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Freedom-based education: rethinking democratic schools

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The goal of this literature review based bachelor's thesis is to offer a deeper understanding of the concept of freedom in the educational context and the application of such idea in democratic schools. In order to conceptualize the idea of freedom in education, a philosophical approach is taken to introduce the topic. The study continues with discussion of the work of the main three authors that are object of this thesis: Rebeca Wild, A.S. Neill and Daniel Greenberg, who use the concept of freedom in the educational context in their work and their schools. Elements such as respect, autonomy, trust, existence of limits and democracy are common values in the understanding of freedom by these authors and are important components of their educational philosophies.

After outlining the understanding of the concept of freedom in the educational context, the focus turns to defining democratic education and introducing the concept of democratic schools as educational initiatives that follow the principles of democratic education. In addition to having freedom, equality and respect as a driving force, democratic way of managing the school and self-directed learning are core values to this way of understanding education. A deeper understanding is offered by showing examples of real-life practices where the idea of freedom is applied in these schools. After examining of some of the characteristics of these schools, certain gaps are found and a main critique is raised.

In this thesis I am proposing the use of the term freedom-based education as an alternative to the democratic education one. The reason behind this proposal is to open a discussion about the shape of the democratic model that is applied in this type of schools and which alternatives could be used. By proposing the term of freedom-based education I aim to collaborate on improving the concept of democratic education and making it more accessible to a greater number of people. Understanding the goal of this type of education as a transformative one makes it pose itself as an alternative to the mainstream educational model and offers a possible change in the educational paradigm.

Keywords: alternative education, democratic education, democratic schools, freedom, freedom-based education.

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1 Introduction

In this thesis I am going to focus on the concept of freedom in the educational context and its presence in the schools through the description and analysis of the concept of democratic education and the way it can be applied through democratic schools. The main reason behind choosing such topic can be seen in my personal motivation to gain deeper understanding of the concept of freedom and how this can be present in the educational context. This idea is aligned with my personal understanding of education and the need to find alternative ways of understanding it. Since a very early moment on my personal journey in the mainstream school system I felt that I was not really being taken into consideration when it came to my education. I was able to go through the goals that the schooling system had set for me, but nothing more. It was not until my entrance in the University to study education that I started wondering why my formal education in the school had taken the shape it took and the consequences it had for me as an adult. At this time, and because of not finding answers to some of these questions in the writings of the authors that had influenced the mainstream systems, made me pivot to what is seen as alternative ways of understanding education. Having completed internships both in traditional and democratic schools made me also start thinking about this issue in a more serious way. In addition to this, I want to contribute to the academic discussions on this topic and hopefully reach a new audience. To do so, I first need to conceptualize my understanding of freedom and then link it to its presence in education. Some authors that advocate the existence of freedom in education do it through the concepts of unschooling, and the discussion goes around the idea of getting rid of schools and the creation of different options that would support that idea. I believe that we can find a place in the school environment that will allow us to engage seriously with the concept of freedom and having it as an important element of education. The desire to explore those possibilities drives this thesis.

To do so, I will carry out a literature review to map different philosophical understandings of freedom and see how it has been dealt with in the educational context. I will also discuss practical examples of three different approaches to democratic education that follow the ideas of three authors to be reviewed, which are Rebeca Wild, A.S. Neill and Daniel Greenberg. In addition to these names, several other philosophers and authors will be brought up to give a

better understanding of the different concepts and different point of views that will help me to create a broader and more robust picture of the concept.

This work is aimed for anyone who is interested in education, but especially for those who might feel that the mainstream way of understanding education is missing something or/and could be rethought. For defining what I understand as mainstream system I refer to the factory model explained by Bruer (2014). This author explains that a factory model system applied to education, means that the knowledge is created by experts and grades are given to students based on how well they can absorb, repeat and reproduce the information and facts that the teachers have presented to them (Bruer, 2014, p. 51). This way of understanding education can be related as well to the banking model presented by Paulo Freire. For this author, the traditional education was based on transmission of knowledge from the teacher to students using basically memory and repetition (Freire, 1972, p. 46). In order to finish my definition of mainstream education, I see similarities between the way that Ivan Illich understood the concept of school and the concept of mainstream education here used. For Illich, school was understood to be a place where students had to spend by obligation a certain amount of time following a curriculum that included a hidden curriculum (Zaldívar, 2015, p. 109). Illich also associates school with grouping of students based on their age and the usage of teachers and a fixed curriculum to pass a set of pre-decided knowledge to them (Illich, 2012, p. 38). This mainstream way of understanding education can be seen in many different education systems around the globe, going from Ecuador where the school has a hidden curriculum and trains the students to obey and follow a routine (Wild, 2000, p. 22) to the United States of America with a standardized system that sets a traditional way of teaching (Robinson & Aronica, 2015, pp. 94-95). Agreeing with Robinson (2015) and his worries related to the direction that the mainstream education is taking and how many of the educational reforms are answering the political and economic needs of the countries (Robinson & Aronica, 2015, p. 15), I feel the need to explore alternatives to those mainstream educational systems.

By writing this thesis I also aim to challenge the reader by bringing ideas that might feel even opposite to what most of us have experienced through our own educational processes (both as students in the school and in higher education) or what we understand as the norm when discussing education. Because of the qualitative nature of this work, I am not seeking for causal relationships or direct connections between facts. I aim to offer a deeper understanding of ideas that might allow to define education in a different way than the mainstream one. By doing so,

it will be useful both for me as learning process and for the reader as maybe new ideas will be presented to them.

The two research questions that drive this theoretical journey and helps to narrow down such vast and complex research theme are:

- *How can freedom be understood in the educational context?*
- *How do democratic schools apply the idea of freedom?*

To seek an answer to the first question, it is necessary to first offer an understanding of the concept of freedom. To do so, I will carry out a brief overview of different philosophical understandings of the concept of freedom offered by different authors I consider important and relevant to build deeper understanding of the concept by drawing connections between various ideas, conceptualization and philosophies. Then I will continue by focusing on Rebeca Wild, A.S. Neill and Daniel Greenberg, whose ideas will form the core of the thesis - by first paying attention to their educational philosophies and understanding of the concept of freedom and after that to their educational approaches (through the examples of their schools). This will work as an introduction to the democratic education concept. In order to answer the second question, the concept of democratic education will be introduced, and democratic schools and their practices will be shown as examples of schools that follow the principles of the democratic education. Examples of how the idea of freedom is applied through those schools will be given to draw a connection between the practices and the theory that has been introduced until this moment. To finish the thesis, I will pose some critiques towards the concept of democratic education and propose a new term to refer to this idea that will bring up a discussion related to purposes of education.

