Toward a Pedagogy of Connectedness: The experience of adolescent students in two aesthetically-oriented schools in Brazil

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy under the Executive Committee of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

2020
ABSTRACT

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The present study investigates pedagogical praxes that may counter the phenomenon of disconnectedness, which is widespread in today’s world. It does so by exploring the experiences of adolescent students in two aesthetically-oriented schools in Brazil that cultivate connectedness—with the self, with others, and with the world—as a central curricular theme.

To carry out the research, I developed a methodology that combines narrative inquiry and visual-based methods. I selected a group of five ninth graders at each of the school sites and invited them to participate in a series of *encontros* in which they created collective fictional stories based on their own experiences within and beyond their school. These stories were complemented by visual narratives collected through school observations. The analysis of the oral and visual narratives points to a divide between the movement towards the connectedness that students live within their school and the disconnecting rationale that prevails in the outside world.

Furthermore, it reveals the conscious and unconscious moves that students make to mediate this divide. Based on the findings, I suggest seven pedagogical praxes that can be explored by schools to cultivate connectedness as a central theme in the formation of young citizens today:

1. artistic engagements
2. sensory explorations
3. valorization of authentic cultures
4. caring relationships
5. habits of reflexivity
6. uncomfortable dialogues
7. collective agency.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study is the culmination of a self-reflexive journey that initiated years before I started my doctoral program at Teachers College. It draws from “aesthetic encounters” with amazing human beings who have awakened insights, emotions, intuitions and thoughts within me. Here, I recollect some of the most meaningful encounters that permeate my dissertation.

Years back, when I explored scholarly work to decide the field and the university where I would pursue my PhD, I for the first time found the word “soul” in an article about citizenship. I am honored to have had the author of that article as my advisor throughout my doctoral journey. Dr. William Gaudelli has been a steady source of inspiration through his writing, teaching, and mentoring. I thank him for the numerous conversations when he helped me to transform my passionate but disperse thoughts into relevant academic inquiry, and for his confidence in my independent work. I hope to one day guide other students with the same truth, altruism, and empathy that he embodied in our encounters.

Throughout these six years at Teachers College, I participated in insightful lectures and class discussions that have shaped how I conceive of education today. I am fortunate for having been able to gather in my dissertation committee the professors who most inspired me through this journey. I thank Dr. Sandra Schmidt, Dr. Megan Laverty, and Dr. Olga Hubard-Orvananos for their thoughtful comments, provocative questions, and encouragement.

As I explored the overwhelming landscape of academic conferences, I have found an inspiring community of scholars beyond TC who enthusiastically shared my passion for a connectedness-driven education. In my first AERA meeting, I immediately connected with a scholar who made a little corner for her baby son at the back of the meeting room. As I learned
later, this gesture was a perfect illustration of how Dr. Michelle Tichy carves room for love in the academic debate for peace and social justice. I am honored to have her as my external reader.

My doctoral work became more fun and lighter thanks to the encounters with other emerging scholars with whom I shared dreams, anxieties, frustrations and accomplishments that are inherent to a graduate journey. I thank my cohort, V and Charlotte, on behalf of the entire community of fellows that accompanied me along these years. I also wish to acknowledge Jenny, Charlotte, Kamiya, Tati, John, Hanadi, Allison, and Deirdre for being my extra set of eyes, and Venetia, Louise, Melissa, and Cecilia for their attentive language revisions.

My encounter with students from both schools where I conducted fieldwork were an invigorating source of insight. I thank each and all of them for having generously shared their stories and their time. I would also like to acknowledge Socorro and Marquilandes for the liaison with the schools, and moreover, for having renewed my hope in education with their amazing example.

This doctoral work was made possible through the financial support from CAPES—the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel in Brazil—and the logistical support from LASPAU—Latin America Scholarship Program from American Universities. I acknowledge the support that I received from Grace Choi and Kate Sheeran, who helped me get through the labyrinth of TC, and from my dearest friend Flavia, who lent me a home full of love during my stays in New York. I also thank my brother Marcelo, who provided me with the infrastructure that enabled me to hold the proposal defense and advanced seminar via teleconference from Brazil.

When I was halfway through my fieldwork, I had to take an eight-month break to live the most challenging experience of my life. This encounter with the unpredictable and with the
unfathomable was an opportunity to develop resilience and to grasp the central problem of this dissertation—connectedness—from a highly embodied perspective. In this process, I was supported by an amazing community of love that, as I realized, has been my main foothold throughout my life. It begins with the unconditional love from my parents, Carlos and Regina, and expands to a vibrant circle of friends from close and afar who have been a permanent source of love and sharing.

No encounters have changed the way I see the world than the births of my two sons. Through their fresh eyes, their radiating affection, and their attuned soul, I witness every single day how we can embody connectedness. I thank Luca and Caio for their invigorating presence in my life.

Finally, I acknowledge the solid blend of partnership, love, sacrifice, and humbleness that I received from my husband, Ferdi, throughout this doctorate. I know how big of a step it was for you to leave behind your job and a comfortable life in Sao Paulo and take that plane with me, our two little boys, and our six pieces of luggage on that August evening. I admire you, and I am forever grateful. I can’t wait to resume our movie nights.
DEDICATION

To Caio and Luca.
And all their fellow young humans
who inherited the daunting,
but fascinating challenge
of (re)connecting.

May you learn to “dance, sing, and make it rain.”
As I facilitated that morning session, my eyes kept being drawn to a little boy sitting on the ground next to his mother, one of the literacy instructors who had been invited to the workshop. Possibly close to one year old, the boy quietly scratched the earth with a pebble. I observed him holding the pebble with both hands, bringing it to his mouth and licking it like a lollipop. During the break, I saw the mother chatting with another woman while she nursed the little boy. I approached them and asked the child’s name. “Triste,” she replied—in Portuguese, Triste means “sad.” I insisted, “I mean, what is his name?” “Teacher, that is really his name: Triste.” At first, I was embarrassed, but then, intrigued by the woman’s unchanging smile, I asked why she had chosen that name. Miquelina, the mother, explained that, since her pregnancy, Triste’s father never cared about him; he would only give attention to her older daughter, whom she named Felicidade (Happiness). “Is Triste a sad child?” I asked. “No!” she answered, laughing. “Triste is actually very joyful. He is shy now because he is afraid of the instructors, since you are white. When he turned one, I went after his father and asked him to change the child’s name, but he did not care; so, I decided to keep his name as Triste.” Possibly

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1 Ailton Krenak is an indigenous activist, writer and a leading voice among Brazilian First Nations.
noticing my discomfort, Miquelina said that she would like to give Triste a new name, and asked for my help to find one. I suggested that she try to find a beautiful word in Umbundu, her native language. She asked the other women for help, and came up with the name Unene (the Umbundu word for a big, strong person). I thought it was a great choice, but Miquelina still wanted to hear other ideas from me. She asked which Portuguese names were popular in my home country, Brazil. I told her I liked names that reminded me of people I admired, like Carlos, my father’s name. “Carlos Unene!” she baptized, loudly. “This will be Triste’s name from now on.” Aware of how a name can influence a person’s self-image, I returned to the workshop with a mix of realization (hoping to have made a positive influence in that child’s life) and guilt (feeling that to a certain degree I had just reproduced the colonial relation in which my words seemed to weigh more than my interlocutor’s).

I open this dissertation with Miquelina’s story because it marks the moment in my life when my interest as an education practitioner began to move toward socio-emotional issues that remain at the margins of the global education debate. My encounter with Miquelina happened in 2008, when I was working as a United Nations Volunteer for UNESCO in Angola. The workshop where we met was part of a project to support the country’s efforts to reduce the high illiteracy rates, and my job on that specific day was to facilitate the exchange of experiences between literacy instructors from local initiatives. From the UN perspective, promoting adult literacy was crucial to the “Education For All” framework, which, in turn, was central to the promotion of the Human Development Index. I pursued this mission with the enthusiasm of someone who had been trained in Development Studies and who, for a long time, had Amartya Sen (1999) as a guru. Yet, as I interacted with Miquelina and other participants in the workshops,
I increasingly felt that much of what we were building in those learning circles could not be grasped in terms of capabilities or educational outcomes. There were moments of empowerment (e.g., being invited to the workshops and having a space to speak up seemed to work as an injection of self-esteem to many of the literacy instructors), and there were moments of affective engagement (e.g., as we sang, danced, and looked into each other’s eyes, the air seemed to be filled with the most genuine feelings and emotions, and my perception was that we left each meeting as more caring human beings). There were also movements towards community building and healing (e.g., neighbors who nurtured hostility towards each other since the civil war had a chance to listen to each other and build empathy). Furthermore, through the formal and informal interactions that the workshops enabled (such as my conversation with Miquelina), we shared cultures, subjectivities, and experiences, learning and unlearning new ways of engaging with the world.

Even though I recognized the intrinsic value of these processes, I did not mention them in my reports. I deemed that they would be too intangible to the eyes of policymakers. Nevertheless, they remained in my thoughts long after I returned from Angola, inspiring a reflection process that over the course of a decade, gradually moved from an intuitive level to an empirical as well as a theoretical exploration. The reflection process culminated in this dissertation work, wherein the symbolic, affective, and soulful aspects of learning—which, along the way, I learned to call aesthetic experiences—are brought to the center of the discussion. I identified the phenomenon of connectedness as the focus of my inquiry and found footholds in two academic fields where this theme has already been debated—Global Citizenship Education and Whole Child Education. In the next section, I state and elaborate the problem in more detail.
I look around, and the world looks brutal. Inequality is brutal, social injustice is brutal, and so are racism, xenophobia, misogyny, homophobia, patriarchy, and all forms of exclusion and oppression that seem to characterize contemporary relationships. I can witness brutality in the everydayness of private life (like in Miquelina’s story), in our exploiting economic system, and in the observation of historical movements (like in the way cultures were assassinated, diversity was pasteurized, and nature was devastated in the name of progress). It looks brutal, too, when we kill utopias and hijack people’s ability to dream about a different future. I look around, and brutality seems to define our contemporary society.

Yet, when I turn my gaze to other directions, I begin to collect evidence that disrupts this seemingly fatalist argument. Some of them are poetic manifests, like the thousands of posters calling for “Mais amor, por favor” (“more love, please”) that have taken over the streets of Sao Paulo, one of the most business-oriented cities in Brazil (see Figure 1), over the last year; or the seesaws that a group of artists has installed at the border wall between Mexico and the United States to enable kids from both sides play together—an iconic illustration of how the arts can cut through man-made barriers. Other types of evidence come from the new voices that gradually occupy

Figure 1. A call for affection on street walls in Sao Paulo
established discourses and political spaces, such as the group of young men who get together in a small town in Northeastern Brazil, in a region known for its patriarchal culture, to discuss toxic masculinity, share repressed feelings, and confront naturalized beliefs and attitudes. Or it comes from the new political movements that emerge in different parts of the world arguing for engaged democracy, young people’s engagement, and socio-environmental politics—e.g., the Extinction Rebellion in the United Kingdom, the Sunrise Movement in the United States, or the Virada Política (Political Turn) in Brazil.

Revisiting my own memories, I gathered new pieces for this constellation of “openings” (Greene, 1995) in the actual brutal world: my soul-nourishing visit to Bhutan, where I unlearned some of my Western truths and understood that happiness is not an individual matter, but an inherently collective state; my encounter with Miquelina and other Angolan women who taught me with their voices and bodies that resistance does not necessarily come in articulated speeches, but can be embodied in the sublime power of a choir or in the moves of a worship dance; and there are always the memories of the marches and debates of the World Social Forums, perhaps my favorite space for reimagining the world, feeling human, and renewing hope.

Finally, I add to the list a message that has gone viral on social media in the last year, and which I have been taking as a mantra ever since. “Ninguém solta a mão de ninguém” (“No one let go of anyone’s hand”) was a resistance slogan used by college students during the

Figure 2. "No one let go of anyone's hand"  
Credit: Thereza Nardelli
military dictatorship in Brazil (1964-1985) to encourage each other every time the campus lights were cut off and the police agents entered the classrooms to arrest students. The story was little known until a tattoo artist recovered the phrase and decided to illustrate it in 2018 (see Figure 2), when the election of ultra-conservative president Jair Bolsonaro installed a period of darkness in the country. With fascist discourse and intolerance on the rise, the message has become a source of strength to oppressed groups and a poetic call for empathy and connectedness. Today, it is the motto of civil society’s resistance in Brazil.

Encouraged by such experiences and influenced by the work of humanist and existentialist thinkers, I refuse to accept brutality as a fatalist truth. Borrowing the metaphor suggested by indigenous activist Krenak (2019), I choose to stand with those who insist on holding hands and on “dancing, singing and making it rain” (p. 29). This doctoral work is an effort to participate in this dance. It draws on the assumption that brutality is simply a symptom of a more profound phenomenon which I define as a state of *disconnectedness* with one another, with nature, with the present moment, and ultimately, with one’s very existence in this world. Simply put, the overarching goal of this dissertation is to investigate pedagogical paths that schools can explore in order to equip young people to (re)connect.

1.1 Problem Statement

Before beginning my doctoral program, I used to work as an educator at the Paulo Freire Institute in Sao Paulo. Freire was no longer alive when I assumed the job, but he left an invitation to my veteran colleagues that was passed on and on like a revolutionary mantra. His advice to “invent new pedagogies” has resonated with me ever since. At the outset, I felt intimidated by it. Yet, the more I engaged in the reading and practice of Freire’s ideas, the more I
fathomed his words and became fascinated by them. First, I realized that Freire was not making an individual call. Indeed, he believed that socially relevant pedagogies were built through a collective—and always dialogical—project (Freire, 1986, 1996). Second, I understood that Freire’s view of pedagogy was very distinct from the purely scientific, pseudo-neutral, and highly sophisticated work designed within university walls (Gadotti, 2012). According to the Freirian perspective, pedagogies should emerge from a critical observation of the world and of current teaching practices, with an attitude towards unlearning truths, deconstructing power relations, and imagining new possible realities. In that sense, when Freire called educators to invent new pedagogies, it was because he saw this as an intrinsic part of our work as critical readers of the world. As put by Gadotti (2012), by inventing new pedagogies we would be reinventing the idea of pedagogy in itself, moving from a technical approach to one that emphasizes its social meanings.

Freire lends his own history to illustrate this process. In his last interview (Freire, 1997b), he narrates a memorable encounter he had as a young teacher, when he was taken to the periphery of Recife—his hometown—and spent some time dialoguing with slum dwellers and peasants. Freire was struck by not only by the harshness of their lives, but also by their passivity in the face of such evident denial of their existence. According to Freire, it was that encounter that motivated him to read Marx—“to understand and do something about it”—and inspired him to conceive the Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Obviously, I do not have the ambition to compare my doctoral research with such a seminal work, but it is inspiring to see how far a pedagogical reflection can go when it is rooted in critical engagements with reality and in the courage to reimagine it.
This doctoral study is my response to Freire’s call. Challenged by the encounters and situations remembered in the introduction to this chapter, I have begun to wonder what a “Pedagogy of Connectedness” would look like. What are the potentials and limitations of schools as vehicles for breaking with the reproduction of a disconnecting mindset? How can schools equip young people to (re)connect with each other and with the world where they belong? And, as they move in this direction, how do students experience connectedness-driven curricula while simultaneously participating in a world dominated by disconnecting forces?

In my dissertation, I have explored only the latter piece of this complex line of inquiry—the one about students’ experience. From a constructivist-interpretive paradigm, I examined the ways in which students experience a connectedness-oriented learning at a particular point in their lives—adolescence—when they expand their engagement with a social world that is increasingly disconnected. I decided to conduct the study in two aesthetically-oriented schools because their philosophical underpinnings are close to the idea of connectedness. Aesthetically-oriented schools cultivate an integrative vision of human beings as well as of the world and connect different kinds of knowledge in order to promote students’ wholistic development and their aesthetic engagement with others and with nature. The school sites were located in the peripheral areas of two large cities in Brazil. At each of them, I selected a small group of ninth graders to share, through an exercise of fictional storytelling, their lived and imagined experiences of connectedness.

In that sense, the “pedagogy of connectedness” that I begin to explore in this study emerges from the experiences and conversations that lie at the margins of the educational debate. And nevertheless, it was conceived to inspire the work of all schools. Despite this ambitious aim, the reader should not expect to find here pedagogical postulates, curriculum blueprints, or policy
recommendations. In line with Freire’s perspective of pedagogies as collective endeavors, I simply offer insights—drawn from students’ experiences—into a dialogue which, despite its social relevance, is still incipient among educational scholars and policymakers.

To build my theoretical framework, I first located within my own field of practice—i.e., Citizenship Education—the increasingly relevant conversation on Global Citizenship Education. It embraces borderless social, political, environmental, and even philosophical issues that are closely related to the connectedness dialogue. Second, I identified the scholarship of Whole Child Education, which espoused a wholistic view of human beings and of the world, addressing issues that are key to the idea of connectedness. To an education practitioner increasingly interested in wholistic approaches to learning, the encounter with this scholarly community represented an important step on my journey towards building an academic identity. With this study, I sought to promote a dialogue between these two fields which have informed my educational identity, and which I consider particularly relevant to education in our current times. It is from this intersection that, as this dissertation suggests, a meaningful and socially relevant Pedagogy of Connectedness can emerge.

1.2 Research Question

The present study was guided by the following research question: In what ways do adolescent students experience connectedness in two aesthetically-oriented schools in Brazil, and what can we draw from these experiences to illuminate a “Pedagogy of Connectedness?”

In order to better structure the analysis, this question was unpacked into four subsidiary questions:

1. How do students experience connectedness in their daily lives outside school?
2. How do students experience connectedness within the school?

3. How do students reconcile their school and out-of-school experiences?

4. What can we draw from students’ experiences to illuminate a “Pedagogy of Connectedness”?

1.3 Conceptual Framework

The overarching goal of this study was to understand how adolescent students from two aesthetically-oriented schools in Brazil experience connectedness within and beyond their school context. Moreover, I was interested in how these experiences could illuminate the current debate on Global Citizenship Education. In this section, I present the conceptual framework that informed this inquiry from the conception of the research problem to the analysis of field texts and decisions about dissertation writing.

Maxwell (2013) refers to conceptual framework as the “idea context,” or a “tentative theory” that frames the study and “the actual ideas and beliefs that you hold about the phenomena studied” (p. 39). With this broad outlook, he encourages researchers to move away from a descriptive summary of literature and, instead, to see alternative ways of framing the issues in which existing scholarships are simply a “source of ideas” (p. 41). He also sees personal experiential knowledge as a major source of insights that can be incorporated in the construction of the conceptual framework in dialogue with the literature review. To help remember (here in the sense of systematizing) these personal experiences, he suggests the creation of a “research identity memo” in which researchers reflect on their experiences with the research theme.

Building on Maxwell’s perspective, I have developed the conceptual framework for this study by drawing not only from the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, but also from personal
reflections registered on a research identity memo. I begin this section by explaining my choice to focus on students’ experiences. Next, I dialogue with the literature on Global Citizenship Education and Whole Child Education, summarizing their main points and locating aesthetic experience as an underlying concept in both scholarships. This concept is unpacked in the following section, drawing on the works of Greene (1995) and Freire (1984/1968). I end this conceptual framework section by integrating these different concepts into two premises that guided me through this inquiry. In an attempt to embody the aesthetics also as a research approach, I also use imagery to illustrate key concepts in this framework, replacing usual graphics by visual representations that embrace fluidity and metaphoric language.

Experience

Given the everydayness of the term experience, I will first address it separately to elucidate the specific sense that I employ in this study—which differs not only from its commonsensical meaning, but also from the Cartesian perspective related to empirical experimentation. My decision to focus the inquiry on student experiences draws on the premise of experience as a key epistemological tenet. I have always been passionate about people’s stories, and intuitively, I knew they could be a source of insight, inspiration, and enhanced understanding. However, it was only during my graduate studies that I had the opportunity to grasp the value of these experiences to spark philosophical thought and theoretical arguments.

The reading of Montaigne (2004/1877) during one of my first years at Teachers College provided me with one of my first inspirations in this direction. With the French thinker, I learned that embodied experiences (lived through all the senses) and social interactions with diverse people could form solid basis for philosophy. But it was with Dewey (1980/1916, 1997/1938) that I understood the imbricatedness of experience and knowledge construction. According to
him, individuals reflect upon their daily experiences in order to make meaning of the phenomena, like I did in the story that I shared in the preface.

Dewey (1997/1938) conceived “experience” in terms of two interrelated principles: the principle of *interaction* (according to which experiences are shaped by interactions with people and with the immediate reality) and the principle of *continuity* (according to which experiences are always influenced by past experiences and influencing future ones). In his view, individuals have an intrinsic habit of inquiring into their lived experiences in an inward process that continuously generates new relations with the environment and with people around. This occurs through both their intellect and their feelings and moral dispositions.

Building on Dewey’s theory, I have used three lenses to inquire into students’ experiences in this study: first, a contextual lens, which situates experiences in the context in which they were lived or imagined; second, a temporal lens, which considers the importance of memories and forward looking as pieces that should be examined and connected to provide a more wholistic understanding of one’s experience; and third, an interactional lens, which attends to how students negotiate subjectivities in the construction of their experiences. In order to capture the interplay of these three dimensions, I chose to work with *stories*. Borrowing from Clandinin's (2013) definition of experiences as “storied phenomenon” (p. 33), I conceived the fieldwork as a space where students could create a narrated experience based on their observations of their context, on their memories, and on their imagination of possible futures (forward looking). Furthermore, seeking to emphasize the interactional dimension of experience—and influenced by my previous work with Freire’s (1984/1968) dialogical epistemology (discussed later on), I chose to work with collectively constructed stories rather than individual ones. In fact, I consider myself as part of this co-constructed experience as well.
since I indirectly participated in the exercise of collective storytelling with my prompts, questions, and interpretations.

A last point I wish to highlight in this framing of experience is why I decided to focus on the perspective of learners. Deborah Meier’s (2002) autoethnography about her work at Central Park East High School, which I once encountered accidently on a desk at a library, was a major influence in this decision. Her focus on what she called “the power of students’ ideas” resonates with Freire’s (1996) argument that students’ voices could and should be listened to in the construction of pedagogies, yet the way she values students’ knowledges transcends the pedagogical practice; she indeed acknowledges their agency and authorship in her scholarly work. It is a premise of my study that students’ narratives can provide insights not only into their experiences in the school, but also into the formation of citizenship attitudes in today’s highly disconnected world. I believe that their ideas are relevant, insightful, and powerful enough to illuminate the still incipient dialogue about educating for connectedness.

**Connectedness**

If on the one hand experience was a term embedded in everydayness, connectedness is in the far-off extreme; it is an abstract, intangible expression. Therefore, my main focus with the literature review synthesized in Chapter 2 was to unpack connectedness into more concrete features that could operate in my conception of the problem and guide my inquiry in terms of students’ experiences. From the interdisciplinary readings, I identified two perspectives. First, connectedness implies an integrated view of the world. While being inherent across different traditional wisdoms, this worldview is most often concealed in Western societies, especially in the current globalized era. In order to restore it, scholars emphasize the need for an inward work that includes: 1) attuning the senses to perceive reality with wonder and openness to hear what,
in Heidegger’s (1976) words, this reality “calls on us”, and 2) engaging in deep reflection grounded on what was perceived. In other words, the integrated worldview must be cultivated through a heightened sensitivity and heightened consciousness. The second part of what it means—living in a state of connectedness—refers to the ethical implications of these transformed engagements with the world enabled by heightened consciousness and sensitivity.

From this perspective, more compassionate and empathetic relations between individuals and the social and natural world emerge in tandem—and interrelatively—with the sense of oneness. These relations, while originating in the emotional—and some authors say spiritual—realm, may have political, social, economic, and even environmental implications, given that a more sensitive society tends to be more inclined towards social and environmental justice, economic equality, and political communities driven by what Rousseau (1998/1762) called “general will.”

Guided by this initial interdisciplinary approach, I located two bodies of theory that seemed to dialogue with connectedness from an educational standpoint—Global Citizenship Education and Whole Child Education. Global Citizenship Education (GCE) is an area of citizenship education that turns towards more global approaches which dissociate the term citizenship from the conventional normative-nationalist perspective and bring it closer to the two dimensions of connectedness outlined in the previous paragraph. Within this body of literature, I focused on a strand of authors who espouse the idea of an integrated worldview by questioning historical as well as cultural disconnecting forces such as colonialism, eurocentrism, and anthropocentrism, and by embedding universal values (e.g., peace, equity, ecology, or social justice) at the concrete reality. In pedagogical terms, they advocate for an education based on aesthetic experiences that allow students to fully experience, in the context of their classroom (as
well as in the surrounding community), the mindsets and attitudes that are key to a citizen in today’s world. This may include opportunities for students to develop genuine relationships, appreciate cultural diversity and dialogue as a means for personal and collective growth, establish and embody local-global relations, reflect about their values and assumptions, and imagine different possibilities to respond to world challenges.

