff member stand precariously on the skis and fall flat on his face into the

water. We all laughed and clapped and later I heard the staff member say to someone: "It's always best when the experiment fails because then it's back to the drawing board to figure it out anew." (Fieldnotes, September 2007)

Michael, the son of founder Daniel Greenberg, speaks to this type of experience as a former Sudbury student:

My experience as a little kid at Sudbury Valley was that I spent a lot more time around slightly older kids than I spent with adults. An eight-year-old is more likely to be a lot more interested in what a twelve-year-old has to say about the world. It makes sense, because the gap between an adult and an eight-year-old, in terms of what they're doing in the world, is enormous, almost unspannable. If you ask a kid to guess your age and you're older, it almost doesn't matter whether you're thirty, forty, or fifty, they're all so far away. But a twelve-year-old isn't so far away. A twelve-year-old is just further enough down the line that they've already made a lot of the experiments that the eight-year-old is about to make and they can actually talk about them. (Greenberg, 2002)

I believe that children do learn in a Sudbury environment and that adults there do teach (not directly but through modeling and talking at length with students about their interests) although I am still undecided as to whether or not this learning is sufficient for the world we live in today. On the other hand, as one observes what happens in the school on a daily basis it becomes obvious that the Sudbury school is not only grounded in a presentational epistemology. If this were the case, and radical freedom was all that there was, in all likelihood the school would degenerate into total chaos. The fact that it does not is because Greenberg understood from the start that freedom must always be counter-balanced by responsibility. Therefore while students are free to learn what they want in general – the one thing they *must* learn in this environment is how to be *responsible citizens*. Refusing to do so or being unable to do so usually requires that the student leave the school. So while learning the traditional 3Rs of reading, writing and 'rithmetic are not necessarily mandatory, the 3Rs of good citizenship (Respect, Responsibility, and Reasonableness) absolutely are. And this learning is in no way left to chance as it is weaved into the very organizational structure of the school itself.

The Three Virtues of Good Citizenship

Rawls, who did not comment a great deal about education, was nonetheless concerned “with establishing social institutions that [we]re just and fair toward citizens who operate[d] within them” (Johnston, 2005, p. 204). In order to create such an institution, the Sudbury school I visited felt it was important to unpack the kinds of behaviours that would ensure the attainment of what both Kant and Rawls called “primary social goods,” (p. 204) these being such virtues as “freedom and autonomy as well as the ability to self-legislate” and so forth. As the adults in the Sudbury school did not want to burden the children with too many concepts, they decided that a simple statement which would cover the most important virtues or dispositions (Edgar, Patton, & Day-Vines, 2002) was needed in order to help students recognize when they were acting as good citizens and when they were not. They came up with the following statement: *be responsible, be respectful and be reasonable to yourself, to others and to the things around you in order to uphold the democratic community.*

This guiding statement is at the core of the school’s Charter (a document containing all the rules of the school). What the Sudbury school calls the 3Rs are in fact democratic dispositions that authors Edgar and colleagues (2002) have noted as important ideas to teach in our public schools. While this may be true, it brings us once again to the difference between teaching *about* such virtues and students actually *practicing* these dispositions in their everyday school lives. In the Sudbury community, practicing good citizenship entails the 3Rs or the three virtues of responsibility, respect, and reasonableness which “act as standards by which all can judge the behavior of others (and [themselves]) and agree if it is right or wrong” (Edgar, et al., 2002, p. 232). *Responsibility* for instance, Edgar and colleagues explain, is to “accept agency – the ability to act upon the environment and others – as a condition for being human. [It is to be] responsible for our actions, the greatest of which is to help our fellow humans” (2002, p. 232). *Respect* on the other hand, implies “knowledge of oneself, of others and knowledge of the environment. ... The disposition of respect is more than knowledge however; it is a tendency to want to know and to be aware that one’s own knowledge is limited and therefore to be curious about the knowledge of others” (p. 234). While *reasonableness*, as defined by those at the Sudbury school, resembles Noddings’ (1984) notion of *caring*. Being reasonable in this sense would entail a certain care and sense of decency “a receptivity, which is more than empathy. ... It is

being open to the possibility that others feel and think differently than we do” (Edgar, et al., 2002, p. 235). Care then involves being reasonable as students realize that sometimes winning one’s point is not worth hurting the other – which does not mean the student must always cede their point to the other – but rather that the feelings of the other sometimes must supersede that of winning or being right.