2 Concepts and components of freedom in education

In this chapter the first research question will be answered. In order to answer: *how can freedom be understood in the educational context?* it is needed to first offer an understanding of the concept of freedom and then create a connection with the educational context. To help creating a first understanding of the concept of freedom, a philosophical approach will be taken. It is important to note how some of the ideas brought by this first group of authors have had a great impact on the thoughts of the authors that are discussed later in this chapter. After paying attention to different authors and their way of understanding the concept of freedom the focus will turn to the educational context. When introducing the idea of having freedom as a driving force in the educational context, the three main authors that are the focus point of this thesis will appear. Their understanding of the concept of freedom and the presence of it in education will lead this part of the thesis.

2.1 Philosophical concept of freedom

Freedom is a concept that has been discussed, analysed and understood in many ways for a long time in the human history. Going from classic Greek philosophers to modern educators, we can observe a variety of understandings of it. To make it relevant to this work, I focus on the understanding of freedom from an educational perspective. A philosophical point of view is taken to introduce the idea of freedom (to offer a richer context that will show the complexity and depth of the concept) and after initial discussion of the concept, I will proceed with the educational understanding of it in the next part of this chapter.

To begin with a classical (referred to the classical Greece) understanding of freedom, we can observe how this idea was discussed already by the Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle. It is possible to recognize how the concept of freedom showed different meanings to the Classical authors, going from understanding it as being a free citizen (meaning that the person was not a slave) to linking this concept to the political context and making it a necessary component of the democracy (Hansen, 2010, pp. 2-3). At some points, this concept is connected to the economic situation of the poor citizens, bringing up a discussion regarding political systems and power relations (Hansen, 2010, pp. 2-3), which could be linked to later educational discussion of Paulo Freire with his concept of the oppressed and the need for their liberation. Freire

understood that the liberation of those that are considered oppressed and cannot enjoy their freedom can take place through education, and offer them not a personal liberation, but the means to do it collectively (McLaren, 2000, p. 175). There is also an understanding of freedom within a democratic society, where there are limits to the personal freedom defined by democratic laws (Hansen, 2010, p. 6). This approach to understanding the development of personal freedom within limits is a key factor that will be developed later by authors such as A.S. Neill or Rebeca Wild. Other concepts such as independency, autonomy and self-control appear in relation to the classical philosophical understanding of freedom (Hansen, 2010, pp. 6-8).

To continue with the philosophical understanding of freedom, I turn the focus to Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), as an example of other approach to the concept that will have a later implication and influence in the educational understanding of it. One of the driving ideas for Rousseau is the one that states that humans are originally free and good by nature (an idea that was already present in earlier authors and will be followed by many others later as well). A second idea of this author is that the existence of institutions corrupt people up to the point of making them evil and lose that original freedom they were born with. (Cañas Quirós, 2000, p. 82)

When focusing on the educational context, and through his book *Emile; or, Concerning Education* from 1762, Rousseau manifests a complex philosophical approach to the understanding of freedom (added to many other philosophical concepts that would be worthy of study by themselves). In addition to the clear philosophical approach of connecting freedom with the idea of free will, there can be seen a connection between the concept of freedom and the educational context and application. Such idea of bringing together freedom and education that can be seen in *Emile* will have an influence in the thoughts of the upcoming authors that will appear in this thesis. By focusing on the implications of freedom in education through *Emile*, we can observe some elements that will start giving entity and meaning to this concept. To begin with, Rousseau pleads for giving freedom (of movement in this case) to the children, but always taking care that they do not get in contact with dangerous elements (Rousseau, 1762/2007, p. 35). By doing so, there is a concern about the safety of the children when allowing them to explore their environment and limits. The same concept will be present later in A. S. Neill's ideas and their application in Summerhill School or in Rebeca Wild's understanding of giving freedom of movement to the children. Another element that appears to be related to freedom is the treatment of failure. Allowing the children to experiment and accept the taste of failing, and even

the pain of it, seems to be a situation that is underlined by the presence of freedom. This situation of enjoying the freedom to find their own limits will be also helpful for the learning of the pupils. (Rousseau, 1889, p. 41)

Rousseau also pays attention to the political and economic context and its relationship with freedom. The author confronts the political world, and how this can have a negative effect on the freedom of the individuals. He explains that the political institutions may use the economic growth to limit freedom of the members of society, making them more dependent on those institutions that have taken their freedom away. One concern that raises from such situation for this author is the possibility that once the individual is submitted by the power of the institution, the desire for freedom might disappear. Because of this threat coming from the political institutions, Rousseau looks for a political model that can combine authority and freedom in his work called *The social contract*. (Cañas Quirós, 2000, pp. 81-82)

In addition to Rousseau, and following in a certain way his steps, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827) can be considered as an influential figure and needs to be mentioned here. Pestalozzi is as an important figure in the educational field and his work was clearly influenced by Rousseau (Bowers & Gehring, 2004, p. 308). The concept of freedom also appears in his work, and even though it is not explicitly linked, certain features of the educational model proposed by this author have a relation with the concept of freedom that I am seeking to understand.

One element that Pestalozzi's ideas shared with the ones of Rousseau is the trust in the innate good will of children (Latham, 2002, p. 59). This idea will be a common driving force of the work of the upcoming authors and will be linked to the concept of freedom as one of the main conditions for freedom to exist in the educational context. Some other elements proposed by Pestalozzi were to not rely on punishment or competition as a way of developing the potential of pupils (Latham, 2002, p. 59). In this case we can see how the underlining value of counting with freedom as a pedagogical component has an impact on the shape that education can take.

Before moving on to the three main authors that will help me define in a more concrete way the concept of freedom in education and the elements that are related to it, I find necessary to refer to other authors that also got in contact with the idea of freedom from different perspectives. Going from a behaviouristic approach to freedom by B. F. Skinner (1904-1990) to an unschooling theory by Ivan Illich (1926-2002) for example, it can be seen how the concept of freedom has been approached from different point of views. Paulo Freire (1921-1991) and John Holt

(1923- 1985) are named here as they have been also influential authors in the upcoming authors that are being referred in this thesis.