While departing from a different perspective, the scholarship on Whole Child Education (WCE) arrives at a very similar place when it comes to the cultivation of connectedness. WCE discourse gravitates around the idea that education should promote the development of the *whole child*—physically, intellectually, emotionally, socially, and spiritually—through a solid combination of experiential learning, movement, artistic work, interactions with nature, and opportunities for students to develop genuine relationships that go beyond the utilitarian interactions that prevail in a capitalist society. Permeating these multiple pedagogical features is an emphasis on introspective moments (enabled, for example, by contemplative or meditative practices) that allow students to make sense of the daily experiences they live in the school and beyond. WCE scholars claim that this wholistic curriculum help children to engage with the world in a more aesthetic way, characterized by an embodied awareness of their connectedness with all living beings and by an authentic will to promote peace and social justice.

In examining the literature, I identified *aesthetic experience* as an underlying concept permeating these two fields (see Figure 3). In the next section, I offer a brief conceptualization of this term, which has become the driving concept of my study.
Aesthetic Experience

I consider myself fortunate for having been a student in Maxine Greene’s last course at Teachers College—in fact, she passed away just a week before our last class. I feel even more fortunate for having been invited for a cranberry juice at her home after one of our first classes, which were held at a museum a couple blocks away. It was there, sitting by her dining table with a couple other classmates that I understood her conception of an aesthetic experience. Holding a newspaper with a photo of a street protest in Ukraine, Maxine asked us, “Can there be anything more aesthetic than this?” At the outset, the question sounded odd. How could a street rally be considered an aesthetic experience? In the conversation that followed, we discussed the street protests that were mushrooming in different parts of the world, and how they represented the wide-awakeness of a new generation exercising their freedom of imagining and fighting for different world. That day, my commute back home was different. I contemplated the people on the subway in a different way. I wondered about their dreams—were they really free to dream? I wondered about what would move them to participate in a rally—what would they fight for? I also remembered my own experiences in protests and the blend of power and freedom that I have always felt when I marched with a flag on my hands.
A few aesthetic experiences are contained in this reflection: the experience lived by the protesters pictured at the newspaper’s cover was aesthetic because of the awareness and agency emanating from their expressions. Greene’s experience in contemplating that image was equally aesthetic, for the deep feelings of empathy, solidarity, and enthusiasm that it evoked. I would also describe my conversation at her dining table as aesthetic due to the way it resonated with me, provoked my thoughts, and made me see things in a different way. Likewise, I would call my ride on the subway aesthetic, for the state of awareness that I experienced, and the unspoken relationship that I established with strangers around me. What is common to all these experiences is that, by awakening my innermost human feelings, they transformed the way I engaged with the world (as visually represented by Figure 4).

Figure 4. A visual representation of the individual (orange) moving from an anesthetic toward an aesthetic engagement with reality (yellow)

This transformed engagement with the world characterized by an attitude of “wide-awakeness” or “being fully aware of what it means to be in the world” (Greene, 1995, p. 35) consists of the essence of what Greene understood by aesthetic experience. In a society marked by alienation (or anesthetic attitude), aesthetic encounters become essential in the promotion of social change. By allowing individuals to experience intense emotions and intimate relationships, these encounters invite them to question taken-for-granted perceptions and positionalities, and to open themselves to new ways of interacting with others and with the shared world, or to “imagine the world ‘as it could be otherwise’” (p.15), as she liked to frame.
Greene’s notion of wide-awakeness speaks closely to Freire’s (1984/1968) concept of conscientization, which refers to a process of unveiling oppressive structures of society in order to deepen the understanding of reality. While commonly discussed as an intellectual exercise, critical consciousness also results from a deeply aesthetic reading of the world mediated by dialogues—which, in turn, were built upon “a profound love for the world and for men”². In his words, “the naming of the world, which is an act of creation and recreation, is not possible if it is not infused in love” (p. 77). Freire emphasized the importance of dialogue in this process of awareness so that it could lead to new visions of society.

In sum, aesthetic experiences refer to aesthetic engagements with the world characterized by two tenets: 1) they are mediated by deep feelings and encounters with others; 2) they awaken a heightened state of consciousness that is both disrupting (insofar as they transcend the “taken-for-granted” and unveil structures) and creative (insofar as they foster “social imagination”).

**Conclusion: Connectedness as Aesthetic Experience**

This study integrates the theories of Global Citizenship Education and Whole Child Education to explore students’ experiences with connectedness with a particular interest in how they relate to the formation of attitudes that are pivotal to become a citizen in today’s world. In search of a more tangible entry point that allowed me to inquire into connectedness through students’ experiences, I identified aesthetic experience as the underlying pivot that, in both scholarships, facilitates the feeling, awareness, and learning of connectedness.

² In the “circles of culture” where Freire facilitated adult literacy (“of the words and of the world”), he often used works of art—mostly from local artists—to spark discussions. Yet, nothing could be more potentially aesthetic to him than the surrounding reality.
From this theoretical exploration derives the two premises that guided me through this inquiry. Firstly, *aesthetic experiences are a powerful avenue for connectedness.* And secondly, *by engaging aesthetically with others and with the world individuals enact an embodied form of citizenship—one that arises from within rather than from social norms or moral teaching.* Figure 5 metaphorically shows how these premises operate in the rationale of the study. Individuals are represented by circles with different nuances (their subjectivities). The way they connect with one another in the public space is characterized by aesthetic experiences in which their subjectivities encounter like colors blend in watercolor painting (an affective, empathetic encounter in which nuances are appreciated). From these aesthetic encounters, their interrelatedness manifests as an existential truth. And, in this state of connectedness, they become engaged citizens in the creation of a new possible world.

![Figure 5. Figurative representation of how connectedness operates in the public space](image)

**1.4 Organization of the Study**

This dissertation is organized into six chapters. *Chapter 1* introduced the research problem and contextualized it both in the current times and in my personal journey as an educator practitioner and scholar. It also presented the Conceptual Framework that drives the
study. Chapter 2 provides an interdisciplinary review of literature on connectedness by concentrating on two bodies or research that address the topic from an educational standpoint, namely Whole Child Education and Global Citizenship Education. Chapter 3 presents my methodological choices and describes the methods that I have used from the selection of research sites to the analysis. Chapter 4 shares the fictional stories co-constructed by the research participants in each of the schools. Chapter 5 discusses the findings by drawing on students’ stories as well as on school observations, in light of the three first subsidiary research questions. Finally, Chapter 6 addresses the last subsidiary question, drawing from students’ experiences to suggest possible paths towards a “Pedagogy of Connectedness.”

In tandem with the emphasis that my study places on the aesthetics, I have essayed a style of writing and presenting data that may be less conventional in academic works. It embraces poetic language, personal anecdotes, and artful representation of processes in order to promote an aesthetic engagement of those who read it. As a result, arguments may not always be presented in a straightforward manner, but entwined with stories. I hope this longer road may result in an insightful and meaningful experience.
Chapter 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

What I am trying to convey to you is more mysterious; it is entwined in the very roots of being, in the impalpable source of sensations.

— J. Gasquet, Cézanne

In this chapter, I provide a synthesis of the relevant literature that guided me through my research journey. **Connectedness** is one of those words that, borrowing from Gasquet, permeates the mysterious, the existential, the impalpable. With that in mind, I began the literature review with interdisciplinary readings that could tackle its multiple dimensions. Next, I focused on the field of Education, where my search was initially narrowed down to Social Studies scholars, for the obvious relevance that the theme has in a discipline that is entrusted with the study of—and preparation for—social and political life. However, I soon realized that **connectedness** was too complex to fit the boundaries of a specific discipline, and so I redirected my theoretical exploration to two wide-ranging bodies of research within the educational field: Whole Child Education and Global Citizenship Education. Still in the process of defining their boundaries, these emerging scholarships have provided me with theoretical grounding while still leaving room for dialogue with other areas, such as environmental education and critical pedagogies.

What I first saw as dispersion, now, in hindsight, I see as a source of inspiration and of enhanced understanding.

While the review heavily draws from authors from the United States, where I have my academic foothold, I also sought to include the work of scholars from Brazil and other southern

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3 Quoted in Merleau-Ponty (1964, p. 159).
countries (e.g., Boff, 2014; Gadotti, 2010; Gutierrez & Prado, 2015; Escobar, 2007; Leroy & Pacheco, 2006) as a way to value epistemologies of the South (Santos, 2010) that could speak closer to the context of my fieldwork.

2.1 An Interdisciplinary Perspective on Connectedness

The phenomenon of connectedness has been a theme of interest in the most varied fields of study—such as Philosophy, Sociology, Physics, and Environmental Sciences. Some scholars approach it from an ontological perspective, seeing it as a state in which one sees life and the universe as an interrelated wholeness, while others emphasize the subjectivities that are bound up to this form of engaging the world. My choice for the term connectedness rather than interconnectedness—also found across the literature—is an effort not only to embrace the ontological/relational dimension conveyed by the concept of interconnectedness, but also the subjective state associated with it. Put differently, it is not difficult to represent the idea of interconnectedness in a diagram, but connectedness is better captured through a picture or through works of arts, which can express and evoke feelings in addition to rational understanding.

From an ontological perspective, connectedness refers to an integrative way of perceiving the world that opposes the Cartesian paradigm still hegemonic in Western societies. This systemic worldview is largely influenced by the work of Capra (1975, 2004), who reconciles modern physics and traditional wisdoms to make his central claim that there is a fundamental unity to all forms of life. He sustains that humans are connected with the rest of the living world not only through shared biological elements, but also because we follow the same organization principles—such as networking, cycles, and cooperation. Capra (2004) developed the concept of
“ecological literacy” to refer to the understanding of these principles and their application to social life. Combining scientific argumentation and social theory, he argues that ecological literacy is essential to the sustainability of life in the planet, and also to make life more fulfilling in these times of chaos. As he puts it, “we belong to the universe, we are at home in it, and this experience of belonging can make our lives profoundly meaningful” (p. 69).

This integrative perspective resonates with fundamental beliefs common to different traditional societies, which have been of increasing interest amongst environmentalists both in Latin America (Boff, 2014; Gutierrez & Prado, 2015; Leroy & Pacheco, 2006) and in the United States (Orr, 2000; Seed, Macy, & Fleming, 2007). These authors see in the traditional wisdoms a source of inspiration into new ways of being in the world that oppose the individualism and consumerism that characterize our hegemonic culture. Underpinning these works is the assumption that the imperative changes in relations experienced with each other and with nature must be preceded by a change at the level of ideas. Otherwise, “we will keep going in circles, unable to change our social relations and the relations with the natural world” (Leroy & Pacheco, 2006, p. 42).

To illustrate the convergence between ecological thinking and traditional wisdom, I bring in a chapter by Armstrong (2009), an Okanagan4 scholar who contributes to the ecoliteracy movement in the United States. She explains that, when confronted with a common problem, the Okanagan gather as a community to listen carefully to each other’s perspectives, for they know that each different voice expands the possibilities to understand the nature of the problem and arrive at a better decision for the group. This process, known as En’owkin, is rooted in a

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4 The Okanagan people have been living for centuries around the US-Canada border on the West Coast.
worldview that sees interrelatedness and cooperation as the essence of collectivities. “I cannot see how community could operate other than within these principles,” (p. 13) explains Armstrong, who was born and raised in the Okanagan Penticton Reserve, in British Columbia.

The embodiment of connectedness in community practices can also be found, with different nuances, in the Southern African philosophy of Ubuntu, which sees one’s existence as deeply entwined with the existence of the other (Tutu, 1999); in the Andean belief in Pachamama, which borrows the principles for a harmonious collective living from nature (Tenesaca, 2010); in the Buddhist vision of Bodhicitta, an altruistic state of mind that cherishes others rather than one’s own self (Rinpoche, 2011); or, still, in the Kaupapa Maori view of knowledge as a collective benefit that needs to be shared (Smith, 2012).

Moving to the field of philosophy, I have included in my review the work of phenomenologists and transcendentalists, due to their profound reflections around the theme of connectedness. In tandem with the natural scientists who moved away from Cartesian thinking, these authors criticize the process of dismemberment that results from the Cartesian emphasis on rational representation and accumulation of knowledge. As Merleau-Ponty (1964) argues, “scientific thinking looks on from above” (p. 160). This process leads to a distorted view of reality as something detached from us, neglecting the fact that “the world is made of the same stuff as the body” (p. 163). In this light, Heidegger (1976) posits that, in this attempt to understand and control the world, we place ourselves before it rather than in it, and in doing so we lose the capacity to realize our common essence. In a nutshell, these thinkers suggest that the more we have developed our intellect, the more we have disconnected from the external world and, ultimately, from our soul—leading to today’s civilization crisis. Something like the
Holocaust, for example, would not have happened if individuals lived in a state of connectedness.

In a more optimistic approach, Emerson (2003/1841) argues that connectedness is a human predisposition imprinted in our soul, as we can realize by observing a little child. The permanent sense of wonder, the heightened sensitiveness, the embodied connection with nature: these are all expressions of the divine soul in its human form. The essential question that Emerson wrestles with is why we lose so much of this human capacity in the course of life. In fact, he believes that humanity is never lost, but that it is concealed by the several layers that we inherit from society, such as social roles, dogmatic knowledge and utilitarian relations. In that sense, (re)connecting would imply transcending these external shells and cultivating what he calls self-reliance, i.e., inhabiting the only real thing in the world: the “active soul” (p. 88), related to the wholeness of the universe. In his words, “we see the world piece by piece, as the sun, the moon, the animal, the tree; but the whole, of which these are the shining parts, is the soul” (p. 207).

Dustin and Ziegler (2007) add to this reflection by arguing that the inner work that nurtures a state of connectedness (e.g., contemplating, listening, wondering, sensing, etc.) is something to be nurtured in one’s daily life, as a way to engage with life with more presence and meaning (p. 53). Heidegger (1976) offers a beautiful metaphor to describe this process that in his view is intrinsic to “thinking.” To him, we must “inspire” what is calling us in the outside world (the famous “food for thought”), and let this inspiration guide our daily actions. To feel connected, then, implies an attitude of bearing witness to the “calls” of other human beings or the nature (Heidegger, 1976, p. 120).
My review of sociology literature focused on works that address connectedness in the context of globalization. From the point of view of technology, the paradox between massive developments in communications and the rise of individualism in various forms stands out (Elliott & Lemert, 2006; Orozco, 2008). From an economic standpoint, capitalism is criticized by scholars from different parts of the globe as an intrinsically excluding as well as dehumanizing force and, furthermore, as a catalyzer of social fragmentation (Arruda & Boff; 2001; Muchie & Xing, 2006; Santos, 2000; Sassen, 2014). For Bauman (1995), this social fragmentation is the mark of our times. He offers one of the most insightful analyses of the current social challenges that I encountered in my examination of literature, in which he describes modernity as “liquid times,” when life is built around the volatility of consumption, competition, and utilitarian relations (Bauman, 2000). Increasingly enclosed in the private realm, individuals disengage from collective endeavors, provoking a “fading of the community spirit” (Bauman, 1995, p. 272). To him, one of the greatest challenges of the twenty-first century is to reconstruct social fabric by constantly “assuming responsibility for the other” (Bauman, 1995, p. 100) as well as by transcending rationality and returning “to the old resources of moral sense and fellow-feeling” (p. 287).

Bauman’s argument reclaims the ethical and affective dimensions of human action, which resonates with what Cortina (2007) named ética de la razón cordial5 (literally, “ethics of cordial reasoning”). Driven by feelings such as kindness, empathy, profound affection, care, and compassion, this ethic that comes from the heart cultivates connectedness from its affective and compassionate roots: “Those who do not have compassion cannot capture the suffering of others;
those who do not have capacity to indignation cannot perceive injustice” (Cortina, 2007, p. 87). Kessler (2010) echoes her by arguing that “the experience of deep connection arises when there is a profound respect, a deep caring, and a quality of ‘being with’ that honors the truth of each participant in the relationship” (p. 18).

Lantieri (2001) joins Kessler in her movement to relate the affective roots of connectedness to a spiritual work that goes beyond feelings and emotions—and that speaks closely to Dustin and Ziegler’s (2007) “inner work” presented earlier. Spirituality, to these authors, does not pertain to the realm of religion and morality, but to a soulful space that can be reached through encounters with nature, with works of art, and “with social issues that can arouse our passions and connect us to a group consciousness that touches the divine within us” (Lantieri, 2001, p. 8). Lantieri stresses that these encounters, in order to reach the soul, must be more than interactions; they must be accompanied by a state of full presence that involves deep listening and a contemplative attitude. Bennett (2001) adds to this conversation by reminding us that these moments of full presence in nature awaken a genuine sense of wonder that is crucial to mobilize our feelings towards ethical relations. Wonder, he posits, opens ourselves to the unusual, the unseen, and the disturbing. In the same line, Zajonc (2008) postulates that wonder can lead one step further and turn into reverence when we recognize the wisdom, force and beauty that is reflected, for example, in “the forms, colors, sounds, and movements of the mountain pond” (p. 57). Zajonc’s work focuses on contemplative practices and in their potential to engender new forms of community life that he sees as imperative in today’s fragmented world. He outlines three processes that are implied in contemplative practices: recollection of the past, mindfulness for the present, and envisioning of the future. Through these processes,
contemplation evokes deep reflection, compassion, insight, and action, encouraging an attitude that allows us to convert the awareness of interconnectedness into a “lived experience” (p. 53).

A last perspective that I would like to include in this interdisciplinary introduction is one that approaches connectedness from the lens of politics. I focus on the work of Rousseau (1979/1762, 1998/1762) due to the significance that it represents to both educational scholarships later explored in this review—Global Citizenship Education and Whole Child Education. According to Rousseau, *citizenship* materializes when the actions of individuals that are part of a collectivity (which may or may not be organized in a governmental body) are guided by what he calls the *general will*. This *general will*, in turn, constitutes the soul of a “*social contract*” in which “each of us puts his goods, his person, his life, and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will, and we as a body accept each member as a part indivisible from the whole” (Rousseau, 1979/1762, p. 460). In that sense, the perception of a wholeness in community is fundamental to mobilize individuals/citizens towards the general will—and, as a result, to the realization of the social contract. As observed by De la Parra (2010), this notion gains more relevance in current times. Since the “*social contract*” envisioned by Rousseau is not bound to the institution of a government, it provides an appropriate foothold to the emerging Global Citizenship agenda that will be discussed in the next section. As put by De la Parra, “social movements based on the promotion of human rights, humanitarian aid, global justice and environmental protection are a clear manifestation of the natural intent of humanity to establish a new social contract to respond to the contingencies of our world circumstance” (p. 27). In that view, the concept of the “social contract” has outgrown national boundaries and can be seen as a transcendental entity upholding the various “imagined communities” formed amidst global civil society.
2.2 Citizenship Education

I hardly think I heard you call
Since betwixt us was the wall

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Wild things wondrous spoken in a tongue
Once our own, native, personal; now hung
Stammering and alien, language

—John Dewey, Education

More than a century after John Dewey wrote these verses, the challenge he raises remains imperative. The walls that thwart individuals from “hearing each other’s calls” and from “speaking the language of the wild and wonderful things in the world” have grown thicker, and our competitive school culture has only worsened these divides. I begin the second part of this literature review with an analysis of Dewey’s work to acknowledge his importance in this debate, as well as to honor the centrality that the theme of connectedness assumes in his thinking—from his first essays on ethics (1972/1897) to later works like “The Public and its Problems” (1984/1927).

A critical witness of both the economic boom and the recession of the beginning of the twentieth century, as well as the First World War, Dewey was convinced that science alone could not make a society flourish. Rather, he was deeply concerned with the impact that the industrial mindset (i.e., materialism, efficiency, and competitiveness) had on social relations. He saw a dehumanizing effect in capitalism insofar as it encouraged people to “focus on their own business” at the cost of neglecting the community time. In his view, socialization was essential to

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Dewey’s poems were found in his office at Columbia University in the 1930s and published in 1977 by Jo Ann Boydston. They were written in the first two decades of the twentieth century, although most of them, like “Education,” do not have a precise date. As Boydston wrote in her introduction, although the poems add little factual information to Dewey’s works, they “illuminate an emotive aspect in his intellectual life often not manifest in the prose” (Boydston, 1977, xvii).
make individuals realize their interrelatedness, an awareness that he saw as a pre-condition of freedom—i.e., since we are all organic parts of the same wholeness, we must realize that our freedom depends on the freedom of others. As Dewey (1984/1927) explains,

human beings combine in behavior as directly and unconsciously as do atoms, stellar masses and cells; as directly and unknowingly as they divide and repel … but ‘we’ and ‘our’ exist only when the consequences of combined action are perceived and become an object of desire and effort. (p. 330)

This excerpt, despite the metaphysical tone, provides the rationale as to why Dewey, a philosopher by training, ended up dedicating a considerable part of his life to education. In a context where collective action was increasingly scarce, individuals had fewer opportunities to invest in the collectivity; as a result, their disposition to connect with others around public issues—what he saw as the soul of democracy—began to fade.

Dewey’s writings are an invitation to reimagine schools as places where these social bonds could be reestablished; where, in fact, the practice of connectedness would permeate the entire curriculum. In this view, schools were privileged spaces for the formation of human beings truly connected with their very community. The main argument of Democracy and Education (1980/1916)—his seminal work—was that, by participating in meaningful collective projects and free communication, young people would impregnate their daily lives with meaning and embody a form of community life driven by a sense of interdependence. Conversely, narrowing schools’ mission to intellectual work and individual academic achievement would form nothing but “egoistic specialists” (Dewey, 1980/1916, p. 10).

I examined the literature on Social Studies in the United States to understand how Dewey’s ideas have been carried forward in his home country. In my interpretation, despite
Dewey’s popularity in the educational field, he has been fairly misinterpreted in his philosophical reflections. One group of U.S. scholars, mostly aligned with neoliberal and traditionalist discourses, criticized Dewey for not having a clear vision of society, a vagueness that would obstruct the setting up of educational priorities and coherent curricula. For example, Hirsch (1999) referred to his progressive ideas as “educational populism,” while Rochester (2003) called them “academic diversion.” These critiques focus primarily on Dewey’s pedagogical ideas, so it is difficult to say whether they misread or simply neglected his philosophical writings. Yet, I would argue that they draw on a rationale that is antithetical to the one that underpins the vision of connectedness, as we can infer by two of its key features: factual-based knowledge and national identity as a central curriculum goal in the Social Studies (Ravitch, 2010). A second group of authors (e.g., Hess, 2009; Levine, 2012; Niemi & Junn, 1998; Parker, 2003), in spite of espousing several of Dewey’s thoughts, offer what I see as a reductionist version of his overarching claim, limiting the scope of citizenship education to civic knowledge and skills (e.g., exercises of deliberation around local issues, critical reading, etc.), and leaving aside the less tangible, yet essential, nurturing of the community spirit.

I also identified a third group formed by critical pedagogues who complicate Dewey’s vision of schools as laboratories for the practice of citizenship. They argue that the notion of citizenship as something universal has been masking social and economic inequalities that limit individuals’ possibilities to enact their citizenship, and that schools should problematize these social injustices and fight against them (Tupper, 2006). The central concern for these authors is “what kind of citizen our educational programs imagine” (Westheimer, 2015, p. 4). In this vain, Westheimer and Kahne (2004) outline a typology, based on a study of school-based citizenship programs, in which they differentiate three kinds of citizens. Embedded in a more individualistic
worldview, the *personally responsible citizen* is related to good character and responsible acts in their communities (e.g., recycling, volunteering, paying taxes, respecting the law, and helping in moments of emergency). The *participatory citizen* participates more actively in social life, mainly through collective efforts. They are better informed about mechanisms of participation and take leadership roles in the community (e.g., they create recycling drives in the neighborhood and campaigns on social media). Finally, the authors theorize *social justice-oriented citizens* as those who look at society through more critical lenses. They delve deeper into the roots of social issues, seeking to understand the causes of social problems and unveiling systems and structures that reproduce patterns of injustice. They inquire into the different dimensions of the phenomena, investigate how the different issues are related, and engage in initiatives to promote systemic and attitudinal change.

The social justice perspective resembles the vision of citizenship predominant among the Brazilian scholars that I revisited for this review (e.g., Antunes & Padilha, 2010; Assumpção, 2009; Brandão, 2000; Gadotti, 2010b). They advocate for an idea of schools as sites for the continuous resignification and expansion of citizenship, building on Freire’s (1997) vision of *Escola Cidadã* (Citizen School). This phrase refers to a school of *companheirismo* (fellowship), of community creation and of collective construction of knowledge for social change—a school that, in Freire’s own words, “lives the tense experience of democracy” (1997). Freire dedicated the last years of his life to conceive this *Escola Cidadã* that could educate *for* citizenship (fighting for the rights of all those who inhabit it) and also *by* citizenship (through the engaged participation of educators, students and their families in the public sphere represented by the school).
At first, this school seems very close to the Deweyan view of democratic schools, and, indeed, a dialogue between the two authors would be a prolific one, with many converging and diverging points. Yet, the Freirean project proposed a critical lens to citizenship that was less developed in Dewey’s pragmatism. The *Escola Cidadã* was grounded on the concept of *Educação Popular* (Popular Education), developed by Freire in his circles of adult literacy as a dialogical method to empower the oppressed to fight for their rights and transform their social realities (Brandão, 2000). It was named Popular Education not only because it originated within socially organized (noninstitutionalized) groups, but also because it recognized the *saberes populares* (popular knowledges) that existed in those groups (Assumpção, 2009).