The Sudbury School’s 3Rs then are the norms against which students and adults are able to gauge whether or not they are in fact living the virtues of strong citizenship in a democratic community. At the school, gauging if a student is behaving responsibly, respectfully, and/or reasonably is both the student’s duty and the community’s. A number of organizational structures are what allow students to acquire both the knowledge (what responsibility, respect, reasonableness are as concepts) as well as to determine the consequences for themselves and for the other who may not be acting according to these norms. Although Greenberg does not refer to Deweyan notions in the Sudbury philosophy, theoretically the way the school is structured resonates quite closely with what I will call Dewey’s (1916/1966) action-consequence model of experience which he explains in the following passage:

When we experience something we act upon it, we do something with it; then we suffer or undergo the consequences. We do something to the thing and then it does something to us in return: such is the peculiar combination. The connection of these two phases of experience measures the fruitfulness or value of the experience. Mere activity does not constitute experience. It is dispersive, centrifugal, dissipating. Experience as trying involves change, but change is meaningless transition unless it is consciously connected with the return wave of consequences which flow from it. (n.p.)

In the following I present the specific structures that allow for this return wave of consequences to one’s actions.

Civil Rights and the Judicial System

As already noted, students at the Sudbury school benefit from many rights and freedoms, the least of which being: the freedom to be who they are; the freedom to learn what they want; the freedom to voice their opinions, as well as the right to justice. From a Marshallian perspective this right to justice or what he called, “civil rights are protected by the court system” (Biesta & Lawy, 2006, p. 67). This court system or judicial system is how Daniel Greenberg decided to organize

the Sudbury school so as to ensure that everyone's rights were respected and that students and adults alike would be held accountable to each other and to the community at large. Freedom and rights are counter-balanced by duties and responsibilities through the following mechanisms or structures:

a) *The Mediation Process*. When it has been determined that a student or staff member has not lived up to the 3Rs and hence was deemed to have lacked in responsibility, respect or reasonableness, *mediation* may be called:

Mediation is a process that helps students to deal with a conflict right in the moment. Anyone involved in or witnessing an escalating conflict can say "Mediation!" An objective third person is [then] called in. The mediator and the conflicting individuals discuss the problem and work out a solution that all parties agree to. (Indigo Sudbury Campus – ISC, 2007)

b) *The Judicial Committee*. If and when a conflict is deemed more serious than the process of mediation can solve, then students and/or staff proceed to the next step which is the *Judicial Committee*. What is commonly called JC at the school is made up of one staff member and four students. Upon admission all students must agree to sit at different times on the Judicial Committee as it is staffed on a rotating basis. Every two weeks the Campus Meeting Chair (explained further on) selects and posts a list of the people who are next to sit on the Judicial Committee. This committee meets Mondays through Thursdays at 11:00 am unless there are no JC reports that have been submitted.

c) *The Judicial Committee Process*. As a former student, Michael Greenberg (2002) speaks to his experience of the judicial system at Sudbury Valley in the following way:

Try to picture what it is like to be a kid in a school like this. You're in a situation where your voice actually matters from a really early age. If you go into school and some big kid bothers you, you have immediate, swift legal recourse. You can walk into a room, fill out a form, and next day stand in front of a group of kids who are a cross-section of the school, some of whom are probably that big kid's friends; and they're all sitting there telling the big kid, "You shouldn't do that. You shouldn't bug that six-year-old." That is tremendous power. You have the power to make a big kid stop bothering you without violence, in completely civil, legal, and enforceable way. And if that big kid keeps bugging you, they're really going to come down on him. The other kids are going to say, "You have got to stop bugging this person. You cannot go into these three rooms because you've been bugging that person too much.

In the school I visited, a student or staff member would write up a Judicial Committee report (what they call “being written up”) because she or he felt that someone had not behaved in a responsible, respectful, or reasonable way. At the JC meeting, the person who wrote the report and the person written up would then tell their sides of the story. The person written up was asked to plead guilty or not guilty. If the person pled not guilty, the JC members voted on whether or not they agreed. If the person pled guilty or was found guilty by the JC, the accused was invited to determine his or her consequence. If she or he didn’t know what to suggest, she or he could ask for suggestions from the JC members. As in most matters at the school, “a consequence is to be passed by a majority vote of the JC” (ISC, 2007). Although the Judicial System is a formal structure much like Dewey (1919/1966), Greenberg believes that, “a democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience” (p. 87). The fact that students’ voices are given a forum to be heard where they can argue for their rights is congruent with Dewey’s notion of a participatory democracy which is realized when there is “a high level of citizen participation in public discussion and decision making ... [which can] lead to the discovery of common interests, not simply bargaining over private interests” (Caspary, 2000, p. 8). Caspary reinforces this when he writes that, “in Dewey’s work conflict-resolution emerges not merely as another political technique, but as a constitutive element of the very meaning of democracy” (pp. 3-4). The judicial process of conflict-resolution at the Sudbury school is a strong model of how a school can be run democratically. Students who sit on the Judicial Committee learn to adopt an inquiring stance as they listen, attempt to understand, inquire into each person’s defense, all the while using the complex language of jurisprudence.