Paulo Freire dealt with the concept of freedom as a goal, as he understood education (especially through literacy learning) as a way of gaining societal freedom for the ones who were suffering oppression (Giroux, 2010, p. 716). In this case freedom is set as a goal of the education process. On the other hand, Ivan Illich also had the concept of educational freedom embedded in his work, in this case with the perspective of finding an alternative to the traditional schooling (Zaldívar, 2015, p. 89). John Holt's approach to freedom is based on the trust towards the children (especially in the natural curiosity) and understanding freedom as the right of children to decide how to encounter the world by themselves and create their own approach to it (Hern, 2008, p. 18). Holt's work relates to some previous approaches of trusting the children and their natural goodness (as in Rousseau or Pestalozzi for example). Importantly, for Holt adults need to trust not only children, but also themselves (Holt, 1982, p. xii). B. F. Skinner also tackled the concept of freedom and took a behaviouristic approach to it to carry out a critique towards the literatures of freedom. For this author, a way of understanding freedom is by linking it to behaviour through type of behaviour called reflexes. (Skinner, 1972, p. 26)

Many of the concepts and components of freedom that have been discussed so far will appear again at later stages of the history brought up by educational authors. These connections between the past and the present, with discussions and different understandings of the concept of freedom at different times are examples that show the complexity and deeper meaning of a word that could seem to be a simple concept, but it reveals itself as a much complex one. To try to understand freedom it is needed to try to understand human nature and other concepts related to it such as determinism for example. Because of this, I consider important to acknowledge the huge scope of the concept and narrow it down to the educational context with a focus in the school environment.

2.2 Concept of freedom in education

After having pointed out some concepts and ideas that have served as ground and influenced the later concepts of freedom in education, I will focus now on the three main authors who are the focus of this thesis and the way their educational philosophy gave an important role to freedom. I consider important to focus not only on the way they understood the concept of freedom but also in their educational philosophy. Even though some of the elements of their educational

philosophies might not appear to be connected in an explicit way with the concept of freedom, they all are existing in an intertwined way and allow freedom to be present in their ideas and initiatives. I will start with A.S. Neill. After him I will introduce Rebeca Wild and will finish with Daniel Greenberg. The reason that has led me to choose these three names is that they have been working with the idea of freedom in education and that makes their presence in my thesis meaningful. Even though they are object of critique (by the public opinion and by myself as well), they present valuable ideas that will help me to describe later what is my understanding of freedom in education. These different approaches can still be seen in the schools that they have helped founding (Summerhill and Sudbury) and in other initiatives that are not running anymore as the case of the Pestalozzi School by Rebeca Wild. A compendium of their ideas in addition to my own insights will help me to define what I understand as freedom-based education in the discussion part of this thesis.

2.2.1 A.S. Neill

Alexander Sutherland Neill (1883-1973) was the founder of Summerhill School in Suffolk (around hundred kilometres from London) in 1921. He was influenced by traditional values during his own upbringing and after working as a teacher in several traditional schools, he established with the help of his first wife an experimental school that would then survive through the years until today. Because of being exposed to the traditional values of the traditional school and not fitting within them, Neill had the urge to do something different, and Summerhill School was his answer (Neill, 2005, pp. 19-20). It is important to acknowledge the political and ideological stand of this author. He was openly against Fascism, after living personally through the rise to power of Hitler and Mussolini (Croall, 1983, p. 245). His political activism was also present in his educational understanding, finding a connection between freedom and society (or the school environment in this case). In my opinion, the stand that Neill took regarding the denial of having discipline and allowing children to be themselves (Neill, 2005, p. 20) is directly related to his ideological point of view and therefore his picture of how society could work in a respectful way to all its members and the role of freedom in his work.

When paying attention to the concept of freedom that is present in Neill's work and philosophy, we can observe that there are certain components that work as foundation for the whole environment where this idea can flourish. As main components for his concept of freedom, we can

see the presence of autonomy, trust and limits. Each of these elements are conditions that will make freedom to be possible to exist. (Neill, 1994, 2005)

Autonomy is a vital element for Neill, and this can be seen on how his model of schooling is built around the autonomy of the students and the trust that adults put on them. It would not be possible to talk about autonomy without trusting on the children and their natural curiosity. In this idea we can see a connection with Rousseau and his way of understanding the human nature as good. The autonomy is also dependant on the age of the child and his development, and because of this it is important to understand the contextual nature of this concept. This is especially relevant when talking about the safety of the children. Neill understands autonomy as giving the children the space and trust, so they can make decisions by themselves and live in a way that he names as a free life. (Neill, 2005, pp. 96-98)

An element that is strongly connected with the trust is love, and for Neill this is also a condition that must exist when talking about trust. His concept of love is understood not to be a romantic or possessive one. Children must feel that they are loved and supported, offering a truly caring environment where they can feel and act as themselves, not just acting on a way that would please the adults. By doing so, they are nearer to act freely and free of any obligations imposed by the older ones (either parents or teachers). An element that is directly related to autonomy and trust is the question of limits and how they are decided and agreed upon. (Neill, 2005, pp. 107-108)

The existence of limits is a necessary condition for freedom to be present not only in the school context, but also in the society. Related to autonomy, Neill (2005) explains that some of the limits to the autonomy that is granted to children must be based on safety matters (allowing a five years old child to use an industrial circular saw might not be a safe option, and that would not be considered autonomy but an unreasonable decision). Children are sensible to social laws, and when these operate in a respectful and democratic environment, they can become a valuable and useful way to set limits (Neill, 2005, p. 100). As it has appeared earlier, this idea of freedom existing within limits was already brought up by earlier philosophers such as Rousseau and will be also a common idea for the rest of authors that will appear in this thesis.

It is possible to link the existence of limits to the existence of freedom in a way that freedom cannot exist if there are no limits. Neill states that freedom means to do as oneself pleases as long as the practice of that freedom does not affect another person's freedom (Neill, 2005, p. 105). By doing so, there needs to be development of the self-discipline and self-control by a

child, as they will be deciding by themselves to act in a way that will not affect others, based on their own understanding of the matter and not just because of an external authority telling them what to do. When discussing freedom and limits, a common misconception can be to associate giving freedom to the children with never saying “no” and giving children as much as they want and allowing them to do as they please. This is not what Neill understands by freedom, as it is needed to set limits and make children understand (as much as possible based on their age and developmental stage) why those limits are set and make them part of that decision (Neill, 1994, p. 26). In order to make children part of the decision-making process and the creation of rules that set limits, Neill trusts on a democratic way to manage the school (Neill, 2005, p. 52) that makes democracy an important element of his educational philosophy.