From my review of Brazilian writings on citizenship education, particularly Freire because of his leading role, I have pinpointed two aspects to add to the conversation on learning for connectedness. The first is the importance of strengthening connectedness between school and the community. In recognizing the value of the diverse popular knowledge, the *Escola Cidadã* also recognizes the educative potential that is present outside the school (in the city in general, but also in the neighborhood). Thus, it encourages students to occupy these external spaces, while also inviting the surrounding community to participate in the learning process (e.g., by participating in parent councils, pedagogic conferences, and collective projects where they can share their knowledge). The second contribution to the discussion on connectedness that I see in Freire’s work is the emphasis on dialogue as a means for the resignification and collective transformation of the world. Dialogue, which has been described as an existential human need by subjects who are innately relational (Bakhtin, 1982; Buber, 1971; Gadamer, 2013/1969), has

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7 The Popular Education method was later expanded to other noninstitutional settings, being used in educational initiatives from various social movements, such as the Landless Movement, Hip Hop movement, fishermen associations and indigenous groups.
have leveraged by Freire (1984/1968) as a central strategy for the empowerment of the oppressed so that they could strengthen their identities, build community, and engage in collective efforts towards social change. In this process, Freire highlights the mediating role assumed by love, humility, and hope. In order to engage in dialogue, one must nurture a deep love towards the others and towards the world—love, in that sense, represented a commitment with the human beings (Freire, 1984/1968). On the other hand, dialogue requires humility. One needs to recognize their incompleteness and the value of the other’s voice. Finally, dialogue needs hope and faith in collective constructions, which, for Freire, were pivotal to the humanization of subjects.

*Global Citizenship Education*

New possibilities for a curriculum oriented towards connectedness arise with the emerging scholarship on Global Citizenship Education (GCE), which seems to gain space in different parts of the world and is recognized in global forums as an avenue for peaceful, sustainable and inclusive societies (UNESCO, 2014). While still a contested area, GCE has been pivotal in pushing the idea of citizenship beyond national boundaries and closer to a Deweyan, more fundamental conception—one that hosts nicely the idea of connectedness. As put by Andreotti (2010), global citizenship education is an opportunity to decolonize the minds and engage new processes of learning that emphasize interaction and self-reflexivity, as well as equip people “to live together in collaborative, but un-coercive ways” (p. 239). From a similar standpoint, Merryfield (2001) encourages educators to take advantage of the momentum provided by GCE to overcome stereotypes that divide the world into “us” and “them” (p. 181), and delve into cross-cultural experiences that embrace the differences and commonalities of a globalized-but-non-imperialist world. Bigelow and Peterson (2002) put forward a rich collection
of pedagogical practices to support educators who wish to enact this view. Drawing on critical pedagogy, the authors address themes not traditionally covered by civic classes—e.g., labor, environment, and consumerism—in order to establish relationships between different global phenomena and to trigger a reflection about at whose expense economic globalization flourishes. As they argue, all is connected: “You can’t really understand what’s going on in one part of the world without looking at how it is related to everything else” (p. 3).

While it becomes easier to teach for connectedness when curricula move away from nationalism civics, it is still a challenging endeavor. As suggested by Myers (2008), navigating a daunting and uncertain world may render students with a feeling of a heavy burden on their shoulders. In a study about adolescents’ perceptions on poverty, he demonstrated that young people share a sense of belonging to the global community and wish to do something to mitigate or eradicate other people’s sufferings; however, they often become overwhelmed and paralyzed by the complexity of the problems they encounter. Bigelow and Peterson (2002) add to this argument by observing that, as students become more aware of the interconnected nature of global problems, they are more likely to be overwhelmed. On the other hand, they are also more prone to find “points of leverage” to make a difference in this world. The key challenge for the educators, according to these authors, is to make the feeling of hope surpass those of anxiety or despair.

In Brazil, the conversations on Global Citizenship Education began to gain shape in the Earth Charter forums organized during the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Against the neoliberal paradigm that shaped the dominant discourse on global citizenship at that time, a strand of Latin American critical pedagogues (e.g., Ednir & Macedo, 2011; Gutierrez & Prado, 2015; Padilha, Favarão, Morris, & Marine, 2011) proposed the adoption of the term “planetary
citizenship” to evoke a more humanistic view of the Earth as a whole community, driven by the ecological principles of cooperation as opposed to the economic rule of competitiveness (Gadotti, 2010a). What stands out across these works is the emphasis on ecology—in fact, a re-signified notion of ecology that transcends the realm of nature and focuses on the relations between all living beings (Boff, 2012)—and the vision of global forums as spaces for new forms of counter-hegemonic activism that gather marginalized groups from different countries (Escobar, 2007; Santos, 2007; Whitaker, 2007).

Different from the global citizen as a consumer or as a worker in the global market, the planetary citizen is committed with personal and collective flourishing and is prepared to engage in dialogue with the other and to live with difference in a democratic and sympathetic way (Padilha, Favarão, Morris, & Marine, 2011, p. 20). To equip young people to become planetary citizens, Gutierrez and Prado (2015) stress that schools need to turn to other forms of perception and knowledge—like intuition and imagination— which go beyond the rational dimension that has been privileged in traditional education systems. For them, “[t]o learn is much more than understanding and conceptualizing: it is to wish, to share, to signify, to interpret, to express and to live” (p. 68). In that sense, an education for planetary citizenship resonates with the Whole Child Education approach that will be later addressed in this chapter.

Padilha et al. (2011) observe that the planetary citizen nurtures a sense of oneness and connectedness to humanity and to the Earth, but this is not an abstract feeling; rather, it is expressed through concrete relations in the universe of daily life. Indeed, what characterizes the dialogues between planetary citizens is not their transnationality (in fact, they may also take place at the local, regional or national level), but their horizontality (in terms of power relations), their plurality (for they overcome traditional social divides), their affection (as opposed to
utilitarian interactions typical from neoliberalism), and their commitment with the construction of another possible world. For all these features, these dialogues create space for the mutual empowerment of different marginalized groups of civil society, and for what Gadotti (2009) named a “utopian transgression.”

Writing from a context that is at once geographically distant and socially close to the Latin American debate on planetary citizenship, Indian philosopher Appadurai (2013) introduces a term that emphasizes the transformative power of these horizontal and situated dialogues. “Cosmopolitanism from below” is a situated form of cosmopolitanism grounded in concrete local realities, which encourages connections between grassroots groups as a way to expand individuals’ understanding of others while nurturing universal values at the same time. According to Appadurai, these new forms of organized power restore—in those who have traditionally been oppressed—the capacity to aspire, moving “from wishful thinking to thoughtful wishing” (p. 193).

The dual dimension of citizenship is also addressed by Gaudelli (2016), who argues that global citizens signify their place in the world by consciously co-inhabiting local and international spaces. He theorizes global citizenship as an attitude of “everyday transcendence”—one that implies having one foot on the concrete reality (what is known and been) and the other in the unknowable or not yet known. In a previous work, Gaudelli (2010) introduced the concept of “curricular soul” to account for this education that connects global consciousness to the concrete lives of students. According to his view, Global Citizenship Education must go beyond learning about the world “as if it were a massive entity to be known for potential future benefits” (p. 5); it is about an “open-ended” effort to encourage students to inquire about the
world based on the place where they are situated. Gaudelli sheds light on the importance that relationships assume in this process, claiming that

at some level relationships are what we all care most about. So, when we exhort students to care about the world, think globally, be a global citizen, these calls ring hollow unless we have engaged them in a full exploration of what it means to care, to love, to befriend, to be intimate. Put another way, how are we to love the world if we cannot fully love ourselves and those closest to us?” (p. 13)

Drawing on Prager’s (1995) study on intimacy, Gaudelli emphasizes that young people should feel invited to engage in these relationships without hiding vulnerabilities, as it is in this vulnerable space that they will become closer to the other, and will experience genuine feelings of empathy, caring, and compassion. He contends that, in the context of global education, these relationships should extrapolate from the school community and “reach out towards others in the world community” (p. 14), be them from different countries (e.g., through study abroad or digital communication projects) or nearby students from different backgrounds. As reminded by Pike and Selby (2000), these encounters with multiple perspectives challenge students to rethink their own values and assumptions while also making sense of their role in the world. Pike and Selby offer an interesting definition of Global Citizenship Education as a simultaneous exploration of the “global village” and the “global self” (p. 14). The “global” and the “self”, they argue, complement each other.

A third element that Gaudelli (2010) considers pivotal to the “curricular soul” are the aesthetic experiences, an emphasis that is shared by a significant group of scholars as means to raise young people’s social consciousness as well as to engender attitudinal change (e.g., Ammentorp, 2007; Eisner, 1991; Garrett & Kerr, 2016; Gaudelli, 2010; Gaudelli & Hewitt, 38
They draw on the works of Dewey (1998) and Greene (1995), who stressed the humanizing potential of the aesthetics to awaken innermost feelings and prompt deep engagements with the others and with the world around. To these authors, aesthetic experiences refer not only to artistic works. While acknowledging the arts as powerful tools of aesthetic learning, they also recognize the encounters that take place in daily life, like the contemplating a natural or social phenomenon, as aesthetic experiences as long as the individual engaged in these experiences maintains an attitude of deep engagement.

Greene (1995) introduces the concept of “social imagination” to refer to “the capacity to invent visions of what should be and what might be in our deficient society, on the streets where we live, in our schools” (p. 5). She contends that building this positive reference, this image of the world “as if it could be otherwise” (p. 15), is crucial for young people to develop a critical perspective of their actual reality and be motivated to transform it. Writing from an existentialist paradigm, Greene firmly believes in the capacity of human beings to, in seeing anew, chose to create another reality. Ultimately, this is what in previous works she called freedom (Greene, 1988). The idea of social imagination is particularly interesting to the debate on global citizenship and connectedness in the context of a civilization crises, since it opens space for a renewed hope and encourages individuals to move from the “confinements of privatism” into a public space.

Dewey’s (1997) view of the aesthetic is more grounded in daily life. He describes aesthetic experiences to as a particular way to engage with reality based on a raised perception of the other and of the world around. In other words, an individual can be in front of the most beautiful work of art, or the most incredible phenomenon, but this encounter will only turn into an aesthetic experience when it is accompanied by an internal work that involves overcoming
conventions, perceiving the other, and engaging both the emotions and the intellect. Ammentorp (2007) provides an illustration of how the aesthetics can help students make sense of their daily lives, particularly in low-income school communities. In a study about the use of an arts-based literacy curriculum to teach for social justice, she demonstrated that through the use of the aesthetics (e.g., photos and creative writing), students felt more confident to bring their life experience into the classroom for analysis and discussion, creating opportunities for culturally relevant learning and social consciousness. An interesting point that stands out in her research is the use of metaphors by students to make sense of complicated concepts.

Also inspired by Dewey, Gaudelli and Hewitt (2010) posit that activities such as debating can also be experienced as aesthetic. According to their argument, the complexity and uncertainty of current global challenges make them excellent triggers for aesthetic debate experiences, in which students engage actively and are eager to create something new. They contend that “adolescents are able to take up such serious issues and deal with the conflicts that arise therein, but schools must rise to the occasion and provide them with the activity that will stir thought and soul” (p. 97). The educative value of conflict and uncomfortable feelings was addressed by Boler (1999; see also Boler & Zembylas, 2003), who points to the potential of these emotions to encourage students to look at their own assumptions, values, and prejudices in light of the others, which become particularly imperative in a context of increased multicultural encounters. She suggests that emotions (including fear) should be not only welcome in the classroom, but also articulated, and examined in light of the social structures in which they are embedded. Without some discomfort, she argues, there is no full engagement and no attitudinal change. In tandem, Houser (2005) argues that the aesthetics hold the potential to enhance human sensibilities needed for a strong multicultural democracy based on empathy and on a strong sense
of connection with others (p. 53), by pushing individuals beyond rationalism, prejudices, and social conventions.

2.3 Whole Child Education

Society must be studied by means of men, and men by means of society. Those who want to treat politics and morals separately will never understand anything of either of the two.

—Rousseau, Émile

In the next paragraphs, I will provide an overview of the scholarship on Whole Child Education (WCE), wherein the schools that participate in this study are situated. This scholarship resonates deeply with the conversation on connectedness that has been synthesized in the previous sections of the chapter, translating many of its tenets to the context of schools. I will preamble this review with a brief analysis of the work Émile, by Rousseau (1979/1762), which is considered the most influential reference upon which the theories of “teaching the whole child” were built.

Émile narrates the educational journey of a fictional child from birth to marriage, from the perspective of his ever-present tutor. What makes this work controversial, particularly in a discussion about connectedness, is the isolation to which Rousseau submits Émile from his early childhood until adolescence, and this is precisely where he diverges from Dewey. Rousseau believed that the society of his time was detached from the most essential human values and would inevitably offer a negative influence on the formation of a child. By protecting his pupil from these negative social interactions, Rousseau sought to create better conditions for his

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8 Rousseau, 1979/1762, p. 235
integral development as a human being. Only when Émile reached adolescence, with his moral judgment well-grounded on his sentiments and on a solid holistic worldview, would he be ready to participate in society.

The disconnectedness that Rousseau identified in the society of his time has only intensified since he wrote the book in 1762. Without entering into the discussion about his solitary and radically controlled tutorship model (which would need to take the temporal context into consideration), the philosophical argument that underpins his method is worth exploring. As the epigraph to this section conveys, Rousseau saw individual and sociopolitical action as intrinsically imbricated, and individuals as political agents. The good functioning of society (upon the principles of freedom, equity, and justice) would then be the natural outcome of a careful and integral formation of its individuals. In that sense, as a philosophical reflection on education, Émile was far from an individualistic project; rather, Rousseau’s overarching goals were ultimately political. He aimed at the healing of society and a harmonious world.

In fact, in the same year that Rousseau published Émile he also published The Social Contract (Rousseau, 1998), which has been addressed earlier in this chapter. Émile, I would argue, details the vision of a humanizing education that could equip individuals to participate in the “social contract”—in short, to be good citizens. Some key features of this educational vision are the respect for the different stages of a person’s development, the recognition of the senses and sentiments as the foundations of reasoning and morality, and the appreciation of the rhythm and lessons from nature.

Émile was one of the main sources of inspiration for the scholarship of Whole Child Education—an eclectic movement that has been rippling in different parts of the world in the last decades as a critique to conventional schools marked by a fragmented, reductionist, and market-
oriented mindset (Nigh, Novak, Binder, & Crowell, 2019). As stated by one of the leading authors in this scholarship, the turn towards the “whole child” is part of a global awakening towards soulfulness, in response to the emptiness of meaning that not only characterizes today’s schools but also the society in which they are embedded (Miller, 2000). According to him, fragmented approaches to reasoning have been at the root of much of the sickness and alienation in our culture. How can we begin to make informed healthful decisions when our economic system places little value on such things as environmental health, volunteerism, the work of women in the home, and childcare? Because we have either refused or been unable to see the interdependence of things, there has been social alienation and environmental decay. (p. 28)

The phenomenon that Miller identifies in this excerpt as *alienation* is a contextualized version of what Rousseau referred to as a loss of humanity and the incapacity to perceive the interconnected essence of the world. Likewise, the tenets of what has become known as Whole Child Education—or WCE, for short—resonate deeply with the educational vision that Rousseau developed in *Émile*. Despite the many nuances across the literature, WCE can be defined as an integrated and experiential learning approach aimed at the balanced development of the mind, the heart, and the body of the individual. It takes the living reality of the child as the starting point, and embraces artistic expression, movement, collective projects, interactions with nature and the practice of autonomy and caring relationships (Miller, 2010; Rudge, 2010). In the words of Miller (2010), “The aim of whole child education is the development of children and adolescents who can think, feel, and act and whose bodies and souls are nourished” (p. 13). Furthermore, it also “connects the child to the surrounding community and the world at large” (p. 8). This definition conveys a twofold rationale. In terms of academic performance, experiences that connect the
emotions, the body, and the soul are more conducive to learning (ASCD, 2016; Palmer, 1993; Miller, 2005), whereas in terms of citizenship the argument is that a nourished soul yields a greater sense of interdependence and responsibility to others (Carlton & Graves, 1991, McFarland, 1991; Noddings, 1984; Palmer, 2014).

As I sorted through the literature, I found it difficult to draw the boundaries of the field of WCE, since it overlaps with other related bodies of knowledge such as Holistic Education, Ecological Literacy, and Socioemotional Learning. In fact, until recently I used the terms Holistic Education and Whole Child Education interchangeably. I opted for the latter after reading Miller’s (2019) recent chapter in which he distinguishes holistic learning by its strong emphasis on spiritual development—criteria which, according to him, would leave out pragmatic authors like Dewey (1980). I acknowledge spirituality as essential in the integral formation of a child, and particularly in the cultivation of connectedness. However, I recognize a broad spectrum in which spirituality can manifest, including when it is not named as such. In my view, spirituality does permeate Dewey’s thinking (I could mention as an example the verses from one of his poems reproduced in the epigraph of the previous section), although it might at times be concealed by scientific language. Having said so, I consider wholistic learning—and not holistic—as a more appropriate way to frame this study, for the latitude that it gives to the analysis. It is important noting here that one of the schools where I conducted fieldwork is a public institution where fostering spirituality is still considered a taboo—sometimes even unlawful. Thus, similarly to Dewey’s writing, it often appears in a subtle manner and avoids language that could be taken as religious.

The most important legacy that progressive educators left to WCE was probably the importance of interdisciplinary and experiential learning in the development of the whole person
Wholistic curricula tend to be more integrated and built around the living reality of the student—as opposed to a standardized one narrowly limited to academic preparation. Their pedagogies emphasize participation, emotional learning, and creativity. WCE also borrows from child education methods like the ones developed by Montessori (2009/1936) and at Reggio Emilia (Wien, 2008), breaking with the conventionally rigid school environment, which is replaced by one that facilitates free play, contact with nature, and aesthetic experiences. Perhaps the most emblematic illustration of this aesthetic approach is provided by the so-called *Waldorf Schools*, which will be examined later in this section.

Inspired by transcendentalist philosophers (Emerson, 2003/1841; Thoreau, 2012), as well as by the growing scholarship on social and emotional learning (Goleman, Bennett, & Barlow, 2012; Noddings, 1984), Whole Child educators espouse the idea that meaningful engagements with the external world—and, by and large, social change—depend on a work that takes place at the level of the soul (Lantieri, 2001; Miller, 2005; Palmer, 1993; see also Unger, 1991). In this perspective, “[t]he soul has a vision without which a person loses one’s sense of relationship and harmony with the world around” (Carlton & Graves, 1991, p. 263). Nurturing the soul may include a wide range of experiences that go beyond traditional practices like contemplation, meditation or yoga; it also encompasses work with various forms of arts (Conte, 2001), storytelling and autobiographical writing (Miller, 2000), discussion around deep questions (Lantieri, 2001), and interactions with nature (Orr, 2000). These experiences similarly connect individuals with the larger human community and with the universe, and in doing so, promote stronger communal lives (Miller, 2005).

The interpersonal dimension of connectedness is furthered by the debate on socioemotional learning. Noddings (1984) was one of the first authors to advocate for the
cultivation of caring relationships as an essential aspect of education. In her view, care—which can manifest, for example, as presence, listening, patience or love—was intrinsically related to ethics. She conceptualizes “ethics of care” as one that moves individuals to care for themselves, for others, and for the planet, which, as she suggested in a later work (Noddings, 2005), constitutes the foundation of global citizenship. This vision is embodied, for example, in the work of Meier (2002). Reflecting on her well-known experience at the Central Park East School in New York City, she contends that empathy, which is fundamental to democratic life, is a “habit of mind” that needs “deliberate cultivation”—that is, it needs to be learned. Therefore, it should not be seen as “soft goals,” but as part of the “hard core” of school subjects. For her, “[c]aring is as much cognitive as affective. The capacity to see the world as others might is central to unsentimental compassion and at the root of both intellectual skepticism and empathy” (p. 63).

In Brazil, one of the leading scholars on the debate of ethical caring is Boff (2012). Inspired by his participation in the formulation of the Earth Charter in 1992, he puts forward the idea that a new ethics of care arises from the ecological movement and the new paradigm put forward by that charter. Boff defines care as “being involved with the other or with the community of life showing zeal and indeed concern” (p. 136) and argues that this is “a part of human being makeup” (p. 133) that must be reawakened in the face of actual ecological, socioeconomic, and political challenges.

Another scholar advancing the discussion around the ethics of caring is Batalloso (2011), who argues that there is no real learning if not through sentimental experiences, and that these experiences are the seeds of social responsibility. Defining ethics of caring as the one “related to the relationships, empathy, understanding, sharing, sensibility, affectivity, caring, in sum,
unconditional love” (p. 313), he sustains that caring is the most singular political virtue because it enables processes of dialogue, cooperation, sharing, personal and, ultimately, social transformation. Berman (1997) and Seymour (2004) are amongst the other authors who echo this perspective. Inquiring into the development of social responsibility, Seymour (2004) concludes that it is less about moral principles and more about this sense of connectedness that comes “from the heart.” In his words, community ultimately springs from “the deepest level of collective inner life, sustained through an invisible web of positive emotions and thoughts” (p. 82). Kessler (2006) introduces the term \textit{intimacy} to refer to “deeply caring, mutual, respectful relationship with one other person” (p. 20). To her, students who feel that they are “truly seen and known” experience a deep state of connectedness, grounded on “a quality of ‘being with’ that honors the truth of each participant in the relationship” (p. 18).

Carlsson-Paige (2001) reminds us that in order to impact the external world, soulful practices must be grounded in reality and, more specifically, in children’s own meanings and experiences (see also Lantieri, 2001). This way, she explains, “feelings will come to school along with thoughts.” The argument is shared by Carlton and Graves (1991), for whom the soul is the source of identity and a way through which students can work the dilemmas they encounter in their daily lives.

At this point, it is important to clarify what Whole Child educators mean by the soul. For the purposes of this study, I will draw on Miller’s (2000) definition of the soul as that part of ourselves that connects the \textit{ego} (our socialized sense of self, or the exterior “I”) and the \textit{spirit} (the divine essence within each person). According to him,

if there is too much emphasis on spirit then we can lose touch with our humanity and daily life. On the other hand, an overemphasis on human self can let our lives become too
narrowly focused on the mundane. Soul connects the human and divine in a mysterious and spontaneous way. (p. 24)

What I like in Miller’s definition is that, in locating the soul in this in-between space, he offers some hints as to how to observe it as an object of inquiry. He suggests, for example, that we can perceive it through gestures, through the eyes, and through the smile: “We can recognize soul in people when we see their eyes light up, when their speech is animated, when their body moves with grace and energy” (p. 25).

Moving from the inner to the outer dimension of development, the literature sheds light on the central role of nature in the integral formation of the individual. Wholistic educators share with environmentalists the critique to anthropocentrism as a culture that prevents individuals from perceiving themselves as an integral part of their environment (Orr, 2000; Seymour, 2004), or what Orr describes as a movement of reunifying the different parts of the self and the world and toward and “embodied knowing.” In terms of pedagogical practices, this movement translates into exercises of responsible practices and empathetical relationship with the Earth (Macy, Brown, & Fox, 2014), critical debates on ecological justice (Jacobi, 2005; Lupinacci, Martusewicz, & Edmunson, 2011; Orr, 2000;), and the practice of simply being in nature as a powerful source of wonder and awe, which can awaken and enliven young people’s imaginations (Bennett, 2001; Louv, 2008).

A different outlook on how to engage the outer world in the education of the Whole Child is offered by the debate on Educação Integral (Integral Education), which was born within the Escola Cidadã (Citizen School) framework, discussed earlier in this chapter. The fact that the phrase “integral Education” does not contain the “child” is more than a linguistic nuance. In fact, while the child remains central in this discourse, the discussion also extends the concept of
wholeness to the *whole school* and to the *whole city* (Gadotti, 2009a). *Whole school* refers to a curriculum that must be developed from an inter and transdisciplinary perspective, integrating subject areas to account for the complexity of today’s global challenges (Morin, 2003; Padilha, 2004). *Whole city*, on the other hand, alludes to the assumption that schools are not the only site of learning (Brandão, 2000; Freire, 2001/1991), and that kids should occupy the spaces of the city where multiple knowledges are found (Padilha, 2007): museums, movie theaters, parks, universities, as well as squares, street markets, circles of *capoeira*, or a craftsman’s workshop. These popular knowledges are also brought into the school by inviting community members to share their experiences and skills, and to participate in forums of discussion about the education of their children. As summarized by Gadotti (2009a), these schools are “integral, integrated and integrating” (p. 32).

Another particularity of the *Educação Integral* movement is that it sprang as a discussion on how to improve the quality of public schooling, while the WCE discourse has been mostly rooted in independent school practices. In that context, extending the school day is taken as a key strategy to protect kids from vulnerable areas from the violent environment in which they live, while also creating opportunity for them to engage with multiple learning activities that are commonly absent in public schools (Moll, 2012).

The *Educação Integral* movement adds important contributions to the WCE conversation because it shows that, in order to move this agenda forward, we need to expand the scope, the time, and the spaces of learning. As argued by the French philosopher Edgar Morin (2008)—who is, together with Freire, one of the major theoretical references of the movement, the big questions of our times—including those about connectedness—call for a reconceptualization of knowledge based on a unifying and multidimensional thinking centered on the development of
critical capacities such as understanding human nature, recognizing the planetary identity, dialoguing, or dealing with uncertainty. Morin coined the term *transdisciplinarity* to refer to this unifying learning approach that moves between, across, and beyond disciplines and mutually emphasizes human universals and contextual diversity.