In the case of the Sudbury school, it is not that freedom and rights always carry the day, rather freedom is in tension with certain structures that permit the students’ rights to be counter-balanced by a level of responsibility to themselves, to others, and to the community. Therefore as Graham (2007) has noted, “existing relations of power and an individual’s position within those relations determine the degree to which they can exert control over their own lives” (p. 205) and this is really the crux of the issue. The Sudbury school has made an intentional effort through structures like the mediation and judicial process to flatten the hierarchical nature of the school in order to allow students more power and hence more freedom to self-govern. In contrast what we find in most public schools, are students who are expected a priori to act

responsibly or else there will be consequences. Being irresponsible or making mistakes from this perspective is always a negative and as already discussed is often reinforced through a Behaviorist model of reward and punishment. Whereas at the Sudbury school choosing to act responsibly or in contrast making a mistake, are not seen as bad or negative but rather as part of a learning process – a learning to become a good citizen. Pedagogically then one could say that this is not a student or child-centered pedagogy nor is it teacher-centered but rather it is a learner-centered model where everyone (adult and child) are considered both learners and teachers at different moments and in different situations. From this perspective, even though adults are still present, their roles are much less imposing and controlling than the hierarchical structure of most public schools where adults hold most of the power to decide what is best and right for students.

In concluding this section, it is important to note that while the judicial system is a very important part of the Sudbury school there are many other ways in which students learn responsibility for instance they form corporations where they are certified to use equipment or to design certain rooms for certain purposes; they hold various clerkships and officer positions and run staff elections and finally they participate in what Greenberg has called the heart of the Sudbury school – the School Meeting which I describe next.

The Campus Meeting

Greenberg (2002) notes that the Sudbury school functions as a “*participatory democracy* governed on the model of a traditional New England Town Meeting. It is here that the daily affairs of the school are managed by the weekly School Meeting at which each student and staff member has one vote” (p. 6). According to Greenberg,

The structure of the school is very formal, in a certain sense. The whole idea is that every kid has a vote and you express your opinion in orderly meetings that take place with a chairman who recognizes you, where you raise your hand and you have to speak to the topic, and if you’re not speaking to the topic someone else can raise their hand and say, “This has nothing to do with the question at hand.” So you’ve got the discipline of debate, of reasoned argument, of trying to persuade your fellow man of a certain thing. If you’re a kid and you want a room set aside for music, for instance, you can’t just do it. You have to go to the School Meeting and get political support, just like in the world. You have to find out if there are other kids who want that room set

aside for music and go to the School Meeting and say, “Can we set this room aside for music?” The rest of the School Meeting is going to say, “Well, right now we use it for this. What do you want to do in there and why do you want to do it? Why do you even need a special room?” You have to come back at them with, “Because we play it loud and we want to soundproof the room and it’s only being used to store a bunch of sports equipment that could be thrown in that closet over there.” It’s a very adult process and it’s also very much of a mirror of the society we actually live in. (n.p.)

At the particular school I visited, rather than the School Meeting, it was called the Campus Meeting, and was described as a “democratic forum that meets weekly to decide on all matters concerning the day-to-day operation of the school” (ISC, 2007). The Campus Meeting was held every Wednesday at noon and all students and staff were invited, although not obligated, to attend. And like in all Sudbury schools each student and staff member had one vote and all meetings were run “using Parliamentary Procedure so students learn to address the Chair, call to order, make motions, second motions, debate issues, and vote” (ISC, 2007). The agenda for the meeting was posted all week long and students were allowed to add any items they wanted to bring up at the meeting.

For the purpose of this study, I present one such meeting that I attended that I feel most illustrates a citizenship that is *practiced*.