Democracy is taken to practice in the school through the General School Meeting (to be described in the next chapter) and it is their way to manage not only some of the limits, but also the way the children relate themselves to the rules. Because of the existence of a democratic governance of the school, it offers the chance to offer children the possibility to get involved with their own environment (if they wish to do so) so they can relate to the limits that will enclose their freedom. As Neill affirms, children have to be owners of their own decisions, and offering them a democratic environment where they can take that responsibility is one of the conditions for freedom to exist. (Neill, 2005, pp. 57-58)

In addition to the elements discussed until this point, there are other elements that I consider important to be highlighted. The first one is not a component of freedom per se but a goal, in this case happiness. This element is recurrent in Neill’s work as he considers that the goal of life is to be happy and therefore, education should help the children to achieve this final goal (Neill, 2005, p. 102). Bringing up happiness as a final life goal can be provocative and even presumptuous, but I find remarkable and valuable that such value is present in his educational philosophy and can be considered as a reality. The second one is teaching with the example. Neill understands that we cannot teach tolerance or trust if we are not able to do it by ourselves as educators or parents (Neill, 2005, p. 112). It is vital that the adults will not only preach certain values, but also act accordingly, and by doing so, it would be possible to create an environment of honesty that will be fertile to grow in freedom. By taking into account all the components of freedom here described, Neill understands that the school can be turned into a safe environment in which the children can develop following their own needs while being respectful towards the other members of the school community and therefore with the society once they leave the school.

2.2.2 Rebeca Wild

The German author and educator Rebeca Wild (1939-2015) was born in Germany, and after receiving training in pedagogy and other fields, in 1977 she funded the Pestalozzi School in Ecuador. Wild states in her work that she was influenced by earlier authors such as Socrates, Rousseau, Pestalozzi and her school referred to other educational initiatives like Montessori schools, Free and Open School in the United States and the previously named Summerhill School (Wild & Wild, 2002, pp. 30-31). Because of these influences and ways of understanding education, there will be a connection with the previous ideas from A. S. Neill such as existence of limits, love and respect for example. Wild (2000) explains that freedom and non-directive actions also play an important role in her understanding of education and it had a decisive role in her educational initiative. She also understands freedom as a way of developing transversal values such as empathy, explaining the potential that such value can have in the educational environment (Wild, 2000, pp. 132-133).

To begin with Wild's educational philosophy, we can observe that the existence of limits is a common topic in her work and her practices in the Pestalozzi School. Wild explains that having limits fosters creativity and reduces the uncertainty that a world without limits would create to its habitants (Wild, 2006, p.39). Wild also makes the difference between having limits and the concepts of punishment and rewards, trying to dismantle the confusion of understanding the existence of limits as a way of setting the environment in which adults can apply punishments to the children that dare to overcome those limits (Wild, 2006, p. 49). The existence of rules that sets limits is a condition that must exist for the individuals to be able to enjoy their freedom, as this one cannot be understood without respecting other's right to have their own freedom (Wild, 2000, p. 39).

Adaptability of the children to their environment is a value that gains importance within Wild's work. One of the main goals of her educational philosophy is to help children to become flexible and be able to adapt to a changing environment such as the society. Wild argues that the fear of the unknown makes humans rely on finding safety and relief in the external authority and therefore getting rid of the autonomy in the name of that feeling of safety (Wild, 2000, p. 25). By giving the children the opportunity to develop their autonomy through allowing them learning and living their life in an environment where freedom is a driving force, their self-discipline will develop as well. This is important as it will allow the children to take responsibility over their actions at later stages (Wild, 2000, p. 39). Learning to take decisions is a learning process

that needs children to have freedom to make their own choices and, in that way, develop those capacities (Wild, 2006, p. 69). Because of understanding that children must learn to take responsibility and make decisions, they are encouraged to do so by including them in the decision-making process. The idea of making children be part of the decision-making process is a common one among all the theories and initiatives that are portrayed in this thesis.

Understanding how children react towards limits and rules is important to be able to set them in a way that they are respectful towards the children. According to Wild, the capacity of children to understand and internalize rules and their meaning is a process that needs to be developed. Children need to recognize and interpret the rules to reach a full understanding of their meaning and their implications within their environment. Until this understanding is fully developed, it is not possible that they will be able to stick to the limits set by the adults. Because of this, adults will have to support and guide the children in this process, making them part of the process of setting the rules and allowing them experiment with them. (Wild, 2006, pp. 140-142)

Respect towards the children is other key element in Wild's understanding of education. As Wild and Wild (2002) present, a first approach to the idea of respect is to base it on respecting the needs of the children. Children have really different kinds of needs, ranging from the physiological to the emotional ones, to name some of them, and they should be respected by the adults (Wild & Wild, 2002, p. 36). It is also important to understand that not only the needs related to the survival of the individual must be taken into consideration, but also those related to the development and growth of the child (Wild, 2006, p. 65). It is needed to consider not only the satisfaction of those need but also the consequences of not fulfilling them.

Pain is an important element when discussing respect for the needs of children. These authors argue that when the needs are not satisfied or satisfied in a wrong way, children feel pain, and that has an impact on both their capacity to learn and to develop. Lack of movement, food or experiences where children can have autonomy and decision-making power may produce pain that can alter their biological functions as well. The existence of pain in children at early ages can have an impact on them as adults as emotional tensions and blockages can take place and accompany the future adult for long time if they are not acknowledged and treated. This shows the importance of taking this element into consideration. (Wild & Wild, 2002, p. 36)

When exploring the question of satisfying the needs of the children, it is important to point out that respect exists when adults give children the opportunity to express those needs and the

satisfaction takes place in an environment of common understanding and responsibility by both parts (Wild & Wild, 2002, p. 38). A second important idea according to Wild and Wild is that the need for mutual respect. They consider that for having a real respect towards the children we need to abandon the vertical approach where only a child needs to respect the adult and adopt a bilateral way of understanding respect. Basing respect on this idea, we can find a situation that fosters respect in both directions, making children become part of that responsibility. (Wild & Wild, 2002, p. 66)

Love is the last element that I consider important to pay attention when discussing about Wild's educational philosophy. This concept appears in many of her texts and seems to be also a vital element for this author. Love is a need that has to be satisfied, not only for living but even for the basic survival (Wild, 2006, p. 81). Love as an ideal concept takes the shape of an unconditional love, where independently of the possible disappointments brought about by children, adults must keep that love towards them (Wild, 2006, p. 83). Wild (2006) affirms that: "every child needs to have the safety of feeling loved in any situation" (p. 83). In connection to the role of punishment in the democratic schools (to be expanded in the later chapter regarding the schools), the author believes that using acceptance and love instead of punishment in certain moments is a valid and useful way to change negative behaviours in children (Wild, 2000, p. 211).