According to Nicolescu (2002), who built on the work of Morin to write the *Manifesto of Transdisciplinarity*, this unifying vision of knowledge transcends the more widely discussed interdisciplinary discourse insofar as it not only promotes dialogues between different areas of knowledge but also between different levels of reality and perception, such as the spiritual (sensorial, intuitive, and emotional), the planetary (natural and cultural heritage), and the cosmic (other spaces and time). Nicolescu explains that transdisciplinarity does not mean the elimination of disciplines; in fact, it is nourished by disciplinary research. Yet, it adds to it a new level of perception, one that embraces affectivity and recovers from the etymological roots of “theory” the idea of *contemplation* as a way to meet the challenges of our era. In tandem with the authors reviewed earlier in this section, Nicolescu sees this practice of contemplation as an opportunity to rethinking assumptions and reorganizing lived experiences. In his view, this practice is imperative in today’s world because we are often trapped into utilitarian and determinist relations that conceals our interior knowledge and the connections we can make with the world.

*Rudolf Steiner and the “Threefoldness”*

The work of the Steiner (1861-1925) embraces the perspective of WCE in many of its essential aspects. In particular, it echoes Rousseau’s perception of an imbricated relationship between individuals and communities in their process of thriving, a point that I consider central in the discussion around my research object.
I end this theoretical chapter with an incursion into his theory for two related reasons. First, his ability to translate the principles of WCE into pedagogical praxis adds a concreteness that up to now was lacking in this review. Secondly, there is a paucity of peer-reviewed and published studies that focus on his work, despite the increasing popularity of Steiner schools worldwide. The number of Steiner schools has doubled over the last decade, and several countries have been adopting Steiner-inspired curricula in public schools (Freunde der Erziehungskunst Rudolf Steiners, 2019). Rawson (2010) points to a reluctance amongst the academic community to engage with Steiner’s philosophy—namely anthroposophy—due to the emphasis that he placed on spirituality (often taken as esoterism or religion). On the other hand, he also sheds light on the fact that many of Steiner’s pedagogical strategies are applied by educators with little critical reflection, simply reproducing and recycling what other schools have done. To that point, I would observe that, like Rousseau, Steiner develops his educational and social theories separately, which may yield incomplete and inaccurate analyses of his work.

Steiner’s educational method was named “Waldorf pedagogy” after the laboratory school where he first conceived and implemented his curriculum, founded within the Waldorf-Astoria cigarette factory, in Stuttgart, in 1919. The school catered to the children of the factory workers. The curriculum developed by Steiner (1985) was oriented towards a balanced development of what he saw as the three interconnected faculties of the soul: thinking (associated with the brain), feeling (associated with the heart), and willing (associated with the limbs and hands). In his view, children should be educated in such a way that these three aspects could be working in harmony, which would enable them to engage the world in more meaningful ways.

A philosophical tenet that structures Steiner’s educational thought is the view that human development happens in seven-year cycles. In the first seven years of life, the development of the
child is concentrated in the physical body. Education should emphasize physical activity and the stimulation of sensory experiences, as well as the development of the healthy habits. This process should be embedded in pleasure and joy to allow the will to develop. Between ages 7-14, the development of feelings and emotions comes to the foreground, and schools should create opportunities for kids to explore this emotional terrain through the arts and imaginative play, and also through a close relationship with the class teacher, who typically remains with the same class from first through eighth grade. Between 14 and 21 years old, the focus shifts to the cognitive and intellectual capacity. Students develop their thinking by participating in activities of contemplation, research, and debate, always valuing autonomy and criticality. Almon (1994) explains the rationale underpinning these cycles:

> When the thinking in the high school years build upon the feeling in the grade-school years and upon the will fostered in the preschool age, the result is a mind characterized by creative imagination (thinking plus feeling), coupled with a strong wish to bring ideas down into practical reality (thinking plus will). (p. 224)

For the purposes of this study, I am mostly interested in how Steiner looks at the education of adolescents. In his view, the age of fourteen marks a key moment in the development of consciousness, when young people feel the impetus to change the world more strongly. School should support them by presenting the world in a way that awakens wonderment, curiosity, and imagination, and by allowing them to develop their moral intuition rather than imposing moral principles through an abstract teaching of rights and duties (Steiner, 1996). Bartges (2011) describes this part of Steiner’s curriculum as a period when students “move from perception to insight”; when they “feel and know that their thoughts can have a profound and critical effect on the world”; and when their judgment and thinking are “alive and
free” (p. 32).

To examine the ways in which Steiner viewed individuals in society, I reviewed three of his philosophical works, all of them were published towards the end of his life (Steiner, 1985, 1991, 1992). By and large, his thought appears anchored in his actual context rather than in an abstract manner. When he argues that education should stimulate sensibilities, he does so in response to the humanitarian crisis after the First World War (Steiner, 1991). When he contends that individuals should restore meaning, it is a way to counter a society that he saw as materialistic and profit-oriented (Steiner, 1985). In that sense, his central argument is very close to Rousseau’s assumption in Émile: that is, that a conscious transformation of the inner life can result in constructive, positive changes in public or social life.

Steiner (1985) perceived society as formed by three interrelated layers, which he referred to as “the threefolding social order.” The first of these layers, the economy, is related to the outer world, and should be driven by a sense of brotherhood. The second layer, the realm of civil rights and political life, refers to human relationships; it should constantly pursue equity. Finally, there is culture, which Steiner related to the subjective and spiritual realms. For Steiner, a good functioning of this social dynamics was intrinsically bound to individual consciousness. For example, Steiner (1991) saw the domination of the economic system over the other two spheres as one of the central problems of his time, and attributed this imbalance to the incapacity of egocentric, self-interested individuals to see the interrelated whole of which they were part. In his view, the overarching goal of schools should be to develop this awareness as well as the creative capacity that individuals could mobilize towards the renewal of social life. In that sense, they would be prepared not only to integrate society but also to recreate the future.
This chapter presents the methodology for the study and is divided into six sections. In the first section, I explain the rationale for utilizing narrative-based inquiry and describe the specific approach that I have adopted, based on a combination of collective fictional narratives and arts-based methods. In the next section, I provide a contextual background. The third section describes the process for the research and participant selection. In the fourth section, I discuss the methods for the collection of field texts. In the fifth section, I outline the procedures for the analysis of students’ narratives. Finally, in the last section I share some ethical considerations and ponder about the limitations of the study. The research protocols and other additional material are included in the Appendices.

3.1 Research Design

This study is a narrative analysis of students’ experiences situated in a constructivist-interpretive paradigm. As such, it sees multiple realities as being continuously co-constructed by individuals through lived experiences and social interactions (Guba & Lincoln, 2012). In the Conceptual Framework section, I discussed my approach to experience as the stories that students live at school and beyond (Clandinin, 2013)—stories that are contextual, interactional, and temporal (Dewey, 1998/1938). In the next paragraphs, I delve into the reasons that influenced my choice for narrative inquiry.

Firstly, narratives are particularly pertinent to investigate a multidimensional theme like connectedness, since they can be a means to unveil subjective aspects that would less likely appear in conventional interviews (Chase, 2005; Van Manen, 1990). As contended by Chase
(2005), stories combine reasoning, feelings, remembrances, analogies, and metaphors, revealing the complexity and creativity of subjects and phenomena. Secondly, narrative-based inquiry lends well to my intention to value students as critical agents in dialogue towards new pedagogies. By engaging students in a relational process of meaning-making, it values their capacity to (re)signify the phenomena (Chase, 2005). In doing so, it not only empowers them to participate in social debates, but it also opens a space for them to reflect upon their own actions, assumptions, and life events.

There is still a third factor that contributed to this methodological choice. As a “field-in-the-making” (Chase, 2005), narrative research provides latitude for new methodological possibilities. In education scholarship, we can find a broad range of narrative studies that spans from genres more bound to concrete reality—such as oral history (Shopes, 2002) or testimonio (Cervantes-Soon, 2012)—to those that emphasize reflexivity and imagination—such as autoethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) and storytelling (Gamson, 2001). In my study, I took this openness as an opportunity to explore non-conventional methods of data collection, analysis, and writing. Drawing from the works of Gamson (2001) and Yoon (2016), as well as from image-based studies (Leavy, 2015; Pink, 2008; Prosser, 2007; Weber, 2007), I developed a methodology in which a small group of students engaged in the construction of collective fictional narratives based on their own memories, perceptions, and imaginative capacity, a process which was mediated by the use of arts-based methods. These oral narratives were complemented by visual narratives in the form of photos that I collected during school observations.

This combination of collective storytelling and arts-based research is closely aligned with the emphasis that the study places on aesthetic experiences. First, as argued by Gamson (2001),
storytelling allows research to move from “disembodied, abstract, emotionally detached argumentation” (p. 188) toward more empowering practices that invite participants to be co-authors in the discussion of public issues, turning fieldwork into an aesthetic experience. Second, oral stories contribute to what Johnson (2003) associates with a “postcolonial project”: one that disrupts the paternalist practices in research and moves from linear texts (“controlled” by the researcher) to “texts in process” (enriched by the nuances and complexity of oral accounts). Finally, by adopting a collective version of storytelling, in which students actively engage in dialogues toward the construction of shared meanings (Yoon, 2016), I seek to value the collective dimension of creative constructions. Building on Freire’s concept of incompleteness, I see the collective stories created by student participants during our encontros as more than the sum of their individual accounts. As they sit on the circle and engage aesthetically with each other, something new arises from both their commonalities and the blending of their subjectivities, following the pattern illustrated in Figure 5.

The use of visual resources, on the other hand, adds insights to the research insofar as it brings forth subjective aspects that are less likely to appear in verbal communication (Prosser, 2007). Aesthetic research methods are becoming increasingly popular in qualitative research, with a particular emphasis on the use of visual material. Weber (2007) contends that images are a valuable resource for social research because their polysemic nature invites scholars to break through common perceptions, think outside the theoretical boxes, and develop empathetic seeing. From the perspective of research participants, Gauntlett and Holzwarth (2006) posits that aesthetic methods strengthen participants’ role as narrators and gives them an opportunity to reflect about their own lives, valuing the visual nature of popular culture. They argue that “the creative activity is the starting point for developing thoughts about personal experience and
identity, which are ultimately communicated to the researcher” (p. 82). Focusing on the educational field in particular, Prosser (2007) shows that visual-centered methodologies can be powerful instruments that reveal the visual culture of schools, including its hidden curriculum.

Leavy (2015) extends the concept of arts-based research to non-visual practices like narrative inquiry, due to the creative element that characterizes them. She highlights the importance of storytelling to communicate truthful stories about social life, and sustains that fictional stories that “blur the real and the imaginary,” are “no less truthful in communicating human experiences” (p. 39).

In the literature on aesthetic research methods, Pink’s (2008) study has been particularly influential in how I conceived my approach to field observations. She discusses the “emplaced” participation of researchers as crucial to make us more attuned to the phenomena we seek to understand and to better grasp what participants will be communicating. By “emplaced” she refers to an embodied experience in which the researcher shares the participants’ visual realities through sensorial—rather than merely rational—engagement. This attitude can be illustrated by the following excerpt from her study about “slow cities”:

It was by walking and eating with others, sharing their gazes, rhythms, sounds, smells and more and by attuning my imagination to their own imaginings for the future material, social and sensory environment of the town that I arrived at an ethnographic place with a remembered past, a direct present and an imagined future. (p. 193)

Inspired by the researcher that “smells,” “listens to,” and contemplates the town to perceive and embody the phenomenon of slowness, I conceived my field observations as moments to also experience connectedness, with all my senses and feelings, as I followed the school routine of participant-students. I observed the school space from different angles, I read the walls, I sat on
the different corners, I ate with students at the cafeteria, and I sat with them in the classroom. In one of the schools, I also had the opportunity to participate in out-of-school activities. Walking with students around the neighborhood and joining them on a bus trip to a sports club and to a museum provided me with a perspective I would not have grasped as a foreigner to that local culture.

3.2 Contextual Background

This study was conducted in two schools located in large Brazilian cities. Before I present the school sites, I offer a brief introduction to the national context in which they are embedded. Several factors make Brazil a particularly challenging setting for young people to experience connectedness. The country has a long colonial past, marked by the oppression against indigenous populations, by environmental devastation, by income concentration, and by one of the lengthiest slavery regimes in the world. In the second half of the twentieth century, Brazil also experienced two decades of military dictatorship, which accentuated inequalities, silenced cultural diversity, and suspended the ongoing consolidation of the democratic state with the dismantling of political institutions and with a violent military repression that included torture, assassinations, censorship, and the exile of hundreds of politicians, artists, and activists (Prado Jr., 2011). This problematic history left several “disconnecting forces” as a legacy, such as structural social and economic inequality, veiled racism, and a loss of democratic habits. It has also resulted in the degradation of the public schools and in a massive migration of upper-class families to private institutions.

Despite the resistance movements that continuously challenged this unjust status quo, it was only after the democratization in the late 1980s that social inclusion policies and affirmative
action began to be implemented—like cash transfer programs, incentives to associations of local farmers, and racial quotas at university and the Pontos de Cultura (centers for the valorization of popular culture). It was also in the last decades that new channels of political participation were created, such as the Orçamento Participativo (Participative Budget)—implemented in various cities as a space where the population could participate in the allocation of resources—and the Conselhos Gestores de Políticas Públicas (Public Policy Stirring Councils), which gathered representatives from civil society to discuss public policies in different areas (Benevides, 1996).

The consolidation of democracy, however, received a sudden pushback in 2016, with the highly contested impeachment of the President Dilma Rousseff, and, two years later, the election of ultra-conservative president Jair Bolsonaro. Since then, public policies have been advancing disconnectedness in the form of environmental degradation, cultural repression, and the loss of rights of marginalized groups. This disconnecting turn mirrors (or is mirrored by) the civil society, which has been undergoing a process of political polarization, rising intolerance, and violence, in addition to a grave economic crisis. This study was conducted amidst this conjuncture of political unrest and social fragmentation, and it was in light of this context that I have interpreted the narratives.

3.3 Research Sites and Participants

This study has an explicit focus on “aesthetically oriented” schools. More specifically, it focused on ninth grade students enrolled in schools that adopt a curriculum aligned with the “whole child” discourse. Within this broad category, I focused on two strands that are relevant to the Brazilian context. First, I searched for schools embedded in the Educação Integral movement (introduced earlier, in Chapter 2). Besides espousing most of the “whole child” principles, this
movement also enacts key tenets of the Global Citizenship Education debate. Second, I decided to include a *Waldorf School* (also addressed in *Chapter 2*), due to the growing influence of this pedagogy in Brazil. The number of Waldorf Schools in the country jumped from nine to seventy-four over the last two decades, and there are another 130 institutions waiting for accreditation by the National Association of Waldorf Schools (Mattos, 2018).

It is important to acknowledge here my personal connections to each of these pedagogical approaches. Between years 2006 and 2007, I worked for a project called Bairro Escola, which implemented the principles of *Educação Integral* in a suburban town in the state of Rio de Janeiro. There, I worked directly with the schools and the municipality team. As a parent of two Waldorf-school students and an active member of their school community, I am also closely familiar with Steiner’s pedagogy—although, since my kids are still in elementary school, my practical knowledge is mostly related to the initial school years. While these personal experiences were not included as objects of study, I cannot disregard the influence they had in my interpretation of field texts and in my interactions with participants.

For the selection of the first school, I purposefully focused on institutions located in Belo Horizonte, the capital of the state of Minas Gerais and the first municipality in the country to enact the *Educação Integral* model as a public policy. The selected school was one of the first sites where the Integral Education program was implemented. It is located in the periphery of Belo Horizonte, in one of its poorest neighborhoods. My choice of this particular site was based on an online search (looking for exemplary cases cited in the mass and social media), followed by an exploratory visit. In order to ensure participants’ anonymity, the name of this school will not be disclosed. It will be referred to as the *Integral School*. 
Despite my initial intention to work with two schools located in the same city, the single Waldorf school in Belo Horizonte did not give permission for the study. Thus, I decided to select as my second research site a Waldorf school in Sao Paulo—a large city that offers a similar urban setting and is within driving distance from where I live. Following the same procedure employed for the selection of the first school, I did an online search to find information about each of the five Waldorf institutions that offered grades 1-9. In this case, I was particularly interested in the school’s engagement in citizenship issues (which, in the case of the Integral School, was implicit and explicit in the pedagogy). Next, I conducted an exploratory visit and met with the ninth-grade coordinator to present the research and evaluate the school’s interest. The selected school site, referred to as the Waldorf School for anonymity purposes, is also located in a peripheral, low-income neighborhood. However, unlike the public school in Belo Horizonte, this is an independent, associative school formed by middle-class families who do not live in the neighborhood. Forty years ago, when the school was founded by a group of parents, the area was still a semi-rural district which allowed students to be in close contact with nature. With the occupation of the peripheries by low-income residents over the last decades, the surroundings have radically transformed into a densely populated area with precarious housing—though, important to note, not as vulnerable as the neighborhood around the Integral School.

**Routine at the School Sites**

*The Integral School.* Students have an extended school day that runs from 8 a.m. (many of them arrive as early as 7:30 due to parents’ schedules) until 5 p.m. In the morning, they have what is called the “integrated curriculum,” which refers to classes like dance, martial arts, music,

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9 In Brazil, ninth grade is the last year of middle school. High schools run from tenth to twelfth grades.
sports, handicraft, gardening, or computing. Each of these classes is taught by a monitor (instructor) selected amongst college students that live in the surrounding community. The offering of classes varies according to the background of these college students, and in doing so, it reflects the expertise available in the community. In the morning period, students also have time to do homework in groups with their peers and with the support of an instructor. In addition, they have some free time for free play, rest, or reading. Morning snack and lunch are provided—at no cost—to all students, as well as a changing room where they can have a shower (which is not typical in Brazilian schools) and brush their teeth after meals. The afternoon is dedicated to the regular classes, which follow the curricular guidelines of the municipality. A remarkable characteristic of the school is the frequent out-of-school activities, which span from brief activities and visits to neighboring spaces (typically on a weekly basis) to day trips to spaces in the city that students do not normally have access.

*The Waldorf School.* Every day at the *Waldorf School* begins at 7:10 a.m. with what is called the “main lesson”—i.e., a two-hour class dedicated to the intensive exploration of one specific subject or unit study which changes every three or four weeks—such as colonial history, Greek mythology, botany, art history, or the world wars. The main lesson block is followed by the conventional curriculum, which integrates classes like philosophy, choir, research, tutorship or technology with the regular ones (biology, geography, history, and so on). Three times a week, the classes end at 1 p.m., and on Mondays and Wednesdays, students stay until 5 p.m. so that they can engage in classes like Brazilian dance, current news, music, circus, physical education, drama, and eurythmy (a type of performance art developed by Steiner based on the

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10 The literal translation would be *counselor,* like summer camp counselors. I adopted the word *instructor* as it conveys better their role as educators while still differentiating them from class *teachers.*
expressive capacity of movements), in addition to a tutorship class in which they engage in personal projects, guided by a mentor teacher, to explore areas of their interest. This variety of classes is aimed at the whole development of the child/young person, according to Steiner’s three-dimensional approach (feeling, willing, and thinking). The curriculum also includes at least one or two excursions every year. These trips begin with short day trips in the lower grades and expand up to full-week excursions in the high school.

**Participants**

Following the small size orientation of narrative studies (Clandinin, 2013), I recruited five ninth grade students in each school—three girls and two boys in the Integral School, and three boys and two girls in the Waldorf School—between thirteen and fifteen years old. This age range was chosen because adolescence is a key moment in the ripening of social consciousness (Steiner, 1996/1921), when individuals engage in the construction of their identities (Noguera, 2008) and when idealism, creativity, and the impetus for social transformation are felt more strongly (Marshak, 2016). As a moment for “inner discovery” and “outer manifestation” (Marshak, 2016), adolescence becomes particularly relevant in the experience of connectedness.

In each school, one staff member worked as my liaison to research-related issues—one of the school coordinators in the case of the Integral School, and the history teacher in the Waldorf School. They organized an initial meeting in which I presented the study to the ninth graders and distributed an invitation letter summarizing the stages of fieldwork in simple language. Students who were interested were told to fill out a form left with the liaison, who then helped me in the final selection process. I was explicit in asking that student recommendations did not take into consideration the student’s academic performance. Two criteria determined the recruitment: 1) willingness and availability of the student to participate in all research meetings (although I
underscored in our first meeting that they could leave the study at any moment), and 2) at least three years of enrolment in the school.

3.4 Methods for Gathering Field Texts

Borrowing from Clandinin (2013), I have replaced the term data by field texts as a way to distance from positivism and emphasize the interpretive approach of this research. Field texts were gathered from two different sources—*encontros* (group meetings) and school observations.

*Encontros (Group Meetings)*

The main source of field texts were the group meetings in which participants engaged in the construction of their collective story. Continuing with the effort to humanize research terminology, I will replace the word *meeting* by the Portuguese word *encontros*, largely used in Brazil by Freirean educators to refer to dialogical learning. With this, I seek to underline the shift from a conventional focus group discussion—driven by the researcher’s interest—to a space for *aesthetic encounters* mediated by engaging dialogues: a space where, like the public spaces described in the Conceptual Framework (Figure 5), students share their subjectivities and blend them into insightful collective creations. They do not simply *meet*; they *encounter* each other, which implies deep interactions.

The dynamics of these *encontros* was inspired by Freire’s (1984/1968) “culture circles”—a strategy for collaborative learning initially developed for literacy circles ("learning the word and world") and later on expanded to *encontros* of popular education in various settings, from grassroots *encontros* for health prevention to national *encontros* of the Landless Workers Movement or even cosmopolitan *encontros* of the World Social Forum. In these circles, participants discuss situations of oppression and envision collective strategies to overcome them.
What is unique about these dialogues, though, is that they are permeated by popular knowledge in its diverse forms of artistic expression. There is dance, music, drama, poetry, storytelling, improvisation, etc. That is why, after all, they are not just circles of debate; they are culture circles, where dialogue is highly aesthetic. It is in this aesthetic space that people are able to dream together and to develop what Greene (2000) called “social imagination.” As one participant of an adult literacy circle once told me, from these circles everyone leaves “cheio de esperança” (full of hope).

Inspired by the Freirean “culture circles” and by the aforementioned art-based research works, the encontros with the students were characterized by artful work, where creativity and imagination were valued more than accurate descriptive accounts or sociological argumentation. The chief activity was always the storytelling—which, as argued by Leavy (2015), is an artful practice per se—but I also employed different visual-based activities to make the narrative exercise more engaging. I did have a protocol for each encontro (see Appendix A), yet they were open-ended protocols, mainly focused on the structure of each encontro, with only a few possible triggering and follow-up questions to invite participants to engage with the research problem through personal stories, perceptions, and feelings. Next, I provide an overview of each of the encontros:

- **Encontro #1** (duration: 1h10): The initial encontro was a moment for participants to introduce themselves and to be introduced to the research project. For personal introductions, they were asked to make a visual representation of themselves—using either a drawing or photocollage. For the introduction of the research theme, I played a
short animation clip\footnote{\textcolor{red}{Are you lost in the world like me? by Steve Cutts}} about disconnectedness in current times, followed by a brief discussion. Next, students constructed the protagonist for the story they would create in the following *encontros*. I asked them to bring, for our next *encontro*, an image that represented their major concern about today’s world. I ended the *encontro* by explaining why I decided to use that clip, which provided me with the hook to share with them what has motivated me to investigate the problem of connectedness.

- *Encontro* #2 (duration: 2h): The second *encontro* was guided by the first subsidiary question—i.e., “How do students experience connectedness in their daily lives outside school?” After a warm-up activity (meant to sensitize them to the different perspectives that can arise from the observation of one same object), participants shared the images they had brought from home and discussed possible relations between them. Next, I asked them to put all images together, contemplate them for a while, and finally begin their collective story. The prompt that elicited the storytelling was: “Let’s imagine (name of the protagonist as defined in *encontro* #1) in the world depicted in those images. What is her/his story? What is she/he experiencing here?”

- *Encontro* #3 (duration: 2h): The third *encontro* focused on the second subsidiary question—“How do students experience connectedness within the school?” To that end, I displayed pictures that I had taken during my school observations and invited students to take a few minutes to explore them independently. Then, I asked them to close their eyes and see what images came to their mind, or what feelings were evoked. Afterwards, students continued the story they had begun to narrate in the previous *encontro*, but now
in a different chapter that would be situated within the school, based on the memories and feelings elicited by the photos. We also discussed which artistic technique they would like to use in the following *encontro* in order to illustrate their story, once again choosing from painting, photocollage, or drawing.