Analyzing a Campus Meeting

It was at one Campus meeting that I attended in May 2007, that the difficulties of living in a democracy became quite evident. It started quite innocently with an 8 year-old boy explaining that he would like to see less arguing and fighting amongst the students of his age. As the discussion progressed, it began to shift as some of the older students became involved. Specifically, two 17 year olds brought up the idea of having a Peace Week at the school the very next week. The students began to define what this Peace Week would look like, explaining that it would entail no violent video game or computer game playing – no violent movies watched and no violent music listened to. I immediately saw a problem with this because at the school there is a group, made up of mostly boys, that I have come to call the Tech Kids that were absent from this meeting. The fact that there would be no game playing allowed during this Peace Week would be perceived as highly problematic by them, of this I was sure. Part of me thought, “Well they’ve chosen not to be here. They have a

vote, so if this Peace Week is passed; they'll just have to bear the consequences of not showing up." And shortly after the proposal for Peace Week was passed.

After the meeting ended, I stepped into the computer lab to speak to the Tech boys, only to find them absolutely beside themselves with indignation and anger (bad news travels fast!). They told me in no uncertain terms that they intended to boycott the school during "Peace Week". I watched them pace, huddled in little groups discussing what they perceived to be a complete travesty. I stood by and watched all of this with one of the staff members standing beside me, who seemed to be struggling herself with the issue of having passed Peace Week at the meeting. In talking with her, she wondered out loud if in fact they were not contravening the democratic process by 'taking away' the freedom of the students to play video games and movies – things many of them freely chose to do with their time. But in the end, we both agreed that the Tech boys had had a choice to show up at Campus meeting and in not doing so, had essentially given up their democratic right to change the outcome of the vote. Nonetheless, I felt she was still struggling with what had happened.

But all was far from over. Not long after all the stomping around; some of the Tech Kids came to the staff member and asked if it would be possible to call an 'Emergency' Campus Meeting. As this had never happened before there was no existing policy in place. The staff member listened to their arguments and made the decision to allow this meeting to happen – the only stipulation being that they go around and inform all those present in the school, that an Emergency Campus Meeting had been called.

At the meeting, the Tech Kids argued that it was counter-philosophy (in the sense that the school is ultimately grounded in the notion of freedom of choice) to impose something like Peace Week on them, hence not allowing them the freedom to do as they so chose with their time. The boys referred to the school's Charter that states that the Sudbury school follows a self-initiated learning model, which allows them to learn "what they want, when they want, with whom they want, for as long as they want, to the depth of their interest, in the way that best suits them" (ISC, 2007). This, the students claimed, was what was being violated. The group of teenage boys took turns in front of the

group and argued eloquently that imposing anything (even Peace) was a violation of the students' freedom to choose what they could and would do at the school. Based in solid and passionate argumentation, the Tech Kids were able to overturn the vote for Peace Week and negotiate a slightly modified notion of it, where only physical aggression and swearing would be banned.

While one could argue that Peace Week was a good idea (from an adult point of view), much deeper issues were at stake here. The Tech Kids believed that the two teenagers who had proposed Peace Week had set it up so that they would not be present at the Campus Meeting that day. As the Tech Kids later explained to me, they had heard the two advocates talking about the idea of Peace Week but had specifically stated that they would not be presenting the idea at the meeting that day. Therefore based on what was written on the meeting agenda, the Tech Kids had seen no reason to attend Campus Meeting that day. This was another dimension of the argument the boys presented against Peace Week – the need for a certain transparency in order to avoid similar situations in the future. Based on this argument, they were also able to modify the policy in regards to the meeting agenda, whereby from now on, any issue to be presented at Campus Meeting needed to be added to the agenda before 10:00 am the day of the meeting and could not be voted on until the next week. A third outcome of the Tech Kids' arguments that day, was an additional policy being written in regards to what could constitute an "emergency" in the future and when this type of meeting could be called. The Tech Kids spearheaded many changes that day.

In watching all of this play itself out, I had to ask, "What kind of learning have I witnessed here?" First, I saw students that although very angry about a situation, and whose first reaction was to respond aggressively by 'boycotting' the school, were able to sit down and strategize on how they might change the situation. And by using the democratic process that structured the school they were successful in doing so. Although the adults present at this meeting did not teach per se, they did facilitate the process for the students in a fair and equitable way. The real teacher at this school according to the staff members is the Charter, as it is what guides the democratic process. To my eyes, these students were living the democratic process in all its

splendour and messiness. Primarily, participating in the democratic process that day was about the students having their voices heard and being taken seriously. I saw students who were able to negotiate and strategize together in a respectful and responsible way. (Field notes, 2007)