2.2.3 Daniel Greenberg

Daniel Greenberg, a former physics professor from Columbia University, is one of the founders of the Sudbury Valley School in Massachusetts (United States). The school was founded in 1968. Greenberg is seen as the main philosopher behind that educational initiative and has been doing research, writing and work towards finding an alternative way of education to the mainstream educational system. Freedom plays an important role within his educational philosophy, complementing other values such as self-motivation of the students, trust in the children and their natural curiosity and respect towards them, to name some of the values.

One of the main elements from Greenberg's educational philosophy is the trust in children's natural curiosity and their natural disposition to investigate their environments and learn from them (Greenberg, 2003, p. 18). To do so, it is necessary to offer children an environment that will allow them to follow those natural inclinations towards learning and doing it without freedom seems to be impossible. According to Greenberg (2003), all children will learn if they are

allowed and encouraged to do it at their own rhythm. Curiosity is their main tool to do so and adults need to trust that children will do it. Freedom in Greenberg's work can be understood as the capacity given to the children to choose by themselves what to study and how (Greenberg, 2003, pp. 101-103). Ackoff and Greenberg (2008) argue that the curiosity is influenced by the personal character of the children and needs to be considered when talking about the learning process. In addition to these two components, children need to be given the right environment where they can investigate their surroundings, ensuring and encouraging spaces for children's contemplation. (Ackoff & Greenberg, 2008, pp. 102-103)

A second way of understanding freedom is to allow children to develop (not only physically, but also emotionally and intellectually) at their own pace and respecting the different ways of development that each child has (Greenberg, 2003, p. 97). This idea was already shared by previously discussed authors and seems to be one of the common lines of thoughts that all of them share. Freedom is also necessary to be present when allowing children building their relations among themselves. By doing so, there will be relationships based on their natural inclinations that will forge meaningful and long-lasting relationships in many cases. (Greenberg, 2003, p. 181)

Self-discipline and taking responsibility are other values that are considered important by Greenberg. This can be seen in the fact that one of the goals in his educational initiative is to allow the students to become responsible individuals that are able to respond to the challenges that society presents to them in an independent way (Greenberg, 2003, p. 184). By doing so, education will help those students to develop their ability to become autonomous individuals.

Ackoff and Greenberg (2008) consider that motivation is a vital element when talking about learning and the way students relate to their school environment and their surroundings. They affirm that the best way of learning takes place when students are the ones making the decision of starting such learning and therefore their inner motivation will drive the learning process (Ackoff & Greenberg, 2008, pp. 10-11). This idea is strongly connected with the previous one regarding children being allowed to choose their own way of discovering the world, creating in this way an environment that will create a meaningful way of learning. Even though personal motivation is a necessary element for learning to happen (Ackoff & Greenberg, 2008, p. 10), the same authors admit that the "source of our internally driven life goals and passions remains a mystery" (Ackoff & Greenberg, 2008, p. 12). By admitting that fact, and even though we are not able to find where the motivation might come from, the authors imply that it is needed to

acknowledge the importance of motivation and take it into consideration when taking decisions regarding learning.

Among other elements that are also present in Greenberg's work, fear is a relevant one to be introduced in this thesis. Greenberg associates the sense of fear with the authority and that is why he aims at avoiding fear of authority in his philosophy. To do so, he proposes not to go against the existence of authority in the school environment, but to understand where that authority comes from and make children take part in the creation and operation of such authority through a democratic way of running the environment where learning takes place. The author argues that it is also important to understand how to reach that position of authority and how to act once it is achieved. (Greenberg, 2003, p. 21)

One element that appears to be common to not only the three referred authors but also to many of those discussed in the first section of this thesis is the role of democracy as a way of managing the school environment and as an ideal of society that would benefit from having such value already present during the education of the younger individuals. The concept of democracy, its link with education and how it is understood in each of the schools that are the object of this study will be presented in the next chapter.

3 Democratic schools and freedom

Having considered different ways of understanding of freedom and the elements from the educational philosophies of the three main authors chosen to be discussed in this thesis I will turn the focus onto answering the second research question of this thesis: *how do democratic schools apply the idea of freedom?* Democratic education is brought to this thesis as it can be considered an environment that can help these philosophies of freedom to take place. Democratic education is chosen because this kind of education gives freedom an important role in education and it is worth analysing and makes meaningful its presence in this work. After describing the theoretical foundations of democratic education and choosing the understanding that will be used in the later discussion, I will describe the real-life examples of practices that follow those foundations to offer deeper and broader understanding of how the application of the idea of freedom to the schools and their practices happen.

3.1 Democratic education

To begin with a definition of democratic education I will use the one provided by the European Democratic Education Community (EUDEC). This non-profit organization is recognized by the United Nations as an official project of the Education for Sustainable Development project and works with educational initiatives and private stakeholders such as researchers and schools to promote and develop democratic education both in Europe and globally (EUDEC, 2015a). This source is chosen because the way they conceptualize democratic education is a compendium of many different authors and initiatives (some of them have already been discussed in this thesis) and it makes meaningful for this thesis to bring an educational concept that values freedom and makes it to be a driving force in the schools that follow the principles of democratic education.

Based on EUDEC (2015b), democratic education is understood as a type of education that is built upon the idea of fulfilling not only the needs of a learner, but also the needs of the community and society. The focus is on the schools, therefore it is a type of education that uses the schooling system but understanding each educational initiative as a unique one, with different and valuable characteristics while avoiding general rules and standardized procedures. By doing so, EUDEC talks about learning communities, giving great value to the whole community

built around the school itself. Even though each educational environment is accepted and encouraged to have individual characteristics and ways of understanding and exercising the concept of a democratic education, there is a series of characteristics that appear in every school that might consider itself as an example of democratic education. (EUDEC, 2015b). Before naming these characteristics, I consider important to point out the strong connection between many of them and many of the previous ideas brought up by the main authors referred in this thesis.