- *Encontro #4* (duration: 2h): The fourth *encontro* employed image creation as a means to create more room for students to express their affective experiences. They were asked to illustrate their story, putting together the chapters developed in the previous *encontros* and using the visual art technique chosen by the group in the previous *encontro*. This *encontro* was particularly marked by improvisation, which resulted from the different dynamics in each school. I welcomed these demands for improvisation as intrinsic to the creative process and as necessary to value student participants’ authenticity and autonomy. At the *Integral School*, students decided they would illustrate the story on a large mural, using drawing and painting. Surprisingly, despite their hesitant reaction when I first proposed the illustration exercise in the previous *encontro*, they asked me to do their artistic work on the walls of one of the busiest school corridors, which obviously ended up drawing the attention and some brush strokes from other students outside the research group. The activity lasted for two hours and, according to the liaison, the storyboard remained on the wall for several days after I left. In the *Waldorf School*, students decided to combine pastel drawing and photocollage on a smaller poster, which

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12 During the *encontro* 3, participants from the *Integral School* shared that they were a bit hesitant about illustrating the story, because they “weren’t good with the arts.” Even the participant who had drawn their protagonist in the first *encontro* was not enthusiastic about the illustration part. Discussing the situation with one of the school’s instructor, we had the idea of taking the group to a museum dedicated to a local artist dedicated to social arts, as a way to expand their understanding about the scope and the possibilities of artistic work. We scheduled the museum trip to happen two days before our last *encontro*. 
was done under a large pergola outside in the patio. The creation process was much more introspective here than in the Integral School, with students offering only a few comments on each other’s drawings. This exercise took only half of our encontro, and we used the rest of the time for a group reflection about the key moments of their collective story. I used memory cards I had at hand to write down some words that seemed meaningful in their talks, and we ended the encontro with an exercise to relate these cards, as in the creation of a concept map. Since in this particular school students had been drawing on the arts to express themselves in the previous encontros, I welcomed this discursive turn as a willingness to dwell a little longer in the story and make it more meaningful to themselves.

- **Encontro #5** (duration: 1h): This encontro happened a few weeks after the end of fieldwork. It was conceived as an opportunity to share my initial interpretation of students’ narratives, particularly its emotional dimension, with research participants.

**School Observations**

In each school, I conducted ten full days of field observations, in addition to the days of the encontros, totaling fifteen days in each school. These observations complemented the storytelling exercise by providing a visual narrative of connectedness experience within the school context, composed of my observation of students in their interactions with one another and with the environment, as well as by my “emplaced participation” (Pink, 2008) in the school routine. I initially followed student-participants during their entire school day, including breaktimes. I also observed other middle-school grades to get a more comprehensive view of the curriculum. In my exploration of the different school spaces, I was particularly drawn to the notice boards, which provided me with yet another source of insight into students’ experiences
through their posted messages and artwork. Observation notes were taken by hand on a notebook to avoid the intrusiveness and dispersion that a laptop could cause in the school setting.

### 3.5 Procedures for the Analysis of Field Texts

The fieldwork procedures described in the previous section generated written and visual field texts, as summarized in Table 1 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collection method</th>
<th>Frequency per school</th>
<th>Types of field texts generated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Encontros</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Dialogue Transcriptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Visual material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School observations</td>
<td>10 full days</td>
<td>Fieldnotes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5 partial days</td>
<td>Photos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(encontro days)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Building on Clandinin (2013), I have approached the analysis of these field texts as a meaning-making process that unfolds in the form of a spiral, with student-participants’ narratives as the starting point. As participants interact, and as I interact with them, with the school context, with the existing literature as well as with the community of scholars (not to mention the reader’s own interaction with the text), meanings are continually transformed. I have tried to make this spiral process of analysis evident by structuring and presenting the analysis in a sequence of five rounds that begins with students’ voices and gradually moves along an interpretive continuum, as summarized next:

- **Round 1 – Field texts**: After each field visit, I typed up transcriptions of the audio recording, created digital versions of my observation sheets, and uploaded the visual material. Everything was imported to NVivo and filed according to the research site and type of source (i.e., images, observation sheets, and audio transcriptions).
• **Round 2 – Interim texts:** Since there was a time gap between collection of field texts and the beginning of the analysis, I felt the need to have a more tactile approach to this material at first. So, I printed all audio transcriptions and observation sheets and coded them line-by-line on paper according to inductive coding (data-driven). Visual material was examined on the screen and coded in NVivo using a tool that allowed me to select different parts of each image and code the different themes I identified in the image.

Next, I created an interim text that was discussed with student participants in *encontro 5*, drawing from both the oral and visual narratives collected. I decided to write this text in the form of a poem because this is a language that, for me, provides more room for the representation of feelings and perceptions. For the construction of the poem, I drafted an outline based on the themes generated by the preliminary analysis on paper, and then returned to the raw material looking for feelings, images, and language that could fill this outline with meaningful verses in which students could see themselves. From this process, two poems were created, one for each school. Each poem, or interim text, was shared with student-participants from the respective school in a feedback meeting. The students shared and discussed their comments, and this feedback was added to NVivo.

• **Round 3 – Fictional stories:** Guided by students’ feedback, I returned to raw data, now on NVivo, and revised the almost one hundred line-by-line themes that I had identified on paper, refining the language and using charts, coding stripes and diagrams to better visualize relations and overlaps (Table 2). I also did a more in-depth analysis of the visual material, going back and forth from images and written material, re-reading one in light of the other. From this process, the initial nearly one hundred themes were narrowed down to twenty-eight (Table 3), which were then grouped according to the school and the
context (within/outside school) where they appeared in the narratives. It was based on this refined list that I outlined the fictional stories presented in Chapter 4. It is important to note that, at this point, I focused on each school separately, with no intention to establish comparisons. My goal was simply to draw a thread for each school where students’ stories would be woven in. In the process of writing up these stories, I tried to stay close to their own language as much as possible, even though translation has made this harder at times.

Table 2. Initial list of themes that resulted from the line-by-line inductive coding
Table 3. Refined list of themes grouped according to school and space (within/outside school)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RECURRENT THEMES</th>
<th>OUTSIDE SCHOOL</th>
<th>WITHIN SCHOOL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTEGRAL SCHOOL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Insecurity &amp; fear</td>
<td>Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oppression</td>
<td>Beauty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Games &amp; social media</td>
<td>Nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consumption</td>
<td>Feelings &amp; emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indifference</td>
<td>Discovery/novelty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Loneliness</td>
<td>Caring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td>Guidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Powerlessness</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stereotypes</td>
<td>Dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WALDORF SCHOOL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Insecurity</td>
<td>Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individualism</td>
<td>Beauty</td>
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<td>Social media</td>
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- **Round 4 – Analysis of SQ #1 and SQ #2**: At this stage, my analytical voice came to the foreground to analyze students’ stories (verbal and non-verbal narratives) in light of the Subsidiary Research Questions #1 and #2 (i.e., how students experience connectedness within and beyond school). While initially working around the themes listed on Table 3, I soon realized that this approach had two shortcomings: first, meanings had been transformed in the process of writing up the story, affecting the recurrence of
themes and the relation between them; second, this fragmented approach conflicted with my interest in obtaining a wholistic understanding of students’ experiences. So, in search of a more aggregating view, I structured the discussion of the first and second Subsidiary Research Questions around three comprehensive categories, corresponding to three different—though interrelated—dimensions of students’ connectedness experiences: connectedness with the self, with others, and with the world. While these categories arose primarily from the fictional stories shared in Chapter 4, they also underlie the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. In that sense, I would say that they reflect both the field texts and my reading of the literature. Figures 6 and 7 show how the each of these dimensions contains the themes from Table 3.

Figure 6. Dimensions of connectedness experience outside (left) and within (right) the Integrated School
• Round 5 – Analysis of SQ #3 and SQ#4: In this final stage of analysis, I adopted a more reflexive and dialogical stance to address the last two Subsidiary Research Questions (i.e., How students reconcile their school and out-of-school experiences, and what we can draw from these experiences to illuminate the current debate on Global Citizenship Education). Building on the analysis from each research site, I juxtaposed the stories from within and outside school and identified movements consciously or unconsciously made by students to reconcile the conflicting experiences from these two contexts. Since the movements made by students from the Integral School and the Waldorf School often overlapped, this time I worked the findings across both school sites. Next, I looked into students’ compounded experiences through the lens of Global Citizenship Education to suggest the pedagogical praxes that are outlined in the last chapter.

3.6 Trustworthiness and Ethical Concerns

As the methodological chapter suggests, a study that works with narratives, and with fictional storytelling in particular, invites us to rethink the entire process of fieldwork, analysis,
and writing. It also raises particular concerns in terms of trustworthiness and ethics. The first question refers to the quality of my representation of students’ experiences. Drawing on Lincoln and Guba's (1985) model of trustworthiness, I have adopted credibility as my major quality criterion. The other three criteria outlined by the authors—transferability, dependability, and confirmability—would be incongruent with my research paradigm and methodology because they are strongly influenced by positivist assumptions. My approach to credibility acknowledges the impossibility of accurate representations of participants’ experiences (Pillow, 2003; Van Maanen, 1988) and takes as credible representations those that best account for the negotiations of meanings with participants. The combination of two different sources of field texts—i.e., the oral stories co-constructed in the encontros and the field observations—provided relevant material for this dialogue. The inclusion of encontro 5 as a space to share and discuss my initial interpretation of the findings with participants was a key strategy to create more space for meaning negotiations. Furthermore, seeking to nurture a complicity relation with participants throughout the fieldwork, I have carved different occasions for informal conversations when I could check some of my interpretations with students (Fine, 1993).

My positionality as a White, middle-class woman, and, above all, a doctoral student from a foreign university, certainly influenced these conversations with students. Since the limited timeframe of the fieldwork would not allow time for the creation of more horizontal relations, I addressed these imbalances by adopting a reflexive attitude throughout the research, making written and mental notes about instances when my positionality might be playing a role. In this process, I followed Pillow’s (2003) suggestion to adopt reflexivity not as a “confessional act,” but as a way to expose the struggles of representation and the challenges of fieldwork. For her, doing “engaged qualitative research” (p. 193) is a messy and uncomfortable process, and this
messiness should be part of what we share with the reader.

In terms of ethics, I sought to ensure the anonymity of research participants by using pseudonyms in all research written materials, and by replacing the names of the schools with generic identifiers based on their pedagogical approaches. A particular ethical concern was related to the use of photos taken in the school. I addressed this question by blurring faces in all photos to prevent any identification, and by sharing all images with the students before considering them as field texts for the analysis.
In this chapter, I present the collective stories narrated by students in the two schools where I conducted fieldwork. They are fictional oral stories co-constructed by student-participants during our encontros, based on their life experiences. One story was constructed in each school. In the first encontro, students created the protagonists: Elisa, in the Integrated School, and Maria, in the Waldorf School. In the second encontro, students developed the first chapter of the narrative. They were asked to bring images representing current challenges in the world that concerned them. After discussing those pictures with the group, they began their narrative based on the prompt, “Let’s imagine [name of the protagonist] in the world depicted in those images. What is her story? What is she experiencing here?” In the third encontro, the story centered around the school context. After contemplating school pictures, students were asked to bring the protagonist to their school and narrate her experiences in that environment. In the fourth encontro, students illustrated their stories. And in our last encontro we discussed my initial interpretation of their narratives, focusing on the emotional dimension. In all encontros, there were times when students diverted from the storytelling to share a personal memory in first person. I incorporated these accounts to the main narrative, attributing them to the fictional character—who was, ultimately, composed by the constellation of experiences in the group.

This chapter begins with the story of Elisa, created by the five student-participants from the Integral School. The second part tells the story of Maria, created by the five student-participants from the Waldorf School. Given the inevitable interpretive nature of the processes of transcription, translation, and editing, the stories as compiled here are also shaped by my
researcher’s voice, even though I made an effort to maintain a descriptive stance and tried to preserve the language used by the students as much as possible.

4.1 The Story of Elisa

Figure 8. Elisa, as pictured by student-participants

At school,
She is full of life.
Her hands encounter the earth,
And her eyes can see her body
With pride.
She feels free.
Her soul encounters her will
And pours from her fingers,
Emanating art,
Poetry and music.
She feels meaningful.
Her thoughts encounter her voice.
And gain attention and guidance.
She feels empowered.
And safe.
But when she enters the classroom
This nourished soul
Shrinks behind the desks.
And her thoughts fly
Looking for something
That makes sense.
Her body feels misplaced
Her voice is silenced
Her will, emptied\textsuperscript{13}.

\textsuperscript{13} Translated excerpt of the poem I wrote as an interim text to discuss my initial interpretation with students (see Appendix B for the original poem).
Elisa’s story begins when she is a ninth grader in the Integral School, on the outskirts of Belo Horizonte, the state capital of Minas Gerais in Brazil. She is fifteen years old, has a dyed purple hair, and identifies herself as parda (“brown”). Born in a small rural town, Elisa moved to Belo Horizonte when she was six, together with her mother and brother. She knows little about her father, and yet she retains painful memories of him beating her mother while they were still married. He disappeared after her mother denounced him to the police.

Elisa likes “shopping malls, cars, cell phones, food, jewelry, butterflies, and rainbows,” and also loves the sea, although she has never been to the beach. The sea, to her, symbolizes freedom. “Can anyone be freer than a fish in the sea?” she asks. Yet, when she looks around her immediate surroundings, the picture is bleak. While she calls herself a candanga (“adventurer,” “explorer”), in reality she seldom leaves her neighborhood—a densely populated area deprived of public institutions or leisure options and dominated by drug dealers. Intimidated by the loud music, fights, trafficking, and even gunshots that come from the streets, Elisa spends most of her time confined to her house. When she needs to leave for groceries, her pace is always fast, and she feels tense like in a videogame. Sometimes she feels suffocated, and her ears “get congested by so much noise.”

To soothe herself, she runs away to some place where she can stay alone, just looking at the sky. She wishes she could spend more time outdoors, closer to nature. She also wishes she could go more often to the city and to the mall. A perfect weekend to her is when her stepfather has money for the bus, and the whole family can all go to the mall. They watch people, eat burgers, and if there is still money, buy a DVD movie to watch at home.

Eventually, Elisa’s brother began to work for the drug dealers because it seemed to be the only “job” opportunity in reach, and it did not take long for him to become addicted himself,
turning his initial earnings into a mounting debt. Under his mattress, he would hide an illegal gun in case the dealers came after him. For a while, Elisa too flirted with trafficking, advertised by word-of-mouth as an easy way to make money and help her family. But, having seen so many friends get lost on this path, she knew it was a dead-end. Instead, she prefers to spend her days confined at home. She looks after the house and her baby brother while her mother works as a nanny for rich families. Or she distracts herself with games or videos on her cell phone, when she is able to access a neighbor’s Wi-Fi for some connection. She is so addicted to the screen that, when she does not have connection, she keeps playing with the little dinosaur [animated icon that appears with the ‘no internet connection’ message]. She knows this is not good, but “there is nothing else to do,” and her mother keeps telling her “go play with your phone.” In fact, her mother too is addicted to Facebook and YouTube.

Although she is often online, Elisa rarely follows the national or global news; she feels she already has “enough problems to deal with” in her own community. She has heard of the war in Syria, and also about Trump’s border wall, but not much else. She feels that there is something in common with her own reality, particularly in the way that the poor are viewed by authorities. “Here, the police think we are criminals only because we are poor; probably the same happens to the immigrants there, who are only trying to find a better life,” she says.

Elisa appears hesitant to discuss social issues, mainly because she feels intimidated by the vocabulary that is commonly used in the discussion. She is not sure what citizen really means, but she guesses it refers to someone “who works, has documents, a house, and who does the right thing.” Even widely-used terms like justice or inequality appear to confuse her. Interestingly, though, she seems to perfectly grasp them when relying on real-life experiences. In her words, “Injustice is when a homeless person is not free to go to a bakery and buy some food—if you are
dirty, people think you will steal something, even if you have the money. Or when you get onto
the bus and everyone looks at you because you are poor… To me, this is injustice… When you
do not have freedom.”

Elisa feels powerless in the face of situations like these. She believes it is up to politicians
to do something, like passing tougher laws, distributing food, and paving the streets, so that kids
can go safely to school without having their shoes covered by mud. Yet, she knows that politics
and laws are not always reliable and that injustices “often benefit the bad guys who you do not
want to mess with.” So, sometimes it seems easier to enter the system, like becoming a police
officer with a gun. “As a cop, you can stay safe inside the car, just observing and giving orders,
and everyone respects you. You can also have a legal gun to protect you, and to protect other
people.” Elisa knows the game of cops and robbers from close range. Two of her uncles are in
the police, and two are in drug trafficking. Growing up, it has been challenging to navigate these
parallel realities, but it has also given her insight into the complexities underlying such an
apparent duality.

Elisa dreams about becoming a famous fashion stylist. Years later, she graduates from
university and moves with her diploma to Paris to work. There, she meets and marries an
“enchanted prince.” Before long, though, the dream begins to dismantle. The “enchanted prince”
becomes aggressive and starts to beat her, echoing the situation that happened to her mother and
to so many other women she meets in her life. Elisa then decides to return to her Brazil and to
live with her family again, in her old neighborhood. There, she finds a way to give back to her
community by starting a project for recovering drug-users offering a combination of sports, arts,
and personal guidance. One of the activities offered is Taekwondo, which teaches youngsters
discipline, perseverance, and caring behavior. Eventually, Elisa’s brother joins the project, quits
drugs, and leaves trafficking to join the army, where he eventually becomes a general. Elisa decides to write her biography. Following the example of a woman writer who once gave a talk in her school when she was still a student, one day she returns to her school to launch her book and to talk to the kids about her project.

**School Experiences**

Moving back to the time when Elisa is a middle school student, the story takes a very different turn. While life at home is lonely and frightening, at the *Integral School* she feels light. She plays, she dances, she sings, she makes arts, and she can get a book from the shelf and throw herself on a cozy cushion to read it. She can even go on daytrips to explore the city in the company of her classmates and teachers.

Elisa has studied at the *Integral School* since first grade, when she moved from the countryside to Belo Horizonte. It did not take her long to realize there was something different about that particular school. While her brother and friends from other schools complained about being bored in class, she was enthusiastic about learning new things like growing vegetables, playing the flute and dancing to African music, as well as discovering new parts of the city. Everything was so different from traditional education that it made her mother a bit hesitant. She went to the school and spoke with the principal, who explained that the *Integral School* was part of a pioneering Integral Education program. For that reason, it offered not only an extended schedule, but also a variety of classes like handicrafts, gardening, and music, which would help Elisa develop not only her thinking, but also her physical, emotional, and social capacities. The explanation was not very clear to her mother, but she accepted it based on the fact that it would be better for Elisa to stay all day at school than be at home alone. It was only a few months later, after watching her daughter at a Taekwondo presentation, that Elisa’s mother began to realize
what the principal had meant in that conversation. It was not just about having fun, but also about learning to respect others, to have self-control, and to concentrate and persist to achieve what we want.

The first good surprise that Elisa had in the *Integral School* was the choir, where she sang and played the flute. The group was named “Dolin Dolá” [a popular children’s song]. Elisa often took the flute home to practice until her mom would tell her to stop. She had never imagined she would be able to play such a beautiful instrument, and to actually record a CD with the group. Moreover, she had never imagined they would perform in so many places: from an improvised square in their neighborhood to the municipal chamber. The audience would always applaud loudly, making her feel proud. The choir was put on hold when their conductor quit the job, and the school is still searching for a substitute, but for Elisa, music is now a firm part of her life. It helps her imagine other places when she feels overwhelmed.

Another treasured moment in Elisa’s memories is the day she and her classmates transformed the school walls and gate into colorful hand-painted murals. The project began with a long discussion to decide what the students would like to represent. Elisa felt deeply connected to her image: a child moving forward on a path. Painting such a large drawing was challenging, but she felt “an inner peace” like she had never felt before, as if feelings like “fear, anger, and sadness were melting,” going away. The outcome was a mosaic of colored murals that looked “very real,” and everyone felt “happy and proud to create something so beautiful.”

Over the course of elementary and middle school, Elisa has actively participated in a variety of classes that have awakened positive feelings like these. Her favorite was the gardening class, which she had been attending since first grade. She remembers the wonderment and happiness that she feels from touching the soil, planting seeds, and watching plants grow. When
something is harvested in the garden, she is always the first to run around the school showing the harvest to everyone. She also loves the school trips, which evoke a feeling of freedom within her. Almost every week she has some out-of-school activity in the vicinity. Her favorite tours are the visits to the communal orchard, to the quilombola\textsuperscript{14} community that still exists across the highway, and to the creek a few blocks away. At the orchard, she met Dona Julia, known as “the guardian of seeds,” due to her effort to protect and multiply *sementes crioulas* (native seeds). Elisa had never heard about native or transgenic seeds until that day, but the orchard looked and smelled to her like a magic place, and she knew she was doing the right thing when they were sowing or distributing seeds to create more places like that. Also, it was uplifting to realize that there were people like Dona Julia in her neighborhood. It helped her see beyond the game of cops and robbers she often felt trapped in.

The visits to the creek are also an opportunity to discover new sides of the neighborhood. On warm days, she can instantly feel the difference when she enters the woods. With her classmates, she usually cleans the area and then stay there for a little while, appreciating the plants, flowers, and animals. She had never imagined there was a place like that around here. Plus, the water is pretty clean, which is a big contrast to the river near the main road.

The visit to the quilombola community has another special meaning. Elisa has been there several times with her parents to participate in *candomblé*\textsuperscript{15} ceremonies, but she had never felt comfortable to talk about it because some of her friends call it witchcraft. Since she began to go

\textsuperscript{14} Quilombola refers to Afro-Brazilian escaped slaves who established resistance settlements called quilombos. Slavery was abolished in Brazil in 1888, but many quilombola descendants decided to maintain their communities as a way to preserve their culture and to be stronger against the social injustices they knew they would face.

\textsuperscript{15} Candomblé literally means “dance in honor of the gods.” It is an Afro-Brazilian religious tradition that borrows from Yoruba, Bantu, and other African cultures. Dance and music are central to Candomblé ceremonies, since the dances enable worshippers to become possessed by the deities, called orishas. These rituals, though, are often seen as witchcraft by Christian groups.
there with the school, she has gained the courage to share her feelings about her friends’ judgment with the gardening instructor and with the school principal.

In fact, the principal has become Elisa’s best listener, someone to whom she reaches out when she is struggling with a problem. Rather than calling the parents every time a student gets in trouble, the principal prefers having a frank conversation and giving a second chance. Plus, the principal knows how to listen without being judgmental and how to “figure things out.” With her, Elisa has learned to be more responsible. Elisa remembers one day when the principal called her to ask why she had been arriving late. Rather than punishing her, she listened to her. And even gave an advice. She suggested that Elisa woke up earlier to leave some time for self-care and for organizing her own things, because this way she would be more fully present at school. A few months later, the principal turned the first school period into a reading time, so that students who arrive late would not miss a class.

Elisa’s morning routine at school also includes a reading time, a time to shower\textsuperscript{16}, and an hour to do her homework with her classmates under the counselors’ supervision. That is a treasured moment to Elisa, because when she is home, she always has so many chores to do that she ends up neglecting homework. She has also learned to enjoy lunchtime. What before was just about filling the stomach has become a time for relaxation, thanks to the peaceful music that is played in the canteen. She does not know what this type of music is called, but she knows it makes her feel calm and light. Similarly, she has learned how to use a fork properly and she has become more conscious about what she puts on her plate: “Is it colorful? Are there any vegetables? Do I need all this food?” And after eating lunch, she enjoys the extra time catching

\textsuperscript{16} This is not typical in public schools.
up with her classmates, playing chess, or reading. In fact, reading is another habit that Elisa has developed in the *Integral School*. There are “reading corners” all around the school, made of shelves with books and a mat, futon, or bench where students can sit and read. She loves to explore all of these areas, as each one holds different books.

During regular classes, though, school seems to lose its magic. There are more threats than encouragement, more shushing than space for students’ voices, and more competition than cooperation. Elisa admits she is not the most disciplined student, but she explains it would be easier to keep her attention if there were fewer copying and memorizing exercises. Sometimes she looks at the board and thinks about the “many more interesting things” she could be doing. Another thing she does not understand is why teachers pick the themes they pick. Last year, for example, her class “spent many classes learning the History of the United States, the Thirteen Colonies and all this.” She could not understand why she needed to know about these colonies if they are in the United States, given that she will most likely never be able to travel there in her life.

On the other hand, she loves geography classes. She loves the stories that the teacher shares about other countries, and the way he allows students to participate. She also loves to play with the globe, trying to find the countries she would like to visit one day. The geography teacher is also the one with whom Elisa has developed the closest relationship. During breaktimes, he is always on the patio playing chess with students, and he often organizes after-school sessions to teach astronomy. She had never paid attention to the sky until he taught her to identify the constellations.

The school has also changed the way that Elisa sees the city where she lives. With her class, she has been able to discover museums, theaters, parks, swimming pools, markets, and so
many other amazing spaces in the city. During the first visits, she felt a little awkward when people stared at her. It looked like they were asking, “what are those black kids doing here?” But having the company of her classmates made her feel more comfortable and protected, and this feeling allowed her to relax and enjoy the experience. Museums, parks, and pools are Elisa’s favorite destinations—“museums and parks because they are beautiful, and pools because they are fun.” Elisa cannot swim, but the pools that the school chooses for the trips are shallow so she could always play freely without fear. Nothing makes her feel freer than playing in the water.