Discussion

The Campus Meeting – Opening up a Public Space

From a Deweyan perspective, one could say that the Campus Meeting is an example of how “the young take part [i]n social situations where the[y] have to refer their way of acting to what others are doing and make it fit in [which] directs their action to a common result, and gives an understanding common to the participants” (Dewey, 1916/1966, p. 45). It also resonates with Lister’s (2005) statement that “citizenship is not a simple, one-size-fits-all category, but is rather a contingent set of accommodations of the underlying principle of equality of status [which] means that citizenship is a contested concept” (p. 474). Being a citizen and being free to self-govern in the Sudbury school is not always easy but ultimately the democratic structures make it a fair, just, active, and I would say educational process. The Campus Meeting illustrates how:

In effect, being a citizen involves much more than the simple acquisition of certain fixed core values and dispositions. It is participative and as such it is itself an inherently educative process. It is about the transformation – through critical enquiry and judgement – of the ways in which young people relate to, understand, and express their place and role in society. (Biesta & Lawy, 2006, p.73)

While the new Social Studies program in Alberta claims to be inquiry-based, the questions it asks are most often tied to specific themes and goals which make the notion of citizenship more of a subject to be studied than a practiced lived experience. In a Sudbury school, children learn that they will not always get their way (as in the real world) but quickly come to understand that a good argument is what is needed in order to win their point but always keeping in mind the 3Rs or virtues of good citizenship.

The fact that what happens in the Campus Meeting is not being “determined by the intentions of the educators or even the intentions of the designers of educational situations, [is] in a sense ever-emergent” (Vanderstaeten & Biesta, 2006, p. 167). This notion of emergence may be what frees us from having to position the Sudbury school as being

grounded either in a presentational or in a representational epistemology, since situating it rather in “an epistemology inspired by strong emergence allows [for] a different way of thinking about the organisation of schooling (Osberg & Biesta, 2007, p. 49). This is a line of inquiry that is worth pursuing further.

Why Democracy?

Perhaps any curriculum that wants to *help students affirm themselves as citizens in a democracy* must start from the fundamental question of why we want to uphold the democratic political system and not settle for some other system. Kluger (2008) is instructive here as he notes that the democratic system is one that allows for a “balance between stability and nimbleness, which in turn allows the system to adjust to changing circumstances and remain in operation” (p. 85). In contrast, there are the unformed, failed, or anarchic societies which although dynamic, are very simple and chaotic. And on the end of the spectrum are the totalitarian states that “are nothing but structure and order” (p. 85) making them simple, but also fixed, unchanging and overly robust. As Kluger suggests, “in neither case is anything terribly complex going on” (2008, p. 85). Democracies on the other hand, are found at the top of the complexity arc “where there’s a functioning social system ... that’s open to constant change” (p. 85). In this sense, the Campus Meeting (at a micro level) is ever-changing – ever emergent – reflective of the democratic society (macro level) that most of us in North America strive for. But most importantly, Kluger notes that it is not a particular bill or rights or election practice that “defines the complex state but rather it is “the freedom with which its citizens can exchange information” (p. 85). As he says, “the more any government, willingly or not, allows arguments to be made and minds to be changed, the more it achieves real complexity” (p. 86). Freedom then according to complexity theory is fundamental to the democratic state and as I have argued throughout this paper, is in many ways, what is absent from public schools today. This should then help explain why it is, that like Biesta & Lawy (2006), I am not very hopeful that public schools will or can achieve a citizenship that is practiced, because without the ability to ask real and destabilizing questions, as was the case with the Campus Meeting presented here, students are unlikely to experience what practiced citizenship is.

And it is in a world where we no longer question, that we become imperiled, as was the case with the greatest tragedy of all – the

Holocaust – where men and women no longer questioned the political agendas of those in power – who became what Arendt called “thoughtless.” This thoughtlessness, which she came to call “the banality of evil,” “was the kind of evil that results from a [group’s] particular capacity to stop thinking” (Young-Bruehl, 2006, p. 4). When citizenship education is conceived solely as one of achievement and/or outcome, where students are not free to raise questions and debate issues that are important and relevant to their lives, then we risk “dark times” as the poet Bertolt Brecht has written:

There are evil deeds, even evil deeds of novel sorts but they are not what constitute the darkness. The darkness is what comes when the open, light spaces between people, the public spaces where people can reveal themselves, are shunned or avoided; the darkness is a hateful attitude toward the public realm, toward politics. (as cited in Young-Bruehl, 2006, p. 6)