According to EUDEC (2015b), there are three main elements in any given democratic school. The first one is to have a culture of equality and respect within the learning community. Within this element, values such as respect, trust and tolerance are vital and must be present in this type of schooling. As second element that is present is the democratic way of managing the school environment through collective decision-making. By understanding the decision-making process to be collective, the system gives equal say to all the components of the community regardless of their age, role or status. All the elements regarding the functioning of the school are object of decision-making by all the members, giving responsibility and trust to everyone in the community. The last element is concerned with learning, and it is based on self-directed learning. Because of trusting in students, they are given the freedom to choose by themselves the way they want to study (both content and methods) and allow them to follow their own interests while respecting their needs and personal characteristics. This requires an honest trust in the inner motivation of children to discover the world and providing the free environment to pursue those goals. (EUDEC, 2015b)

I find it necessary to make a distinction between democratic education (as described in this chapter) and schooling for democratic values. Schooling for democratic values is a part of the mainstream education system and is an upcoming idea brought by mainstream stakeholders such as the Council of Europe. In 2018 the Council of Europe presented a project related to “Competences for Democratic Culture” in which they described different ways of introducing democratic values into education and how to measure them. This was presented in the context of other elements that were connected with the concept of democratic education, for example intercultural dialogue (Council of Europe, 2018a). The report claims that: “democratic education should be part of a comprehensive and coherent vision of education, of an education of the whole person” (Council of Europe, 2018b, p. 14). Even though in such affirmation one can see the use of the term of “democratic education”, it is possible to see how the goals for the educa-

tion presented by the Council of Europe (2018b): “preparation for the labour market, preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies, personal development and development and maintenance of a broad, advanced knowledge base” (p.14), vary from the goals set by the democratic education principle. Even though a discussion related to purposes of education will take place in the discussion chapter, we can already see a difference between the values of the mainstream educational model and the democratic education one.

By observing the different values that are present in both the mainstream model and the democratic one that is being introduced in this thesis, it is possible to see how the same word can have different meanings based on which values are behind it. Because of this difference of understanding the same word, the one defined by EUDEC is the conceptualization that will be used in this thesis when referring to democratic education. The definition brought by EUDEC is nearer to the concepts discussed by the authors that have turned freedom as a driving force in their educational philosophies and therefore it makes it meaningful for this work. It is also important to point out that even though some of the authors referred in this thesis are not talking explicitly about the concept of democratic education; its principles follow many of their ideas and understandings related to education. By reflecting on this term of democratic education later during the discussion part of this thesis, the term of freedom-based education will be introduced in order to offer a different way of understanding the concept defined by EUDEC.

Before examining the examples of real-life experiences of democratic schools, it is relevant to acknowledge that there are many other ways of understanding and naming democratic education. There are other concepts developed by many authors and educational initiatives such as free schools, progressive education or active schools to name some of them. Even though they all share similar values, there are several reasons for differences in the names. These reasons can range from plain marketing reasons due to a conservative context or because of using some different pedagogical or even spiritual approaches. The relationship that each educational initiative takes with freedom is different and it has also an influence on which term is used. In this thesis the focus is on democratic schools as examples of schools that follow the principles of democratic education.

3.2 Real-life examples of democratic schools

To provide a better understanding of how the democratic education approach should work I will pay attention to both the ways the main authors that are the focus of this thesis explained

the application of their ideas in the real-life and how other educational initiatives explain nowadays their way of working and practices. I will help myself with some of the original texts from the main authors, where they describe how their initiatives took place and some more recent material from other current schools. To structure this subchapter, I will focus on some of the different elements related to freedom that have been present so far through this thesis and how the idea of freedom can be applied in the schools.

To begin with, the democratic way of managing the school is the first element to be considered. Because of being democratic schools, one of the conditions that must be met is to manage the school in a democratic way. It seems that there is a common way to do so in many of the school models discussed in this thesis for example a school assembly or meeting. Even though the individual characteristics of each school might create different ways of managing the meeting, all of them use the idea of each person present in the community (students, teachers and staff) having one vote and making decisions through voting in that environment. In Summerhill, the weekly assembly takes care of making decisions related to rules and social elements such as the everyday life at the school but leaves out of the responsibility of the assembly elements like the hiring of staff or economic issues (Neill, 2005, pp. 52-54). The weekly meeting also takes decisions regarding punishments for the students that break the rules decided by the assembly itself (Neill, 2005, p. 56). By doing so, the children manage themselves in an autonomous way and the punishment becomes relevant to them. Neill argues that this way of understanding democracy as a direct one is more fair and real than the representative model that is present in the society (Neill, 2005, p. 61). Even though this might sound perfect, it is important to be critical and analyse this direct democracy from another point of view. This critique will be part of the discussion that takes place in the next chapter of this thesis.

According to Holt (1973, p. 97), the Summerhill School model is worthy to be considered as a good starting point and needs development to make it better. Following this idea of developing the model from Neill, we can see how the Sudbury Valley School deals with the democratic way of managing the community. Greenberg (2003) explains that in the Sudbury Valley School there is a weekly meeting but working in a different way to the Summerhill one for example. In this weekly meeting, all the matters related to the functioning of the school are dealt with. Economic and staff issues are also part of this decision-making body while respecting the idea of each person having one vote (Greenberg, 2003, pp. 113-115). In addition to the weekly meetings, we can find other units under the name of committees that take care of different aspects related to the management of the school (Greenberg, 2003, p. 132). One of these committees is

called “Judicial Committee” (JC) and is the tool that the school uses to deal with different conflicts that might appear among the members of the community (Greenberg, 2003, p. 171). This is one example of the existence of development from model to model. While the issues related to conflicts were placed in the weekly meeting in Summerhill, in the Sudbury model this was outsourced to the JC (Greenberg, 2003, p. 169). The idea of having a committee made from students and staff that takes care of conflict solving is also present in other educational initiatives like El Dragon International School in Spain through their own judicial committee (El Dragon International School, 2018).

Even though the democratic education model pursues the existence of an egalitarian way of understanding education and decision-making, the reality might be different as power relations play a role even in this system and have a negative impact on the way the ideal way of working takes place. For example, in his ethnographic research Wilson (2015), found that the way that the decision-making process took place was following hierarchical values, where different members were privileged based on their gender, age and experience (Wilson, 2015, p. 134).

Furthermore, when discussing how learning takes place in these initiatives, we can see different approaches, but always following the principle of trusting in the natural curiosity of the children and giving them the chance to choose by themselves and working in an autonomous way. Self-directed learning is a way of doing so, and the Pestalozzi school used that idea in its practice. According to Wild and Wild (2002), their school believed in an education centred on the children and their needs by offering them chances to discover, explore, express and experience their environment. In this context, the school avoids applying external academic pressure to the children, fostering an environment that would allow a socialization process that would make children be able to develop their inner satisfaction while being aware of their surrounding when taking decisions. (Wild & Wild, 2002, p. 49)

The Pestalozzi school used a learning environment that would allow the spontaneous learning based on the inner motivation of the children. Wild and Wild (2002) argue that by having diverse materials available to them, the natural curiosity and interest of the children will develop. They propose that the activity must be non-directed by the adults, allowing the children to discover their environment by themselves (Wild & Wild, 2002, p. 65). Because of this, it was possible to find plenty of games that children could enjoy through free play and carry out at the same time learning related to the topic the game was connected to (Wild & Wild, 2002, p. 58).