Figure 9. Illustration of Elisa's story by student-participants
4.2 The Story of Maria

Figure 10. Maria, as pictured by student-participants

It is not easy to awake
And realize
That the world out there
Is not always true.
That amid beauty and kindness
Lies individualism and oppression.

But like a sunflower,
Maria stands there
In all her vitality
Swaying towards the light
Taking the everyday challenge
To insist in a hopeful future.

And when she feels lonely
Awkward or numb,
She finds refuge in the arts,
Where her heart feels warm,
And the world gains meaning.
Then, she feels ready to walk
With autonomy and will,
Becoming a citizen
With the mind, heart and hands17.

17 Translation of part of the interim text I wrote in the form of a poem to share with student-participants on the 5th encontro.
Maria is a middle-class girl in her teens who likes to be surrounded by nature, books, music, and coffee. Her parents, both of them scholars in the field of astrophysics, decided to raise their four children in a suburban town where they could adopt a low-profile lifestyle. From there, Maria commutes every day by bus\textsuperscript{18} to the *Waldorf School* on the Western side of Sao Paulo, Brazil's most populous city.

Maria’s story begins precisely on this commute, on an ordinary day. She is on the bus, contemplating the green pockets that resist in that densely populated area through the windows, when a man—“a big man”—bumps into her, shouts at her, takes her wallet, and runs away. It was “the fall from paradise.” Not that violence was something unfamiliar to her—it is on the news every day as well as in the conversations with family and friends. In fact, it is on her doorstep, since the *Waldorf School* is located in a typically vulnerable area on the peripheries of Sao Paulo. Nevertheless, while aware of her proximity to violent areas and of her added vulnerability due to being a girl, Maria still thought she was safe, living in a bubble where the world was still “good and beautiful.” Like most of her classmates, she lives in a nice neighborhood and experiences very little of the community around her school. The three-minute walk between the school gate and the bus stop is considered safe due to two security guards hired by the school to watch the students along the way. Therefore, while she hears about cases of violence in the community, she never actually witnesses them. She does remember a few cases of car thefts that involved families from school, and one incident with a parent who was kidnapped for a couple of hours. But, still, she considers these cases exceptions and finds the area relatively peaceful.

\textsuperscript{18} It is important to note that *bus*, here, refers to regular city buses, and not to school buses. In Sao Paulo, like in most cities in Brazil, school buses are a private service rather than a service offered by the municipality. Older middleclass students most commonly take the regular city buses.
Maria admits that her connection with the community around the school is very limited. A few years ago, the school opened up classrooms in the evening to offer tuition-free high school to youth from the local community. Every Tuesday, morning and evening students sit together in a special afternoon class called “current issues.” Maria likes the opportunity to break out of her social bubble and hear about the reality of these new friends but feels that class time is too short to build intimacy.

Maria’s concern with social interactions has been growing over the last year. Since kindergarten, she has experienced a strong sense of community at school, as if classmates and teachers were an extension of her family. As she begins to participate more in the outside as well as virtual world, Maria realizes that this type of close relationships is “out of fashion.” She sees a lot of individualism and selfishness in today’s society, with people increasingly isolated and mostly worried about “owning things.” In her view, this is especially true about the internet, where the other is “just an icon on Instagram, Snapchat, or Facebook.” Because she doesn’t know their problems or who they really are, they mean little to her. In Maria’s opinion, people seem to be more concerned with taking selfies than with looking at the other. She does participate on social media, but she has been making a conscious effort to limit the time she remains online. For example, she used to spend a lot of time on Instagram… then, one day she deleted the app just to see how she would feel. Nothing changed in her life, except for the fact that now she has more time to do the things that make her happy, like playing music, reading, and spending time with real people.

Maria believes that small individual actions like this can have a snowball effect and be a good starting point to promote urgent changes in society. She doesn’t think activism needs to be something big, like wearing the T-shirt and going on a street protest; it can also be “something
you do every day to change a situation.” Well, in reality, that is what part of Maria believes—the part that tries to hold a positive perspective towards the future. The other part of her is more critical, and questions her own ability to practice what she preaches. She knows that things are more complicated, and that her individual power is limited. “How can I stop violence, for example?” Many times, Maria feels that she is not strong enough to change what she knows needs to be changed, so she ends up going with the flow even though she does not like where it is taking her.

To her, this is particularly true in the case of environmental problems. “We see the trash we produce, the bees we kill, and yet we do nothing to stop it; we turn the other way and go back to playing on our cell phones.” She mentions the ongoing and highly contested construction of the ring road around Sao Paulo as an example. She admits that it is difficult to say “no” to something that will reduce the travel time considerably, even though she is aware of the environmental damage it will engender. In another example closer to her daily life, Maria ponders about social responsibility at the grocery store. She could buy rice in a glass jar to reduce plastic consumption, but the plastic bag is much cheaper—in fact, in most cases she cannot even find the glass jar!

Maria would like to do more on this and other social issues, but she often feels lonely. There are not many people outside the school who share the same concern and engagement. She also feels unsure where to start from, because there is so much to be done. And she is skeptical about which institutions to reach out to, since most of them are either corrupt or “too inside the box.” Maria thinks it will become easier to be an active citizen as an adult, through her future work. She says her work and social activism will overlap. She will choose a job that is meaningful to her, maybe a Waldorf teacher, and this is also how she will choose the causes to
fight for. She thinks that it is very unlikely that she will engage in something that she has only read or heard about; it must be “something she is living through.”

For now, Maria tries to make sense of the world through drawings, painting, or poems. Sometimes she posts these works on the school walls; other times she prefers to keep them to herself. Maria also likes to observe and read about what is going on in the world, as she believes this will help her make informed decisions in the future. She is concerned with the escalation of “fake news.” To avoid falling into this trap, she tries to confront different sources, and always remains a critical reader. During the electoral campaign, she received all sorts of fake news on WhatsApp. One of them claimed that fascism was a movement from the left. She found it very strange, so she did some research and concluded that the message was indeed fake. Maria credits much of her critical capacity to her school, where she learns to be a “free thinker.” To her, free thinkers are those people who do not follow pre-established thoughts; they develop their own. They realize that things need to be improved, and they not only speak up for what needs to be changed, but also “roll up their sleeves and get their hands dirty.” She likes to have her hands on something, “as long as they are not empty.” They must be filled with something that makes sense to her. When she sees meaning in what she does, she does it with conviction.

School Experiences

Maria experiences a whole new world when she is at school—a world full of colors, arts, and nature. Kids can still climb trees and play with sand, leaves, sticks, stones, ropes, and paper planes. Older kids can do arts, music, research, invent things… They are always busy with something meaningful and teachers give them autonomy and also their support. Even in more traditional classes, like Portuguese, math, or history, she often has activities outside the classroom that allow her to move her body and to enjoy the atmosphere of the campus. Maria
feels grateful for the relationships she experiences at school. Teachers greet each student at the door, look into each student’s eyes, shake hands, and ask how students are feeling. If one day she is not well, she knows that the teacher will come to her desk and ask what is going on. Also, she has known her classmates for so many years, and they have been together in so many important moments, that it “feels like a big family.” Maria does not see any of this in the outside world, and that often makes her feel out of place.

She remembers her first *Festa Junina*\(^{19}\) in the *Waldorf School*, as a new student coming from a traditional school. It was so different from all the other *Festa Juninas*... Little kids were holding lanterns, the older ones carrying torches and lighting the bonfire themselves... It looked like everyone was involved in a magical ritual. At that time, she felt just like a spectator, and a little awkward. It was only several years later, when Maria was an eighth grader and had the responsibility to carry the torch herself, that she was able to fully understand the meaning of it. Then, she realized the difference between watching the bonfire and actually lighting it up. Eighth graders light up the fire to mark the end of grade school\(^{20}\), so there is a lot of emotion involved. She thinks that it is almost like a rebirth, and it is definitely unforgettable; it is a feeling of belonging that she cannot describe, “as if you were becoming the fire, the flame, the heat, becoming part of that.” To Maria, there are two bonfires: “one made with fire and the other with emotions.”

\(^{19}\) *Festa Junina* (June Harvest Celebration) is a popular festival that happens all over the country in the month of June, to celebrate harvest and the birthdays of Saint Peter, Saint Anthony, and Saint John. Schools celebrate it with folk music and dance, traditional food, and a big bonfire.

\(^{20}\) Although middle school in Brazil officially includes the ninth grade, in the *Waldorf School* it ends with the eighth grade to coincide with the end of the second development cycle according to Steiner’s model. The ninth grade follows a typical high school curriculum (varied subjects, no class teacher), despite being formally part of middle school.
Just like the fire, the other elements of nature also have a place in Maria’s school memories. In one of her main elementary school projects, she and her classmates spent several days with their hands in the soil building a small cob house. It was amazing to realize what they were able to do out of mud. The earth work continued throughout middle school, with clay art, garden classes and drawings on the ground, and culminated with a ninth-grade fieldtrip to an *agroforestry* farm, where Maria spent five days plowing, harvesting, and learning biodynamic farming techniques. In the end students were all physically very tired, but also proud of themselves and so thankful to nature.

Maria believes that these school experiences are not only hands-on; they are all “embedded in meaning.” In one of her first years at the *Waldorf School*, the teacher arrived in the classroom with knitting needles and a yarn and announced that their next project would be making a doll. Knitting did not seem like a school lesson, she thought at the time. But the movement of the needles awoke memories of her grandmother trying to teach her some stitches when she was little, and those memories gave her the motivation to work. As each little doll’s arm or leg became ready, she would say, “Wow, I can do that!” In the end, the doll turned out to be so pretty that Maria gave her a special place on a shelf she has in her bedroom.

A similar experience was when the Technology Class teacher challenged each student to build a bicycle from scratch. Maria liked bikes but she had no idea how to make one and indeed, it was hard at the beginning. “You fix each string on the wheel, align them, then when you look at it... it is tilted. Then you align again, observe it, and it is tilted again! Then, when you finally make it, you realize there are two wheels and you will need to do everything once more.” But

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21 Technology Class is a 9th grade course where students experience the power of human creation by employing technology to create objects that are used in their daily lives.
with practice, and the support of classmates and teachers, it became easier, and by the end of the semester, all the students had made a bike. To celebrate the accomplishment, the class went on a bike ride. Maria had gained a callus on her hand from the project, but also new skills and knowledge about how bicycles work. Now she keeps looking around and wondering how things are made.

To Maria, the special classes like Technology, Jornal (Newspaper, in English), Circus, or Drama were an important addition to regular classes because they took her out of her comfort zone and provided more opportunities for her to thrive with “autonomy, purpose, and sense of community.” For example, through the Theater classes she had in eighth grade—which culminated in a Shakespeare play at the end of the year—Maria was able to know herself better and to rethink some of her views and behaviors. The first unit of the course was called “the art of speech.” It was about practicing talking in unusual ways and doing some strange exercises like lifting up a chair without making noise. In the first few classes, everyone was shy and hesitant and feeling a bit ridiculous, but at some point, “there was a ‘boom!’” and people became really engaged and extroverted. Maria realized it was actually cool to try something different with her voices and movements, and since the whole group was going through the same process, there was no reason to be embarrassed. On the day of the presentation to the community, Maria felt butterflies in her stomach, the insecurity for “not knowing whether it would work out well.” Yet she enjoyed it. Through the experimentation and interaction of characters during their practices, the classmates deepened their sense of being in a group. The characters interacted and allowed them to get closer to classmates with whom they were not so close before. The class has always been like a big family, but through acting the relations became even more authentic.
The frequent school fieldtrips provided many more of these bonding moments. One of Maria’s favorites was a cave expedition in middle school, when she spent four days together with all her classmates, exploring dark and scary caves with lots of spiders, stalactites, and stalagmites. One day, the group was deep inside the cave when the guide asked everyone to turn off their flashlights. She suddenly found herself in a total blackout. It was suffocating for the first minutes, but then a friend touched her shoulder and they immediately began to laugh together. To Maria, the experience was at once terrifying and amazing. In a world increasingly marked by individualism, fear, and competitiveness, she returned home with an embodied and lively understanding of the value of camaraderie and trust in overcoming challenging situations.

This year, Maria has become more active at school. She joined the Gremio (a student association) and a feminist group. With the Gremio, she organizes games and other events such as quizzes and debates, and takes students’ requests and complaints to teachers and coordinators. With the feminist group, she participates in discussions about women and gender-related themes and contributes to the poster board that the group has on the patio.

Figure 11. Illustration of Maria's story by student-participants
This chapter analyzes the stories presented in the Chapter 4. It is divided into three sections. In the first two sections, I address the first and second subsidiary research questions (i.e., how students experience connectedness within and beyond school), as they intersect with the three interrelated dimensions of students’ experience of connectedness: connectedness with the self, with others, and with the world. Findings from each school site are discussed separately. In the last part of the chapter, I address the third subsidiary research question (i.e., how students reconcile their experiences within and beyond their schools), this time across the two schools.

5.1 How do Students Experience Connectedness in their Daily Lives Outside School?

The Integral School

Connectedness with the self. In the process of character building, students construct Elisa as a representation of themselves—a girl around their age who emigrated from a small town to Belo Horizonte and enrolled in the Integral School. We can even notice, in one of Elisa’s portraits created by a student in the group, the same tension that they carried in some of our Encontros. When it comes to Elisa’s physical appearance, however, the representation becomes less accurate. First, Elisa’s straight, dyed purple hair looks very different from the curly dark hair that student-participants have. Then, there are the eyes: two students wanted a green-eyed girl, although at the end the group decides on a brown color. After some indecision about her skin color (this is a literal translation; race is not named), the group decides she will be parda (brown). It is noteworthy that the conversation gravitates around skin color rather than race,
Carvano, 2008). Considering that the five student-participants were African Brazilians, I see three possible forces that may interplay here. On the one hand, the choice of the term *parda* as one of Elisa’s defining traits may result from the influence of white supremacy (Hooks, 1992) and eurocentrism (Amin, 1989); on the other hand, it may indicate the adoption of a *whitening* ideology, which is a well-studied mechanism of social inclusion (Domingues, 2002). In Brazil, the whiter the person, the easier it is to access social spaces. In that sense, “whitening” Elisa might have been a strategy to give her an “easier life.”

The aspect that I would like to highlight from this discussion (or lack of discussion) on race is the fact that it denotes a *disconnect in terms of racial identity* and perhaps the lack of the necessary criticality to tackle it. In Brazil, racism manifests in a veiled form. It was only after the redemocratization in the late 1980s that the “myth of racial democracy” has begun to be deconstructed. In 2010, for the first time, Black/mixed-race citizens have outnumbered White citizens in the national census (IBGE, 2010), which may not be due to an increase in birth rates, but an effect of the growing debate on racial identity sparked by the affirmative action implemented in the beginning of the 2000s (Paixão & Carvano, 2008). In my school observations, I have witnessed the theme of race being addressed one time in a literature class, and several times as part of informal conversation between instructors and students, and in a conversation between the principal and a small group of students. I have also seen it as the theme of messages on notice boards and artwork on school walls (as will be described later in this

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22 The discourse of “racial democracy” (Nascimento, 1978) has been hegemonic in Brazil for a long time, based on the fact that, after the end of slavery, the country has never experienced legal segregation like the *Jim Crow laws* in the United States. This myth has been gradually challenged with the rise of the black movement since redemocratization in the late 1980s (Carneiro, 2018).

23 In 2003, when the Workers’ Party took over the national government, a Ministry for the Promotion of Racial Equality was created to implement affirmative action and anti-racism laws.
section). However, Elisa’s story indicates that these interventions have not been sufficient to promote an attitude of “wide-awareness” (Greene, 1995, p. 35) in which they question the “taken-for-granted.” In particular, they do not show political clarity to question and disrupt the reproduction of racist patterns (Tupper, 2006).

Moving further in the process of constructing Elisa’s identity, students seem to circumvent subjectivities and keep a rather outward look, drawing on clichés to define her: “a girl who likes shopping malls, cars, cell phones, food, jewelry, butterflies, and rainbows.” If there is any pattern on this list, it may be that all the items are symbols of status or happiness widely disseminated by the mass media. Butterflies and rainbows are classic elements in children’s cartoons often associated with joy and peace, while the rest of the list gathers emblematic consumption dreams in capitalist societies. Students reproduce these media-crafted symbols in a rather unconscious manner, without pondering what they actually mean to them (Carlsson-Paige, 2001), or the feelings and memories that they elicit (Zajonc, 2008). For example, what does the car represent in her life? Is it a means for exploring new places? Does it contribute to her autonomy? Likewise, what precisely attracts her to butterflies and rainbows? Is it the feeling of wonder they awaken? Or memory from her childhood?

Accompanying this disconnectedness from subjectivity is an absence of reflexivity about daily experiences. For example, students define a perfect weekend program as a “stroll at the mall,” “watching people, eating burgers, and buying a DVD if there is still money.” However, they do not question if this experience is somehow influenced by consumption-driven propaganda, or whether it is limited by their economic power. Assuming the attitude of a global citizen (Bigelow & Peterson, 2002; see also Andreotti, 2010; Gaudelli, 2016) would imply a more critical view of these experiences. For example, is there a more fulfilling form of
entertainment besides “watching people?” Anything they would like to taste besides hamburgers?

When discussing Elisa’s profession, students put three very distinct ideas on the table. The first one was being a “fashion stylish.” The second idea was becoming a teacher, which was quickly replaced by a “police officer with a gun.” I was very intrigued by the emphasis that students placed on “having a gun.” If having a gun is already implied in the profession of a police officer, why did they want to underline this feature in their narrative? As the narrative continued, it became clear that the gun represented two key elements that students seek in their life: safety and power: “As a cop, you can stay safe in the car, just observing and giving orders, and everyone respects you”; “with a legal gun you protect yourself and other people”; “I want to be a coronel, for coronels can do whatever they want. I would send two officers to each school.”

Surprisingly, the conversation returns to the original idea, and the group agrees that Elisa will be a fashion designer. Without elaborating much on the whys and hows of this choice, the group fasts forward to Elisa’s graduation and to her move to Paris, where she “marries an enchanted prince.” Here, students reproduce again what they get from media, drawing on three classic clichés disseminated by hegemonic culture: college diploma, fashion in Paris, and “enchanted princes.” There is no attempt to question the cultures of individualism, eurocentrism, and patriarchalism that underlie this narrative (Andreotti, 2010).

The next movement in the narrative is also very telling of how difficult it is for this group of students to sustain their dreams. After a short time living up her dream in Paris, Elisa’s “prince” suddenly becomes aggressive, reproducing a pattern they all are familiar with. The significance that this episode has to the group—girls in particular—becomes evident in the picture spontaneously sketched by one of the girls during our second encontro. It depicts Elisa
ready for the confrontation with her aggressor (Figure 12), which is implicit not only in the gestures, but also in the written message: “I may be afraid, but that does not mean I cannot defeat.” The illustration contradicts with the oral narrative, in which students evade the conflicting situation rather than confronting it. Similar to when the protagonist moves to Paris to flee from the problems that surrounded her in Brazil, now she abandons her career and flies back to her home country to escape the aggressive partner. During the storytelling exercise, none of the students—not even the author of the illustration—questioned this situation. In hindsight, I wonder whether the presence of male students intimidated the female participants to manifest their will, and how I could have encouraged them to speak up.

![Figure 12. A second portrait of Elisa, after being a victim of aggression](image)

**Connectedness with others.** In the *Integral School*, the stories about Elisa’s out-of-school experiences centered around the protagonist, with little development on Elisa’s relationship with other characters, who are presented in a rather superficial, even stereotypical, way. The husband is the “aggressor,” the brother is “drug-addicted,” and the uncles are the “traffic-dealers.” Contrasting these stereotypes with other stories that students shared during the *encontros*, I would argue that these relationships mirror other situations that they have witnessed in their
lives, such as domestic and street violence. It might be that the feelings of fear and oppression that are elicited by these painful memories inhibit the construction of more complex characters because they handicap the development of empathy.

Another element that stands out in the narratives is the absence of adults who can model relationships based on connectedness. Elisa spends most of her time at home, where her parents seem to be too trapped by the “liquid times” (Bauman, 2000) to be good models of genuine relationships. Elisa’s mother is always tired from working all day out as a nanny, and spends her free time navigating on social media with her phone. Elisa’s stepfather is a security guard who works night shifts and sleeps during the day. The family is a typical example of the struggle to be included in a globalized world (Sassen, 2014) and of the negative impact of economic globalization in the social relations of vulnerable populations (Santos, 2000). Students in the group can relate to this situation, and in particular to the indifference that the Elisa experiences at home. As one of the girls shared, “My mother keeps telling me ‘go play with your phone’… the truth is that she doesn’t want to give me attention because she too is addicted to Facebook and YouTube.” And in the virtual world, their disconnectedness is only accentuated. They are either playing games, watching videos, or following celebrities on social media, habits that do not help them to establish deep relationships.

Connectedness with the world. As I made my way to Integral School for the first time, a woman approached me on the bus and told me to keep my cell phone on my pocket. “Esse lugar não é bom; se cuida” (This place is no good; take care”), she alerted me. I had taken out the phone out to take photos from the window, but after her advice I put it back on my backpack and spent the rest of the trip simply observing the other passengers. Tired bodies, dreary eyes, and many, many headphones connected to cellphones inside their pockets. On my penultimate visit,
students told me that a man had been shot in front of the school the previous evening for some trafficking-related reason, they said. Such situations are routine for students at Integral School.

A question I wrestled with during fieldwork was: “How can one experience connectedness in such a context?” At the Integral School, brutality is not an abstract concept; it is eminently real. And so is its root cause, disconnectedness. In the students’ narrative, it appears in the form of physical sensations (“Sometimes I feel suffocated, and with the ears congested by so much noise”) or in their memories (the father beating the mother, the uncle sleeping with a gun under their mattress, the days begging for money after the move to the city). It’s also present in descriptions of their routines, through elements like fights, trafficking, drugs, and noise (“I stay home for most of the day; if I need to leave for groceries, I look down and walk fast as if I were in a game”).

The focus of students’ attention remains on immediate, day-to-day issues, and there is little thought for the bigger picture. It was initially odd to me that the students should mention the pavement as a public policy priority, since I had expected them to talk about inequality, violence or other pressing social problems. However, when they explained that with paved streets “kids could go safely to school without having their shoes covered by mud,” it became apparent that the pavement meant something very different to those students than to myself—a middle class white woman who recently moved to a non-paved street as a conscious choice to live in a rural environment. For this group of socially excluded adolescents, pavements and paved roads represent safety, access to public services (facilitating the circulation of trucks, garbage trucks, police cars, etc.) and a better school experience. Discussing this with the principal, she told me that on rainy days it was very common for kids to come to school wearing flip flops, so as to keep their single pair of sneakers clean. But a side effect of this, she said, was
that students end up being excluded from activities that require sneakers, like physical education.

In a nutshell, pavement—or a lack of—has direct implications on the well-being of the students.

What does this conversation tell us about the way these students connect with the outside world? It suggests a pragmatic perception of reality, where the starting point is the struggles in their routine. In my interpretation, much of their energy, time, and thoughts are consumed by daily efforts to access basic rights that are not guaranteed by the State. This is already so challenging that their attention remains mostly on their surroundings, without much interest in other contexts. A student verbalized this point in her narrative when she affirmed that Elisa did not follow the news because “she has already enough problems to deal with in her own community.” Nonetheless, the narrative also suggests that other parts of Elisa are curious and open to other realities. For example, they define Elisa as a candanga, and imagine her moving to Paris by herself after graduation. While this term most commonly refers to workers who migrate from rural to the urban areas, students defined it as “adventurer” or “explorer”\textsuperscript{24}, which could be further explored as a self-defense strategy to exalt the moving to the city as an act of courage rather than an economic necessity.

How do students respond to this context which deprives them from living out their subjectivities? The most evident response is a constant state of alertness. The narratives point to

\textsuperscript{24} As I searched for the word Candango, I found different meanings. Etymologically, it comes from kungundu, which means “villain” in Quimbundo (today, one of the official languages in Angola), and was used to refer to the Portuguese slave traffickers. Historically, it was a depreciative term used in the 1950s to refer to those who migrated to the central region of the country, usually coming from vulnerable areas of the Northeastern region, to work on the construction of the State capital, Brasilia (Trevisan, 2012). With time, the word has lost the negative connotation and began to refer to all Brasilia residents. A famous monument in the capital, previously called “Os Guerreiros” (The Warriors) has been renamed as “The Candangos” in honor of the workers (Secretaria de Educação do Paraná). I checked with the school principal, one teacher and one instructor to see if the meaning given by students was widespread. Two of them refer to it as someone who migrated to the big city from the countryside, and one specifically mentioned migrants from the Northeast.
a sensation of powerlessness and to a refusal to take responsibility: “It is up to politicians to do something.” Previous studies have argued that adolescents are often overwhelmed and paralyzed when confronted with the complex challenges of today’s world (Myers, 2008). This may be even truer in the particular case of students from the Integral School, where these challenges are not abstract concepts, but lived experiences. In fact, the narrative of Elisa suggests three distinct strategies used by students to cope with this frightening reality. The first is a self-imposed isolation. In Elisa’s story, the protagonist barely occupies the public space, except for short incursions to the grocery store and to her school. The second strategy is seeking distraction in the virtual world. Elisa says most of her free time is spent on electronic games or on Youtube videos. “I am so addicted to the screen that, when I don’t have connection, I keep playing with the little dinosaur.” The idea of engaging with an animated icon that appears on the screen when there is no internet connection, but which does nothing but repetitive jumps, is emblematic of an anesthetic state (Greene, 1995) that seems to characterize the way the students engage with the world.