But a public space, like the one created in the Campus Meeting, must be intentionally weaved into the very structural organization of a school. Such a space must be held open; it must be structured in ways that place public debate always at the front and center and not simply part of one more subject to be taught in an already over-stuffed curriculum. Of course we don’t need to do this, but the price we may pay is an ever encroaching darkness, where our youth come to “give up on the world, thinking that they can set themselves outside it, without revealing themselves in the world or in the public realm” (Young-Bruehl, 2006, p. 6). While not perfect, the Sudbury model is an example of a school that has managed to put relatively simple structures – like the Campus Meeting – into place so as to allow for a productive and dynamic tension to exist between notions of freedom and responsibility. If nothing else, the Sudbury model illustrates that it is possible for schools to be different although this difference requires a fundamental shift of how we understand the purpose of schools today.

Conclusion

Thinking differently about schools and how they are organized entails challenging what Arendt called our “habits of mind,” that is our unquestioned assumptions about how things are and should be. In this sense, how we, as the general public have come to define the public school and the way it is organized, may reflect a certain “habit of mind” – in that the definition of what a school is or should be has become “thoughtless” – or the complacent repetition of “truths” which have

become trivial and empty” (Young-Bruehl, 2006, p. 5). There is no doubt that schools have changed very little both structurally and pedagogically over time. What may have served well historically, may not necessarily meet the needs of our students today. It is this refusal to question such structures – what Arendt called “preformed ways of thinking” – that she fought most against. Here, I am called to wonder to what extent much of our curricula may reflect these preformed ways of thinking. As Arendt noted so well in the case of Eichmann’s role in the Nazi party, while he was able to recite “moral rules” – even “Kant’s famous categorical imperative, which stipulates that one should not follow a rule that one would be unwilling to have as a rule for everyone” (p. 3) – which proved he had been “schooled” – he was unable to *act* according to this imperative by asking himself the essential moral question “Could I live with myself if I did this deed” (p. 3)?

In a sense, it is not unlike many Programs of Study that recite moral rules (or curriculum concepts of good citizenship) and require that students learn and then be tested on these but never give students the freedom to act according to these moral rules. This is a crucial point as it indicates that simply learning or *knowing about* something does not necessarily translate into desirable actions, as was the case with Eichmann and many others in the Nazi party, who “showed no independent sense of responsibility, no common sense or ability to think” (p. 3) even though they had been schooled and therefore learned about the difference between right and wrong. Is this the type of citizen we want our children to be? If not then we may need to challenge our habits of mind by expanding our understandings of schools; the way they are organized and how able they are to educate a responsible citizenry. As already noted, this does not mean that the Sudbury model should be adopted by all. Rather, it is that the *discomfort* that the Sudbury model tends to generate in people because it is so very different from what we are used to (teachers teaching, students listening and taking tests), allows us to “bump up” against our “fixed assumptions” of what schools are and should be. To think schools anew, as Arendt said:

We cannot use concepts from Before, inherited from a world that exists no longer, to explore After. But it is not possible simply to set aside old concepts – like old hats that we can remove from our heads – without exploring the fact that those concepts are inside our heads, ingrained in our thinking. Because habits of thinking linger, we also have to change our habits by understanding how they were acquired. (Young-Bruehl, 2006, p. 10)

Why is it, as Edgar, et al. (2002) have suggested:

[That] one rarely hears ideas regarding school reform framed with emancipatory language and images for the purposes of creating a just, ethically responsive ... society[?]. [Perhaps it is because] to do so would imply increasing teacher agency, sharing power, examining issues of equity and justice, and employing collaborative decision-making, all concerns that are antithetical to the current high-stakes testing movement. (p. 232)

The Sudbury model while not perfect, is structured to address these issues, because they believe, like Eisner (2002) that “the ultimate aim of education is to enable individuals to become the architects of their own education and through that process to continually reinvent themselves” (p. 240).

In order to achieve a truly democratic educational model, where children are architects of their own lives, students must be considered *a priori* to have certain rights and not *only* responsibilities and duties there. As well, if we are to create spaces where citizenship is practiced and not simply the outcome of a particular educational trajectory as Biesta and Lawy (2006) have noted, students must be given freedom so they can learn how to choose (as often as possible) to act as responsible citizens in a democratic community.

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Author's Address:

University of Alberta
Campus Saint-Jean
8406- 91 Street
Edmonton, AB
CANADA T6C 4G9
EMAIL: rochelle.skogen@ualberta.ca