This idea is strongly connected with the concept of self-directed learning, as it allows the children to follow their own developmental times without being directed externally by a curriculum that might not fit the needs of each children.

The concept of self-directed learning and designing a personal curriculum that is relevant to the children can be seen in the way that it is applied in the Makarios Community School. In this progressive school (as they define themselves), after getting to know the student, the agreement on a personal plan is made together with a student. It includes the subjects that the student is interested in. By accepting this plan, the student agrees on attending to those lectures and getting involved with the learning (Makarios Community School, 2018). By doing so, the learning will be autonomous with the help of the different teachers around the school and will become relevant as it is coming from the personal interest of the students themselves. The mixed aged groups are an element that plays in favour of this kind of learning as it allows the children of different ages and developmental stages help each other in the different tasks and give an extra component of social relationships to the academic learning (Greenberg, 2003, p. 85). The Summerhill School also follows this principle, and as Neill expressed more than fifty years ago, schools must take into account mixed groups, not just taking into consideration the age but also the gender, an idea that might have sounded provocative at the time (Neill, 2005, p. 62).

One element that appears in several schools is the free play. Because of the idea of learning happening in an implicit way and allowing it to happen at any time and any place, free play becomes the perfect ally to do so. Greenberg (2003) explains that free play is one of the key elements for learning in the Sudbury School. This author gives value to the free play as a way of not just focusing on academic knowledge, but also on other elements that will be relevant and useful for the students such as developing the concentration and focusing skills (Greenberg, 2003, p. 85). Playing is an important element within the Summerhill School way of working, understanding the importance of it as a way of developing a great variety of skills (Neill, 2005, p. 66).

The existence of limits has been discussed above as an important part of the educational philosophies of the authors before mentioned. It is common to see in democratic schools that the way of setting limits and therefore the rules that will regulate many of the interactions between children and adults is aligned with the democratic component of this type of schools. One example could be seen in the Pestalozzi School where they used to take decisions related to the rules and the consequences of breaking them in their weekly meeting where the primary level

students and staff came together (Wild, 2006, pp. 199-200). When talking about limits, it is also necessary to stress how important the connection between the work in the school and the work at home is. As an example of this we can see the existence of a contract signed between the parents and the school staff at the Pestalozzi School, where the way of working with the idea of limits is accepted by both parts (Wild, 2006, p. 202). This need of taking into consideration the families and the need for cooperation with them was also brought by Neill (1994, p. 83). Because of making children take part in the process of deciding the rules and the punishments related to the non-compliance towards those rules, the possible punishments are understood to be fair and shared by the community.

In this chapter it has been possible to observe how the idea of freedom can be applied in the different elements of the school, influencing on several characteristics of it. Aspects related not only to the learning but also social relationships and the way the students relate themselves with the management of the school and community can be affected by having freedom as a driving force. It is important to understand that the existence of freedom in the school requires that the whole school community is engaged with the idea, going from the students to the parents and staff. Democracy is also a vital element that seems to be present in democratic schools, but it is such a complex concept that in my opinion requires of a thoughtful understanding of it, and that idea will lead the next chapter with a discussion regarding that topic.

4 Discussion

After having introduced and defined the concepts of freedom in education and democratic education through the theories of the main three authors that are the scope of this thesis and their educational initiatives, I will proceed to set the discussion between those main concepts and my own understanding on the matter. To begin with, I will describe the challenges and limitations that have appeared during the writing process, related not just to the concepts themselves but also to the research process. After doing so, I will carry out a critique towards the concept of democratic education and propose the use of a different term that will synthesize in a more accurate way my understanding of the concept. I will introduce the use of the term of freedom-based education and argue why I consider necessary to use such term. I will finish this discussion by analysing the implications of freedom-based education in a broader picture that will talk about purposes of education and its relationship with the society.

This thesis has presented several challenges and it has several limitations that need to be acknowledged. The first challenge is related to the concept of freedom. Understanding and expressing that concept in a way that is relevant for the research has posed many difficulties. Freedom as a concept is so vast and complex that it is vital to narrow it down to a scale that makes it possible to conceptualize and offer a deeper understanding within the scope of the bachelor's thesis. To do so, the discussion has focused on the educational context. Even though that narrows down the concept, it still needs support from other philosophical points of views to understand it in a meaningful way.

An important challenge that has emerged after working with the concept of freedom in education has taken the shape of a paradox related to parents making the decision of choosing freedom for their children in their name. Approaching this paradox would require a comprehensive work that was not the aim of this thesis and therefore could not be done in this piece of work. The second challenge has been the selection of material and theories. Because of democratic education (theories and authors) not being so spread and not being present on mainstream educational systems, the amount of peer reviewed material and research regarding the topic is quite limited. Due to this situation, most of the material used in this thesis is referred to the original works of the main authors, bringing up the issue that there can be a gap between their theories and the reality of the practices. To avoid this, it would be necessary to carry out more research

related to the main two concepts that have been driving this thesis to see from a research point of view how the theory takes place in the real world. The last challenge that I can bring up is my personal relationship with the object of the study. Due to the strong connection between the topic and my personal educational philosophy I have needed to acknowledge this while writing and selecting the material to avoid a strong influence of my personal inclinations on the theoretical part.

At this moment I am proposing the use of the term freedom-based education instead of democratic education. This proposal emerges from the main critique that I want to pose towards the concept of democratic education and from my personal understanding of freedom as the core value of this type of education. I want to use this term as I feel that ‘democratic education’ does not totally represent the idea I want to articulate. It is important to note that even though the wording is different, the underlying values of the term that I am proposing instead of the original one remain the same. Values such as freedom, respect, trust and the rest that have been discussed so far along this thesis are also driving forces on freedom-based education. The main difference lies in the way the concept of democracy is understood and taken into practice.

Firstly, I consider that, since the core value of this type of education is freedom, that concept should be present in the name that will be used to refer to this concept of education. Secondly, and as my main critique, the existence of the word “democratic” in the term might present itself as questionable. Even though I agree with the concept of democracy here described by the different authors and their schools, I think that there must be a deeper discussion and rethinking of democracy itself and its place in the schools and ultimately in the society. Ackoff and Greenberg (2008) understand democracy as making decisions by voting and not by authoritarian imposition (Ackoff & Greenberg, 2008, p. 66). In my opinion a democratic model that is based on the power of the majority without addressing their capacity to make responsible decisions should be object of a rethinking process. This has been acknowledged already by some schools that are applying sociocratic methods to their way of governance. According to Romme, Broekgaarden, Huijzer, Reijmer and van der Eyden (2018), the sociocratic method can be seen as a developed way of democracy. This method of governance is based on informed consent and double linking. Informed consent happens when the opposite part cannot use arguments anymore against the proposal and must finally consent on that proposal to happen. The double link concept relates to the existence of a connection between different levels of decision-making bodies, making the decisions to be shared and understood by all the involved parts. This is a contraposition to the bottom-up ways of other methods of governance (Romme, Broekgaarden,

Huijzer, Reijmer, & van der Eyden, 2018, pp. 2-4). Using this way of decision-making opens the door to alternative methods to the democratic ones used by the democratic schools that have been named and described in this thesis. Because of this, I understand that the term freedom-based education represents in a more accurate way my understanding on education and therefore I propose to use it in the rest of this thesis and later research. With this word choice it is not my intention to go against or even repudiate the concept of democratic education, but to propose another, perhaps an improved, take on it.