What stands out to me is that most of the games they play actually mirror their own reality, with guns, shootings, and persecution, and in fact offer little escapism from a violent reality offering instead just virtual violence. It appears, however, that the games allow the students to cease their role as victims, and allow them to become the winner, the killer, the oppressor. In other words, through the games, they seem to find the power that seems to be inaccessible to them in the real world.

The third strategy is an apparent withdrawal from the discussion of social issues. The students seem to have a hard time translating their personal concrete experiences to wider
reflections about the reality of the world in which they live. In Elisa’s story, there is a passage where students describe a situation of injustice in a very authentic way:

I think injustice is when a homeless person is not free to go to a bakery and buy some food—if you are dirty, people think you will steal something, even if you have the money. Or when you get onto the bus and everyone looks at you because you are poor… To me, this is injustice… When you do not have freedom.

Yet, despite this accurate description and intuitive reflection, students seem to lack vocabulary and political clarity to translate this life experience into a more consistent statement around the concepts of injustice and freedom. In general, they struggle to move from intuitive knowledge to more profound reflections about structural social problems (Freire, 1984/1968).

**The Waldorf School**

*Connectedness with the self.* In the *Waldorf School*, the process of character creation was very telling of how students engage with their subjectivities. The first question they asked me was whether they could use the board. As I replied positively, one of the students took a chalk and drew a face without eyes, mouth or hair; only the outline of the face (Figure 13). Then, she turned to the group and asked, “Boy or girl? Or transgender?” One participant argued that choosing a transgender character would make the story more interesting, as they would find more challenges in today’s world. Another one pondered that no one in the group was transgender, so they would not be able to relate so much. “Does she really need to have a gender?” asked the student with the chalk. “Can’t she be genderless?” As I observed them, I wondered how much of that hesitation was influenced by the debate on gender that was trending
on Brazilian media at that moment. To my surprise, however, one of the students came up with a completely unexpected idea: “What if she is an elf? An elf with yellow clothes and blue shoes…” Everyone laughed, someone commented something like, “Man, we are really Waldorf…” and they finally decided for a girl.

The student with the chalk added some hair to the shape on the board. “Is she happy?” They agreed that the protagonist was a fairly happy girl, and the face gained a smile and some dimples—no eyes, though. Someone suggested that Maria could be mixed race, but the group agreed that a white girl would better reflect the group. Next, they picked the most common feminine name in Portuguese—Maria (Mary, in English)—and moved on to her social characteristics, pondering each of the suggestions before adding them to the checklist on the board. “When we say ‘middle-class’, do we mean upper middle-class or lower middle-class?” “She could live a little further down in the country…like in Itu [a middle-sized town one hour away]?” “No, Itu is a place for rich people.” “How many buses does she take?” “I think her parents could be something very different, like… astrophysicists.”

25 For context, there was a heated gender debate on Brazilian media at the time I was doing my fieldwork. One of the presidential candidates (who ended up winning the election months later) engaged on a campaign against what he called “gender ideology.” The campaign influenced the creation of conservative policies, like banning schoolbooks that used gender terminology (as happened in the Integral School); on the other hand, it triggered conversations on gender on social media, that spread amongst families, schools and, most importantly, groups of youth.

26 As I was analyzing the data, I was intrigued with the absence of the eyes. I asked the students if that was intentional, and they explained that at school they were taught to draw faces with minimal traces. According to Steiner, this would foster children’s imagination as the expressions would be constructed within themselves.”
From my observation of this process, I could draw a few inferences about the ways in which this particular group of students connect with their selves. First, there was an appreciation of the subjectivities, often expressed through metaphoric language (e.g., when one participant presents herself as “the sunflower that always looks at the sun”). Maria became a “happy girl” before any external characteristics were defined, and part of her character was defined by elements that we may consider as typically “soul-nourishing” like nature, books and music (Bennett, 2001; Lantieri, 2001).

A second point that stood out in this process was students’ awareness of their privileged place in society, as we can derive from their conversation on gender or their questioning of social class. On the other hand, the joke about the “elf”—even though it was a joke and was quickly dismissed—might sound like an attempt to escape real life’s conflicts and to perpetuate the magical world that is nurtured in Waldorf kids from a very young age (Almond, 1994). As a “Waldorf mother,” I am familiar with the “fairy world” that involves Waldorf schools, and I wonder how students transition from a world that is essentially “kind and beautiful” to one where

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27 When I was doing my pilot study in California, I learned that Waldorf students were often called “fairy kids,” for the way they dressed, played, and talked looked like they lived in a parallel world of fantasy.
difficult truths like inequality, violence and injustice become concrete challenges. According to Steiner’s (1996) stages of development, this is a situation typically lived by adolescents. A comment made by one of the participants after watching the warm-up animation clip28 in our first *Encontro* shows how this mediation is not easy to him. He affirmed that sometimes he identifies himself as a little boy feeling like an outlier in a world of numbness (Greene, 1995), but at other times he goes with the flow and behaves like the alienated masses, “even though [he] does not like where it is taking [him].”

Finally, as students negotiated Maria’s characteristics, they displayed a reflexive and dialogical attitude. In fact, this reflexive stance was a key characteristic of the participant-students in the Waldorf School throughout the five *Encontros*, as if stopping to reflect upon their daily lives was a habit that they cultivated. The passage in Maria’s story when she realizes she was spending too much time on Instagram and decided to delete the app “to see how she felt” is a good concrete example of this reflexive attitude (this was a “real” personal experience shared by one of the students, which was incorporated in the story).

*Connectedness with others.* It is in the realm of the social interactions that student-participants from the Waldorf School perceive the phenomenon of disconnectedness more intensely. They feel that relationships are “too superficial” and that many people are more “concerned with their selves” and with “taking selfies” than with “looking at the other people around them,” a concern shared by many critics of the rise of individualism in today’s globalized world (Elliot & Lemert, 2006; Orozco, 2008). “We are turning into an isolated thing.” A student pinpointed the *ego* as the central problem that has been undermining social interactions. “We are

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28 Are you lost in the world like me?” by Steve Cutts.
becoming bigger and bigger, but we are not growing together; we are growing individually, and this won’t take us anywhere.” Another participant suggested that this rise in egocentrism may be due to the advent of social media. “People are always seeking likes, but what difference does this make? What will that add to my life?” In a comment that seems a perfect description of what Dewey (1980/1916) referred to as “egoistic specialists,” the same student ponders: “The ego makes us bigger while at the same time it reduces the others to an icon—an icon from Instagram, Snapchat or Facebook.”

Students’ responses to this movement towards social fragmentation (Bauman, 1995) comes in two distinct forms. In some parts of the narrative, they demonstrated a feeling of hopeless (“Sometimes I lose faith in humanity;” “This will not end well”), which seems to paralyze their actions (Myers, 2008). In other moments, an attitude of agency stems from their heightened awareness (Bigelow & Peterson, 2002). In Maria’s story, her effort to limit the time she spends online despite her easy access to devices and Wi-Fi networks stands out. When I asked the group to explain what motivated her to do so, they argued that she “realized that the time she spends virtually had no meaning.” So, “she preferred to spend more time in the real world, in place where she feels she belongs, like the school, doing things she likes, with real people.”

Influenced by the imminent presidential election, the conversation at some point diverted to the realm of politics. In a demonstration of strong critical thinking, students related egocentrism, and the movement of disconnectedness in general, to the political polarization and to the loss of dialogical attitude:

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29 Fieldwork took place amid a heated electoral campaign.
In a democracy, we need to debate the ideas… And it is difficult to debate politics, or any other issue, with people that have big egos… These people defend ideas that no longer make sense just because they were taught to be always right... They should see more naturally the idea of changing their minds.

The heightened criticality also became evident in their critique about the gun liberalization project that has been heatedly debated since 2018.

Some people now argue that democracy means anyone should be allowed to have a gun at home if they wish… This is such a contradiction; guns are used to eliminate others, and democracy is about saying what you want to say without attacking the other… You cannot want to eliminate the other only because they have a different point of view.

This comment deeply resonates with Dewey’s (1980/1916) theorization of democracy as the “art of living together.” It shows a capacity to appropriate key democratic concepts and contextualize them to their daily lives.

**Connectedness with the world.** The first thing that stands out in the way participants from the *Waldorf School* engage with the world is their level of awareness and concern about reality, particularly around environmental issues. In the second *Encontro*, when they were asked to bring images that represented their main concerns in today’s world, the entire group selected photos of environmental problems, with the exception of one female student who raised the issue of violence. Discussions addressed both global and local environmental problems, going from major current issues like waste disposal, to more recent and less explored issues, like the decline in bee populations. One participant brought photos he had taken in a road construction site near his house (Figure 14), which has been a polemic issue for many years in Sao Paulo due to the environmental impact of these works on a protected area of native forest. As the group discussed
the image, they demonstrated knowledge about the matter, but also a capacity to connect it with the impact on their individual lives and their personal responsibilities, like when one student shared that, “It is difficult to say ‘no’ to something that will considerably reduce your travel time, even though you are aware of the environmental damage it will engender.”

Figure 14. Deforestation provoked by road construction in Sao Paulo metro area

The discussion about violence—the other issue raised by the students—was less profound. The group was highly engaged in the topic, even though they had no image to draw upon30; however, students’ comments lacked the concreteness that characterized the accounts from the Integral School. It sounded as if violence (and physical violence in particular), in their case, was experienced in an imaginary space, rather than being something they had personally experienced. In other words, violence did not seem to be something they face in their daily lives, but a latent fear based in other people’s reports.

A question that arises, then, is to what extent these imagined experiences influence the way these adolescents connect with the world. Based on the episode of the bus, I would say that

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30 As part of the methodology, I had requested that students brought images of issues that concerned them in today’s world. This particular student forgot to bring hers, so I asked her to explain verbally what she would have represented.
imagination encourages them to look at their own lives from a different perspective, from where they can acknowledge and question their privileges—like when they described the assault as a “fall from paradise” and Maria’s reality as a “bubble where the world was still good and beautiful.” Yet, it does not seem sufficient to enable them to fully grasp the violent reality lived by those outside her bubble, as we can infer by the way that the bus episode is left unconcluded. It is unclear what exactly happened to Maria, how she felt after the event, what the consequences were, how other people reacted, and what happened to the man. In a nutshell, it seems that students lacked lived experiences to elaborate on this part of the story. On the other hand, the fact that Maria’s story actually begins with the assault cannot be overlooked. To me, it suggests a movement to highlight violence as a major social concern, even though it is not something that marks their daily lives.

The choice of the bus\textsuperscript{31} as the scenario for exploring violence is worth examining. Indeed, the bus entered Maria’s story even earlier, during the process of character construction. The group agreed that Maria commuted to the school by public bus; not only that, but it seemed important that her route included a transfer, which extended her commute. What symbolic meanings can be attributed to the bus? An element that occupies so much space in the imaginary of student-participants must signify more than a means of transportation. Recollecting my own memories, I remembered that my first rides on public buses also happened on my way to school. They were rare, as my father worked in the same school, and I usually rode with him. So, bus rides were special moments that gave me a taste of freedom, of venturing in the social world all by myself. I loved to observe the other passengers, to chat with the ticket officer, and like Maria,

\textsuperscript{31} As previously clarified, bus here refers to regular public transportation, not school bus.
to look through the windows. And through those windows, the world looked different. I revisited these memories not so long ago, when I conducted the pilot study that preceded this dissertation. On that occasion, buses were mentioned by one of my interviewees as spaces where he could have social interactions with people different than him.

What I see in common in these experiences is the role played by buses as enablers of adolescents’ first independent contact with the public space. In the case of the Waldorf School, I see the scene where Maria “looks through the windows” as a metaphoric representation of the attitude towards public issues that student-participants demonstrated in the research. They were genuinely interested and concerned, but they were still in a position of observers rather than activists. In a world where young people tend to spend a considerable part of their time in front of screens, this is not a small deed. Indeed, throughout the encontros students established connection between different phenomena (e.g., “When we consume, we discard, we pollute, so we contribute to the environmental problems”), shared critical reflections about their own attitude (“We see the trash we produce, the bees we kill, and yet we do nothing to stop it”), and showed unique perspectives on reality (“Violence is a consequence of a weak spirituality”). Yet, despite owning these awareness tools, a sense of powerlessness and insecurity seemed to hinder their movement from observers to more active engagement with the public space (“I know that our power as individuals is limited”). This might be the reason why they make Maria wait to practice activism in adulthood, through their work. Their argument to wait to “engage on something that [they] live” is closely aligned with Steiner’s (1991) argument that individuals should be first equipped with awareness and creative capacity to then engage in the renewal of society.
5.2 How do Students Experience Connectedness within the School?

The Integral School

*Connectedness with the self.* The narrative of Elisa’s school experiences points to a movement toward stronger reconnection with the self, particularly when students participate in or remember the morning classes. This movement became evident to me, for example, when I observed the African-Brazilian dance classes. The students, mostly African Brazilians, danced with contentment and pride, as captured by the Figure 15:

![African-Brazilian dance class: building identity and self-esteem](image)

Figure 15. African-Brazilian dance class: building identity and self-esteem

As I observed the class, I was particularly drawn to the way that kids looked at the mirror, as there was something authentic and powerful in their smiles. After that day, I noticed several other school situations during which students had similar expressions of contentment, curiosity, and self-esteem, like when they were making braided bracelets in the indigenous handicraft course, harvesting, or practicing Taekwondo skills. Although students never framed it this way in our conversations, I would translate these moments as opportunities for them to explore their cultural, ethnic, and racial identities (Padilha, 2007).
There was a particular moment during one of our *encontros* when the value of these cultural explorations became evident. It was when one of the students remembered the day she visited the quilombola community where she attended religious rituals with her parents. The experience was so meaningful to her that she wanted to include in Elisa’s story. And it was meaningful because it changed the way she perceived the quilombola community and the *Candomblé*[^32], the religion practiced by her family. As the student shared,

before, [she] was very ashamed to talk about it with [her] classmates, because they would say [she] was into witchcraft. With the visit, they were able to see with their own eyes how beautiful that place is—full of nature. Plus, the gardening instructor explained that *Candomblé* came from African religions and that is why [they] do the dances and use those costumes. There is nothing to do with witchcraft.

Given her excitement in narrating this experience, I would say that the visit to the quilombola community not only served to affirm her cultural and religious identity, but it has also empowered her to speak up.

The library is another space that invites students to explore cultural diversity. One student-participant who considers religion a strong part of his identity shared a personal story about the importance that the library has in his life. He remembered the day when he found books about Greek mythology and religion and said that since that day he spends most of his free time there. “I have a special shelf where I hide the books I am reading; this way I am sure nobody will take them before I finish them. Nobody else is interested in those themes, so I think it is OK, right?”

[^32]: An Afro-Brazilian religious tradition rooted in the Yoruba culture from West Africa.
Something that caught my attention the first day I entered the library was an entire display section dedicated to African-Brazilian literature, beautifully decorated “to inspire students,” according to the librarian (Figure 16). There are similar display sections on ecological agriculture, indigenous culture, and poetry. In a conversation I had with the librarian, she explained that she selects books that may help students understand the current times, besides preparing temporary displays according to the themes that teachers are addressing in the classroom. When I asked her about the absence of feminist or gender-related material, she justified, visibly uncomfortable, that the municipal board of education has banned most of those books for considering that they disseminate a “gender ideology.” She affirmed that the library still has some material, but they cannot be given too much visibility because most of the families have bought into the government’s narrative, and are constantly on the look-out for material they consider inappropriate. Put another way, despite the efforts that the school makes to support students in the affirmation of their identities, an essential piece of this process—related to gender identity—is hindered by a null curriculum (Eisner, 1985) imposed from above. This “glitch” in the narrative is a reminder of the inevitable overlaps between students’ experiences within and beyond school, since the disconnecting forces typical from “the outside world” are constantly permeating the school environment.
Another element that stands out in the narrative is the role of the arts in students’ reconnection with their selves. The arts not only create space for students to develop different representations of themselves and of the world (Batallollo, 2011), but they also seem to open up the students for inward movement, through which they are able to reconnect with their sentiments (Miller, 2000), and acknowledge and represent them—at times with metaphoric language, at others with concrete situations. The potential of the arts became clear to me after I observed students’ attitudes in our meetings. The times I gave them opportunity to use the arts to reflect upon Elisa’s identity—for example, making collages, writing poems, or drawing Elisa’s storyboard—their subjectivity emerged. During the creation of the storyboard, one of the students asked if she could draw the sea. I wondered why she wanted to draw the sea, and she explained that the sea represented freedom, and freedom was “something that made Elisa happy.” “Can anyone be freer than a fish on the sea?” she thought out loud, as she drew a fish jumping out of the water, in metaphoric language that clearly contrasts with the superficiality with which Elisa was described at the beginning of the narrative.

Indeed, students themselves seem to have a good perception of the effect that the arts can have on one’s feelings, as suggested by the part of Elisa’s story where she and her classmates
painted the school walls and gate—in fact, a real project that the group undertook a couple of years ago (Figure 17), or when students described the choir and dance presentations. The narrative suggests three main effects of the arts in students’ lived experiences. First, it helps them mediate negative or oppressive feelings, sometimes even transforming them into positive ones (“She felt an inner peace like she had never felt before, as if feelings like fear, anger, and sadness were melting, going away”). Second, it is through the arts that students reopen their senses towards the world, and re-encounter a sensitivity that is often suffocated by the oppressive surroundings. Third, through the arts students acknowledge and reconnect with their capacity to create beauty (“She became happy and proud to create something so beautiful”) while also building confidence and self-esteem (“The audience would always applaud loudly, making us feel proud”). As someone who has always encountered recognition of my work, it took me some time to understand the symbolism of these applauses. They are key to making students realize that they were actually creating something worth sharing. As such, they empower them to have a more active role in society.

Figure 17. Murals painted by students: arts as an emotional outlet
**Connectedness with others.** In one of my school visits, I was at the principal’s office when a female student came in with her father. The girl had been sent home by one of the teachers because she was not wearing jeans, the required attire in the school. The principal holds the student by the hand and left the room with her. After a few minutes they were back, the girl with a happy face and wearing a pair of jeans. As I learned later, the principal understood her embarrassment—that her only pair of jeans were dirty on that day—and she lent her a pair. The situation is so common that the school keeps a few clothes and shoes for students to borrow in these cases.

That day, as I typed in my observation notes, I reflected about the idiosyncrasies of a whole-child school situated in a vulnerable area. In such a context, young people might encounter extra challenges to break with the vicious cycle of disconnectedness in which they are embedded. They might need people who, like the principal in the *Integral School*, have a thoughtful perception of their daily challenges, and who know when to offer them a hand. From a relational perspective, they might need more guidance, more modelling, more care than it would be commonly expected from a school (Meier, 2002).

In my interpretation, what really made a difference in the expression of the student as she returned to the office was not the pair of jeans, but the feeling of being truly seen and cared for (Kessler, 2006; Noddings, 1984). “She [the Principal] wants to know how we are doing; she listens to us until the end.” This attitude, which I witnessed in different situations during my observations—like the way the principal greeted students (Figure 18) —as well as in students’ oral narratives (“I prefer that you arrive a bit later but be here in body and soul”), can be read as a manifestation of empathy, hence, of connectedness with others.
Figure 18. The principal welcomes students at the cafeteria: nurturing caring relationships

Such intimacy (Gaudelli, 2010; Kessler, 2006) and empathy (Noddings, 1984) also characterizes the relation between students and some of their teachers, like the geography teacher. During breaktimes, he is always around the patio, either playing chess with his students or simply listening to them. Another moment of intimacy that I witnessed during fieldwork was the scene of the librarian reading to a group of children—and to the school’s caretaker who stood next to them (Figure 19). Everyone in the group seemed to be fully engaged in the story and in that common space. In my interpretation, what had brought them to this space was not the story per se, but the attitude of the librarian, who invited them to occupy the patio in a different way and created a deeply caring relationship with them.

Figure 19. The librarian reads to a group of students at the patio
The relationship is even closer with the instructors of morning activities. One of the student-participants said that there are conversations that he can only have with instructor—“issues that my mom would never understand.” Several factors might facilitate a close relation between students and instructors. They live in the same neighborhood—in fact, many of them are former Integral School students—so they can relate to much of what the students bring; furthermore, they have more flexibility and freedom in terms of curriculum, giving them more space to build close relationships and promote dialogue.

**Connectedness with the world.** In the part of Elisa’s story that takes place outside school, analyzed earlier in this chapter, her attitude was mostly that of a spectator of a frightening environment that required her to be on a constant state of high alert. Conversely, at school, she is at the center of the narrative. She plays, dances, sings, gardens, paints; in other words, she acts upon the world. Elements like guns, trafficking and violence—which permeate the conversations in the first two encontros—disappear from the school story, and there is an atmosphere of safety and tranquility.

The sight of a student reading comics (Figure 20, left) would not normally draw much attention, but it is particularly meaningful to students from the Integral School, who rarely find a peaceful moment or place at home to be able to read. Likewise, the sight of a group of children fully immersed in pretend play (Figure 20, right), even though they might be too old for that kind of play, shows them enjoying a rare safe environment and gives them an opportunity to catch up with a childhood that has been systematically neglected at home. It is significant that these pictures were taken at an annex to the school called “Casa da Educação Integral” (House of Integral Education), a “real house” rented by the school to host some of their extra-class activities and to allow kids to have some free time where they can interact freely.
In this space, I observed children spread all around the backyard, doing everything from playing boardgames and picking *jabuticaba*\(^{33}\) to reading and pretend playing, always very engaged. Those scenes reminded me that, for those kids in particular, just as important as learning Math or Portuguese is having a *safe* space where they can just be children, where they can expand their sensory experiences and discover new ways of connecting with the world (Batallolso, 2011; Miller, 2010), and where they can interact with each other and experience, in an embodied manner, fundamental democratic skills like tolerance, listening, and negotiation (Dewey, 1980/1916, 1997/1938).

![Figure 20](image)

**Figure 20. School as a safe environment: peace to read, play and connect with the world in different forms**

In Elisa’s story, students also highlight experiences that take place beyond schools’ walls. Fieldtrips are an essential tenet of the curriculum at the Integral School, and at least once a month the students go on fieldtrips (Antunes & Padilha, 2010; Gadotti, 2009). These are either in the immediacy of the school or to museums, parks, markets, sport clubs, and markets in the city center. The narratives point to two major impacts of these activities in the way students connect to the world.

\(^{33}\) Brazilian grape
First, they discover new places and new people in their own neighborhood. I accompanied the gardening group on one of these local hikes to a local creek that the group had “adopted.” The experience at the creek was engaging, with students interacting with nature and cleaning up litter from the area; yet, it was the short walk to the place that stood out to me. Listening to the stories that the instructor shared about the indigenous communities who lived in the area, observing the houses, and making stops every time one saw a different fruit or animal, was such an inspiring way to grasp the area beyond the veil of violence.

Second, when the students move beyond their immediate neighborhood, they have a chance to occupy spaces in the city where they thought they did not belong (Gadotti, 2009a). In general, the group recalled a feeling of discomfort when stepping into these new areas for the first time (e.g., “It looked like they were asking, ‘what are those black kids doing here?’”). Yet, what stands out in the narrative are the feelings of freedom, pleasure, and wonder that followed (e.g., “There was so much green [about a park they visited] … And it was a fresher green, a different green that has not been devastated like here”). I personally accompanied students on two of these trips: to a museum, and to a swimming pool within a sports club (Figure 21). I must admit that at the outset it sounded strange to take students to a swimming pool. But after observing them for a while, I understood that there was something much more profound in that visit. For most of the kids, a big swimming pool was something inaccessible, that they could not afford34, so the pool trip allowed them to experience fun and freedom, to interact with each other, and to embody the idea that they have the right to these feelings. In tandem with the idea of

34 Public pools are extremely rare in Brazil
offering a backyard where kids could just be kids, the pool worked as a place where students could just exercise the right to play that is often denied to them.

![Image](image.png)

**Figure 21. Students on a field trip to a sports club: the right to play**

Either exploring new areas in their neighborhood or occupying new spaces in the city, students seem to be fully engaged in action. This way, they display a very different attitude compared to their description of Elisa’s visit to the mall, where she remained a spectator—“we watch people, eat burgers, and there is still money we buy a DVD movie to watch at home.”

Another point that stands out in the narrative from the *Integral School* is the role of nature in opening up students’ perception toward the world. The image of these two boys playing with ants (Figure 22) speaks close to this. I had been observing them for a while, and was enchanted with the combination of affection, presence, and curiosity that was reflected in the scene. It was only when I got closer to take a picture that I saw that all these inspiring feelings were caused by a little ant—not a special type of ant or anything, just a typical ant. And it was enough to engage them with such presence (Bennett, 2001; Louv, 2008).
I look at the hands of the two little boys as they pet the ants, and the image of an iPad instantly comes to my mind. Would they be as awake and engaged if they were touching a screen instead of touching the earth, or in the same state of wonder? If these are feelings that connect us with the world, they seem to be increasingly rare due to popularization of electronic gadgets. Nature, however, seems to have the power to bring them back. The question that remains, then, is how to make nature as interesting—and accessible—as a computer game.