A second critique that I need to pose after working with the concept of democratic schools is referred to their condition of being private in most of the cases. It is needed to understand that this is the result of most of mainstream educational systems that do not accept these different ways of understanding education to be part of the public educational system. An example of this rejection of democratic schools by the governments that use the mainstream educational system can be seen on the struggles of the Summerhill School with the national inspection that nearly took the school to its disappearance (Stronach, 2006, pp. 118-136). Because of this, I think that there is need to work towards making this understanding of the education more known to the public and aim on creating an educational system that will value freedom and its presence in the educational context. By doing so, this type of education will become more accessible, making social and economic aspects not a decisive element when choosing which education parents want to offer to their children.

After understanding the concept of democratic education and freedom-based education, it is important to discuss how this type of education can have an impact and become an element of change when talking about purpose of education. According to Piller (2006) for example, the mainstream educational system can be seen as a way of maintaining and perpetuating social and economic structures that favour the status quo (Piller, 2016, p. 99). Assuming that we understand the Council of Europe as a mainstream actor, and as it was already argued in this thesis, we can see that some of their goals for the mass education refer to the creation of working force and citizens able to live in a democratic context (Council of Europe, 2018b, p. 14). On the other hand, we can observe aims of the Summerhill School such as creating a happy childhood, giving children power over their own life or allowing them to develop naturally (Stronach, 2006, p. 119). If we briefly compare the goals of the Summerhill School as an example of the alternative way of understanding education, it is possible to see a difference between them. I understand freedom-based education as a transformative one in opposition to the reproducing values of the mainstream model. We can observe how the values behind freedom-based education can be

connected with the social transformation theories while the mainstream educational model is aligned with the values of the social transmission theories (Bennett & LeCompte, 1990, pp. 2-30). Because of this transformative approach, it can be understood that the goal of this type of education is to allow the individuals to grow and develop freely based on their own needs while respecting the other members of their community while being given the possibility and tools to be able to change their environment. External elements such as parent's expectations or social, economic or even faith impositions will reduce their strength and influence over the children when these last ones are given the possibility of developing and growing in a free (following the concept of freedom discussed throughout this thesis) environment. With this, I want to acknowledge the different aims that this alternative way of understanding education proposes and give a greater value to the concept of freedom in education.

By including the values of freedom, as described along this thesis, and a democratic way of making decisions in the public mainstream education there could be an impact on the purpose of education and therefore a change in the educational paradigm. Allowing children and young people to follow their inner motivation while trusting them by offering a safe and respectful environment would be an initial point where to start building this new paradigm.

This implies the need to rethink the role of teachers as well and their pedagogical approaches. In this type of education, the teacher becomes more of a companion and guide than a know-all character whose responsibility is just to pour information in the empty minds of the children. It is also important to accept that this model of education might not fit everyone, but in my opinion, no educational model will be totally suitable for every learner. Each student as an individual has own especial needs, motivation and ways of learning, but I believe that by giving freedom an important role in education we can offer a more flexible way of trying to cover as many of those individual needs as possible while existing in a respectful environment with the rest of members of the community. Freedom-based education is not a magical solution to all the education problems, but it is an idea that it is worthy to consider and keep researching and improving as an alternative towards a traditional model that for many is obsolete and needs not just a reformation, but a new model.

5 Conclusion

By carrying out a literature review I have introduced and explained the concepts of freedom in education and democratic education. To do so I have focused on the works and ideas of the authors A.S Neill, Rebeca Wild and Daniel Greenberg as representatives of this alternative educational movement. Examples have been also taken from other educational initiatives to show how the ideas related to freedom in education can be put in practice through democratic education. After working with these concepts, I pose some critiques towards the concept of democratic education that will lead me to use the term of freedom-based education instead of the previous one.

The second chapter focused on freedom, firstly paying attention to early works that have influenced the later understandings of the topic. Names such as Plato and Aristotle, Rousseau or Pestalozzi appear at this point offering different ways of understanding freedom and introducing elements such as existence of limits, autonomy or democratic values that were to shape the thinking of later authors. Secondly, the point of view of the chapter switches towards the educational understanding of freedom by paying attention to the three main authors that are the focus of this thesis. Their understanding of freedom in education is portrayed by showing different elements of their educational philosophies that work within freedom and this gives a better understanding of the topic and their own approaches. Ideas related to love, respect, autonomy, freedom within limits, trust and democratic ways of managing the community are common in the three authors and conform the environment where freedom can take place and serves as ground to build the concept of democratic education that was introduced in the third chapter.

The third chapter focused on democratic education and gave examples of how this educational approach can work in real-life. It begins with defining the concept as an educational system that uses the child as central point and offers an environment that allows the development and growth in a respectful way, giving importance to values such as autonomy, personal needs and happiness among others. The chapter continued by giving examples of practices that take place in this kind of schools, paying special attention to the way democracy, learning and limits work in such environments.

To finish this thesis, a discussion including challenges and limitations was drawn in the fourth chapter. After acknowledging the limitations of the research and posing a main critique towards the concept of democratic education and its understanding of democracy, I proposed the use of the freedom-based education term and link the existence of this type of education with a different way of understanding education and consequently set new purposes of education. Understanding education as an organic process that allows children to grow and develop following their own rhythm and inclinations, while offering an environment that support them to enjoy and understand freedom is the way I consider education should take place. Freedom will become then the best ally to do so, allowing adults to trust in the children and fostering a respectful and fulfilling upbringing. This might sound utopic at a time when standardization and con- striction seem to be a norm in most of the educational systems driven by economic reasons, but I want to keep the door open to explore and research alternatives that someday might become the norm. This leads to my master's thesis, in which I aim to pay attention to how the ideas of freedom are implemented in democratic schools and offer a deeper understanding of it and continue developing the idea of freedom-based education.

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