In one of my school observations, I joined the gardening group on a short excursion to the creek in the local neighborhood. Albeit short, the trip was rich in sensorial experiences. As
we approached the creek, the orangish landscape formed by the unfinished houses was replaced by lush bushes, and the street noise exchanged for water sounds. Students looked totally engaged, some playing with the animals and plants, some cleaning the litter found in the area, and others just relaxing and contemplating. “I like coming here because it is fresh,” one said. On our way back to school, I captured the scene above (Figure 23), protagonized by the instructor. It was only months later, when I was coding the visual material, that I realized how this image related to the previous one. The instructor, one of the most enthusiastic that I met at the Integral School, was continuously modelling a relation with the world that was driven by admiration, wonderment, curiosity, and affection (Bennett, 2001; Boff, 2012; Orr, 2000). This kind of relation is reflected in the previous picture of the two boys, and it is also implicit in the comment of a student-participant about the astronomy sections she took with the Geography teacher (“I had never paid attention to the sky until he showed us the constellations”).

![Figure 24. Re-signifying the world with the hands through the arts and gardening classes](image)

If one part of the move towards connectedness is about fostering different ways to perceive the world, then the other piece seems to be about using the arts to represent it and to transform it. Students, as they represent the world, have an opportunity to read and reflect upon it from different perspectives, and to explore different feelings related to it (Ammentorp, 2007).
For example, at a time when the world is watching the Amazon burn due to disastrous governmental policies, I observed a student drawing a forest on fire (Figure 24, left), inspired by a poem read during the arts class. I wonder how differently the news about the Amazon would be read by youth who have had these aesthetic experiences with the theme. What stays in their memories from these experiences? How do these experiences shape their social imagination (Greene, 1995)?

The gardening classes are another experience in which, like with the arts, students use their hands to transform reality (Figure 24, right). There, the process of transformation begins with one of the most basic and universal elements around—the soil—and is nurtured every day. At school, the vegetables grown and picked by the students are used to prepare their lunch by the school cooks. And, since the garden is located at the center of the school site, right across from the cafeteria, it has a truly irradiating effect, welcoming lightness and color to the grey patio and positively altering the atmosphere of the entire school. I was able to witness the role of the garden within the school dynamic in one of my observation days, when the group were picking basil. Students were so proud of their work that they went around the school distributing branches of the herb. The smell of basil spread through the corridors, disrupting the routine with a combination of lightness and magic.

The idea of “disrupting the routine” is important to remind that the aesthetic engagements described in the previous paragraphs represent only one part of the experience of students attending the Integral School. In many of the classes, teachers still employ a traditional model of education based on fragmented knowledge that does not always seem relevant to the students. Indeed, students clearly perceive a divide between what they call “the morning school” and the “afternoon school,” when they have the so-called regular classes (“In the morning, we are always
learning, running after things. In the afternoon, I look at the board and think about so many other things I could be doing with my time”). The divide is evident in their body language too. The sense of presence that students exude during the morning activities is replaced in the regular classes by a jaded expression. During my observations, I saw several students with headphones hiding their phones under their desks. These headphones, I would argue, can be seen both as a form of escapism and as a strategy of silent resistance, in which students refuse to engage with learning that does not seem meaningful to them. In an attempt to understand what makes a “regular class” an aesthetic experience, I looked at the way students describe the geography classes in Elisa’s story, always related with interest and enthusiasm. Students highlight elements like curious stories, interesting visual material like globes and pictures and, above all, the opportunity to share their own experiences and debate about what is going on in the world. “He lets us talk, and if someone has stories about the place we are studying, he wants to listen.” In that sense, they corroborate Gaudelli and Hewitt’s (2010) argument that engaging debates around issues related to students’ lives can engender highly aesthetic experiences in the classroom. As the example shows, these debates must be facilitated by teachers who truly care for the students and who nurture a genuine interest towards them.

The Waldorf School

*Connectedness with the self.* The narrative of Maria’s school experiences was rich in introspective moments when students paused, after the description of an event, to ponder about the meanings it had to them, often switching from third to first person. They spoke with such eloquence that it sounded like it was not the first time that they were engaging in those thoughts. On the contrary, it sounded like the search for purpose/signification was an embodied habit, just
like a mindfulness in ordinary moments of life (Carosson-Paige, 2001; Lantieri, 2001; Miller, 2010).

One of the narrative moments when this habit became evident was the one when students described Maria’s experience at the *Festa Junina*. The festival appeared several times in the story, being depicted as a sublime moment that awakened different emotions and feelings—a truly aesthetic experience. First, there was a combination of awkwardness, fear, and wonder that Maria felt in her first contact with the unusual ritual of lighting and dancing around the bonfire. Then, when she moved from a spectator to an active participant in the ritual, awkwardness was replaced by a strong feeling of belonging—described as “becoming the fire, the flame, the heat, becoming part of that.” Students compare Maria’s first experience as an observer of the bonfire and later on “carrying the torch” to then conclude that it was only when she was as active participant that she truly grasped the meaning of the ritual. “It is so different to see the fire and to actually make the fire.” In other words, *doing* and *thinking* are closely imbricated. Moreover, I would argue that *doing*, in that sense, is more than hands-on work. It is also entwined with *sensations, emotions, and feelings* awakened by the aesthetic experience of engaging with the fire—such as awkwardness, wonderment, and belonging. In this way, the three dimensions that compose Steiner’s (1981) threefold vision of the individual—hands, heart, and mind—interplay to impregnate students’ experiences with meaning. Students seem to be conscious of this process when they use the phrase “embedded in meaning” to describe what they do school.

We can see this interplay of doing, feeling, and thinking in different parts of Maria’s story (e.g., the making of the doll, the cob house, or the bike). It was also evident in my observations. One of the moments when this stood out was during the circus class. As I observed students practicing different circus techniques (e.g., juggling, aerial acrobatics, and trampoline), I
noticed that the teacher did not focus on their technical performance; rather, her instructions were directed to the awareness of their bodies (e.g., “move the center of gravity to your belly”). When I spoke with the teacher after the class, she explained that her objective was to make students experience some of the sensations that they will experience in their lives with their bodies. In ninth grade, they practice movements of forward/backward, which is an embodied way to explore the moment that they are living, the transition from past (childhood) and to the future or the unknown (adulthood).

I could also witness students engaged in purposeful doing in different class projects. One of the most illustrative ones was perhaps the “Bike Project” that students carried out in the Technology class (Figure 25). The existence of a purpose behind the project (i.e., understanding the mechanisms and creating with the own’s hands an object that makes complete sense in today’s world) boosted students’ will. This exercise turned what could be just a tiring mechanical practice into an opportunity to develop several attitudes that are essential in the process of connecting with the self, such as mindfulness, resilience, persistence, group work, camaraderie, autonomy, and curiosity (Miller, 2010).

Figure 25. Students in the bike project: developing persistence, confidence, and autonomy
On the storyboard created by students in our fourth encontro, one of the students drew a tree to represent what she considered pivotal in Maria’s school journey (Figure 26). On the trunk, one can read the word maturity; on the leaves, resilience. She explains: “This tree is Maria; it is me, it is us; in all those years [in the Waldorf School], I was able to ripen and to understand who I am; at the same time, I learned to be resilient.” She defines resilience as the capacity “to learn to start again, or to look at a problem and resolve it,” and explains that the tree is resilient “because it always changes but maintains its core.”

![Tree drawing](image)

**Figure 26. A representation of school experience: developing maturity (trunk) and resilience (leaves)**

Students’ engagement in purposeful doing was also evident out of class, for example, as students posted their thoughts on the bulletin boards, as they washed their lunch boxes and organized the kitchen (there is a small one only for students’ use), and as they discussed the school reform during the students’ association meeting. During our last encontro, as students reflected about the main features of their school experiences, they concluded that at the center of their learning was autonomy, which is “useful for many other things, like a special UNO card.” According to them, autonomy helps them develop their “own thoughts instead of pre-established ones”; and in doing so, it helps them “find something to act on,” something they want to change in the world. This explanation, which I find surprisingly complex, suggests a
perception of the individual as the center of social change, which reflects Steiner’s (1991) view of individual consciousness as the key to social renewal.

The curriculum of the Waldorf School abounds in opportunities for students to signify their feelings and emotions through painting, singing, writing, acting, and other arts. Besides facilitating an aesthetic engagement with learning, these artistic works enable students to acknowledge, understand, express, and transform their feelings. As one of the participants explained, the arts are used so much in the school that, for them, it has become a natural process to draw and write as an emotional outlet. This was evident across the many pictures of artwork that I collected during fieldwork, although two of them have drawn my attention in particular for their close relation to images collected in the Integral School. The first one (Figure 27, left) is part of the storyboard that student-participants created in our fourth encontro. I found it fascinating that the sea was used in both schools to express students’ feelings—while in the Integral School it was associated with “freedom,” in the Waldorf School it came with the message “Renova-te” (“recreate yourself”). When I asked the student what she meant with that, she explained that one of the most important gifts that Maria got from school was the possibility to recreate herself every day. And that now, as she is close to graduating, she feels ready to use this capacity elsewhere. The second image depicts a young person seen from the back, looking to a colorful background (Figure 27, right). The similarity with the painting on the gate of the Integral School is evident. While the artistic language is different (in the Waldorf School the background is abstract rather than well-defined drawings, and the person looks older than the child painted in the Integral School), both convey the idea of “looking to the future,” which is a typical attitude from adolescence (Marshak, 2016).
Figure 27. The arts as means to acknowledge, express and transform feelings

The relation between the arts and students’ emotional development was manifested several times across the oral narrative. This is particularly well illustrated by students’ description of drama classes, when they demonstrated their level of awareness in comments like: “At the beginning we had to do all those strange exercises, and I felt a bit ridiculous… but now I see how this helped me leave my comfort zone,” or, “At the same time that we practice for the play, we practice different behaviors, and this helps us understand our individuality.” These comments show the potential of aesthetic experiences to the enhancement of human sensibilities (Houser, 2005). And they also speak close to Boler’s (1999) argument that uncomfortable feelings can be particularly powerful means to make students rethink their attitudes.

Connectedness with others. Participants from the Waldorf School often refer to the school community, in particular their classmates, as a family, which, in this case, is associated with a sense of belonging, trust, and affective relationships. These elements also appear implicitly and explicitly in the visual narrative. I have selected three situations to illustrate them. In the first one (Figure 28, left), ninth graders sketched on the board some features that they want to include in a collective visual plan for the urban mobility of their dream city. In a school with neither uniforms nor a mascot, dreaming together and practicing social imagination (Freire,
1984/1968; Greene, 1995) appear to be a pivotal strategy to nourish the sense of belonging. In the second scene (Figure 28, center), two students helped a classmate to do handstand during circus class, in a beautiful metaphor of how trust and care mediate relationships in the group. Finally, the third image (Figure 28, right) depicts two student-participants working together to build a bike. I selected this image because it represents well the relationships that I observed during fieldwork. In contrast to what many studies describe as typical adolescent behaviors (e.g., stereotyping, bullying, gossiping, social isolation), students’ interactions in the Waldorf School are permeated by camaraderie, kindness, altruism, respect, empathy, and intimacy.

Figure 28. Sharing, trust and camaraderie: elements that permeate students’ relationship

Maria’s story points to two curriculum components that seem key in the cultivation of genuine relationships among students. The first one is the arts, which create a space of experimentation where students can perceive the other and reflect about social interactions. When remembering the drama course, for example, students recognize that the same “weird exercises” that made them feel “a bit ridiculous” also made them more at ease with their classmates, more conscious about stereotypes and excluding behavior, and able to appreciate other sides of their classmates that they had not perceived before. “We have always had this group spirit, but after that drama course, relations have become more fluid.”

The second curricular component that appears to be central in the deepening of relationships in the Waldorf School are the field trips. In part, what contributes to this process is
the extended time that the group spends together in a more informal environment. Yet, what students consider the most relevant factor is the opportunity to share intense emotions. This is illustrated in the following excerpt from Maria’s story, when she is in a dark cave: “It was suffocating for the first minutes, but then a friend touched my shoulder and we immediately began to laugh together.” In that sense, experiencing a challenging situation together seems to open room for the understanding of the values of trust and camaraderie.

To these two points, I would add a third one, from my observation of teacher-student relations in the Waldorf School. In my interpretation, teachers play a fundamental role in modelling the kind of genuine relations that the literature pinpoints as an essential part of connectedness (e.g., Noddings, 1984). This modelling begins with the ritual of teachers greeting each student at the door, looking them in the eyes and asking how they are feeling, and they do that every single day, from first until ninth grade. It continues during the classes, with a humanizing approach to teaching that places equal weight on the content and on students’ development as a person. In one of the history classes I observed, for example, the teacher left the main theme aside to discuss, for over half-an-hour, why it was not acceptable to be a free-rider on a groupwork (something that had just happened). Then, in ninth grade in particular, there is one mandatory course called tutorship, in which one teacher mentors students in their transition from middle to high school, guiding them in the journey of unpacking their subjectivities and of discovering what motivates them to act upon the world. Overall, teachers are constantly reminding students that they are seen and cared for.

Connectedness with the world. Both oral and visual narratives indicate that, when they are within the Waldorf School, students assume an active attitude, as protagonists in the debate
about current issues, as agents in the planning and management of school activities, or as explorers who experiment new ways of engaging the world.

Current affairs are woven in all class subjects, but they are the central theme of a course called *Jornal* (Newspaper, in English), that is mandatory to all ninth graders. In the three sessions that I observed, the group discussed the housing problem in Sao Paulo, Lula’s (the former president) arrestment, and gender disparities in the job market. More than an opportunity to build knowledge about those important themes, I see the class as an exercise of aesthetic engagement with the public space (Gaudelli & Hewitt, 2010; Greene, 1995). To illustrate this point, I take as example one of the sections in which the teacher handed out an internet article about gender wage inequality. After asking students to read in pairs, the first question that he asked was not about students’ interpretation or opinions, but about their feelings. “Do you feel disturbed? If not, why not?” With that, he sparked an engaging discussion, for which a female student had the following answer: “The situation is so normalized that we often do not feel bothered; it is what it is.” After students shared their feelings, the teacher asked them to read the graphs that illustrated the article. The discussion that followed included themes like domestic work, sexism, and cultural reproduction. Even with a limited vocabulary, students seemed comfortable in speaking up and demonstrated genuine interest in the conversation. When the debate was cooling down, the teacher complicated the question by adding a racial perspective to it. The class ended with students reading the article together.

In hindsight, I analyze the sequence of the class as a rich exercise of how to engage with the problems in today’s world from the “inside out,” i.e., first with the heart (understanding the feelings that are awakened and developing empathy) and then with the rational capacities (criticality, different forms of literacy, and the ability to connect different phenomenon).
the conversation with the group reading was, in my interpretation, a symbolic way to evoke the spirit of community (Dewey, 1984)\textsuperscript{35}.

Students’ engagement in current debates can also be seen on the school walls, which are filled with awareness messages and artwork as well as fliers about cultural activities and programs that encourage youth leadership and politically engaged poetry (Figure 29). Two aspects make these noticeboards particularly relevant to the connectedness discussion. First, they are organized and almost fully furnished by students themselves, showing an activism that was absent in the narrative of their experiences outside the school.

\textbf{Figure 29. Posters created by students and posted on the noticeboard: activism on school’s walls}

Second, they display a fascinating blend of political messages and transcendental themes, which becomes even more evident in the next picture (Figure 30). The two posters on the top are subtle calls for action (“Protest is when I say that something bothers me; resistance is when I

\textsuperscript{35} As explained earlier, the Jornal course brings together morning and evening students, being the latter mostly from the surrounding community.
ensure that what bothers me will no longer happen” and “Those who accept evil without protesting cooperate with it”), while the bottom one invites for an existential reflection (“What connects us to the sky.”) This apparent thematic duality suggests that, to these students, there is something common to political and existential questions which makes them themes worth of their mobilization: they are both movements to connect the individual with the world around.

Figure 30. Notice board at the Waldorf School: a call for action, followed by an existential reflection

Students’ protagonism can also be observed in the way they participate in the planning and management of school activities, often through the Gremio Estudantil (student association) or the Coletivo Feminista (feminist collective). Since all but one student-participant were members of the Gremio, I accompanied them in two meetings, which happened during lunch time. In one of them, students discussed the reform of the high school building, which had been announced by the school administration. The goal of the meeting was to gather ideas and send a consolidated proposal from the students. Translating the notes on Figure 31, the list included items for students’ kitchen, anti-mold painting on the walls, a net along the corridor to hang the student-made papyrus, and hooks for backpacks. In the other meeting that I observed, students
were planning the organization of a cultural sarau (a gathering to share poetry and music). The school supported the event by providing the space and the security guards; all the rest, from catering to cleaning, was organized by students. I am hesitant to use the term “student leadership” to define these initiatives, since it places students in a position of differentiation and exceptionality (who are they leading?). Rather, my perception is that students’ participation in the Waldorf School activities is a spontaneous and authentic process, deriving from a sense of belonging and from a genuine responsibility toward the school community—which, indeed, speaks close to Steiner’s perspective on social transformation (Steiner, 1991).

A different dimension of the process that is experienced by students is the exploration of subjective and sensorial interactions with reality. Like in the Integral School, students at the Waldorf School encounter an atmosphere that favors these interactions at school. The pivotal element here, however, is not so much the issue of safety (a condition they also have at home), but the abundance of stimuli and opportunities to explore the world in different ways. This diversity was represented by one of the student-participants in the form of a mandala (Figure 32, Figure 31. List of ideas for the reform of the High School building: exercising participation in the school).
Mandala is a whole formed by several little pieces. Mine will have colors, many colors. I had so many experiences here… I think the colors represent this diversity.” The mandala gives a sense of unity to these various experiences, making them part of an interconnected whole, rather than random and dislocated (Capra, 1975). As the student explained, “The mandala has four symmetrical parts, so an experience that you have in one field of your life will influence the other.”

An important aspect of this diversity of experiences was beautifully described by another student-participant in a haiku she wrote about the school. “Aproveite, criança. Porque se a vida é melodia, aqui a gente dança” (“Enjoy, child, for if life is melody, here we dance”). The message, which she tattooed on her arms with a pen, reminds us that, in their explorations of the world, the students’ attitude is not that of a scientist (observing, understanding, and explaining), commonly associated to schools, but that of a dancer (immersing, creating, and enjoying). Dancing, a metaphor I used at the beginning of this dissertation, is a perfect representation of what Greene (1995) by aesthetic engagement. Good dancers dive into the music with their hearts, body, mind,
and spirit. Good dancers disrupt socially constructed patterns, for they let their bodies be controlled by their souls. Good dancers inspire other people to dance.

While the arts, here represented by the dance, opens important doors for the experiments with connectedness, nature is another powerful vehicle to facilitate this process. In a scene that closely resembles another one that was captured in the Integral School, students interact with a small caterpillar that crawled on a students’ T-shirt (Figure 33, left). In a different one, which represents an activity proposed by a class teacher, a student learns geometry by using a stone, a cord and a stick (Figure 33, right).

![Figure 33. Encounters with nature: wonderment and curiosity](image)

The feeling of wonderment and curiosity evoked by these images is recurrent in students’ accounts of their experiences with nature; however, they are only part of the experience. Equally remarkable in the narrative from the Waldorf School is students’ capacity to convert these positive experiences with nature into an attitude that is at once fulfilling and environmentally concerned (Orr, 2000). An observation of students during lunch break provides a glimpse of this attitude. They sit in groups under the trees, each one holding a glass lunchbox and metal utensils. No plastic, no disposable material. One student eats passion fruit directly from the fruit, throwing
the shell on the compost bin which is installed in the patio—no food waste. Then, each one washes their containers and tuck them into their backpacks. Weekly, local farmers sell their organic vegetables and fruits at the kiosk installed next to the school gate.

Rather than being isolated or unconscious practices, these experiences should be read in dialogue with students’ critical reading of today’s environmental problems, previously discussed. For example, the absence of trash production during lunch is coherent with students’ critique of consumption as the root-cause of the waste crisis—one of the issues evoked in Maria’s story, and later represented by a student on the storyboard (Figure 34). Likewise, the option for organic food represents an individual effort to address the excess use of agrochemicals, which one of the students highlighted as the cause for the decrease in bee populations. When we juxtapose these attitudes at the micro and macro level, it becomes easier to understand the developments that can happen from sublime experiences with nature—emphasized in Rousseau’s (1979/1762) Émile. Students explain that these relations became evident only very recently, when in ninth grade teachers began to approach the world in a more critical way. “Before, it was as if we lived in the bubble of the bubble; everything was like a Disneyworld… ‘The world is beautiful’ [doing air quotes], you know? That is why I have drawn this beautiful planet full of trash, to represent this shift.” When I asked the group how they feel to leave Disneyworld, they all agree it is good to be awake. “If you remain stuck in the Disneyworld, you do not see the problems around you.”
Figure 34. The consumption-waste cycle as a representation of environmental awareness

If, on the one hand, students’ engagement with the world seems to be mediated by critical awareness, on the other hand it also seems to be shaped by a heightened sensitivity that is nurtured in the Waldorf School since a young age through aesthetic encounters and sensory experiences (Steiner, 1985). This sensitivity manifests through the different perceptions and the metaphorical language that students bring to our conversations (e.g., the sunflower, the three, the sea…), but it is particularly noticeable in students’ artwork. I selected two pieces to illustrate this point. One of them was made by a student-participant during our second encontro. She explained that, “we often see only the part, represented by the leaves, and forget that reality is much larger, like the forest here… We need to see the wholeness.” (Figure 35, left) The other one was a charcoal drawing posted on a noticeboard in the classroom, and represents the “fieldtrip to the caves” that the group included in Maria’s story (Figure 35, right). In the first image, I can see sensitivity as something that deepens the process of awareness, by enabling students to establish creative connections that broaden their understanding and the possibilities of transformative action. In the second, I can see in the richness of details (particularly impressive
for a charcoal drawing) a fascinating capacity to perceive, through attuned senses, what others do not perceive.

In my observations, I noticed the existence of some arrangements and features in the *Waldorf School* that facilitate the exercise of sensitivity. First, to increase the full engagement of students in the classroom (a serious issue in the *Waldorf School*), the school installed pockets at the entrance of each classroom where students can leave their devices to disconnect from the virtual world and be fully engaged in class activities. Second, there is a certain flexibility in the use of time, space, and pedagogic resources—compared to the usually strict format of conventional schools. The first class of the day is longer, lasting almost two hours, which allows time for different approaches of the lesson theme—usually combining arts, movement and research. I observed one class in which, before learning about cave painting, students participated in a game of wolves and hunters around the patio. As they returned to the class, sweaty and tired, the teacher made an analogy between their sensation and what humans probably experienced every day in the Paleolithic era. I also observed a literature class in which

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The school follows Steiner’s system of “main lesson blocks,” which consists in electing one subject to be the academic focus for a period of 3-5 weeks (called a block).
students walked around the school blindfolded and holding hands, after which they discussed a passage of a famous Brazilian novel (*Grande Sertão Veredas*, from *Guimarães Rosa*) about a young man facing his fears and crossing a river towards the unknown represented by the other side.

**5.3 How do Students Reconcile their School and Out-of-School Experiences?**

When I decided to focus this study about connectedness in aesthetically-oriented schools, I knew that I would be working in sites that purposefully countered the rationale of disconnectedness that prevails in today’s world. Therefore, it was expected that students’ experience within the school sites conflicted with their daily lives outside. To answer the third subsidiary research question, I sought to understand how students experience this divide, and to unpack the conscious and unconscious moves that they make to reconcile their experiences from the two contexts.

At the *Integral School*, the narrative of Elisa’s out-of-school experiences is permeated by elements such as guns, police, drugs, and aggression as well as by feelings of fear and oppression, while the school stories are composed by elements like nature, arts, and play as well as by feelings of pleasure, wonderment, and discovery. In this school in particular, students also experience a divide within the school, since the principles of integral/whole-child learning have not been fully enacted in the so-called regular classes. This means that, in the afternoon, students are still subjected to the test-driven banking model of education (*Freire, 1984/1968*), which clashes with the experience they have in the morning. Yet, the limited references to the afternoon classes in Elisa’s story suggest that students privilege the aesthetic part of the curriculum represented by the morning activities in their memories.
At the Waldorf School, findings actually indicate some continuity between values, dynamics, and relationships experienced at school and at home. Nevertheless, the conflict becomes evident when we compare students’ experience in the public spheres within and beyond the school—by public spheres I refer to the symbolic spaces where individuals engage in public-oriented matters (Fraser, 1993; Habermas, 1991). The observation of students’ routine as well as of the posts on school’s boards indicates an active engagement in current public debates, through a remarkable feminist lens. It also shows a deep commitment to the nurturing of school’s community life (Dewey, 1980/1916). Conversely, Maria’s story suggests that, when students enter the public spheres outside the school, they seem to hold back from this activism and adopt a more passive position of critical observers. They seem to be daunted by hegemonic habits of consumption, intolerance, and alienation, and intimidated by the prevailing utilitarian, egocentric relations.

At the Integral School, students’ out-of-school experiences seem to infiltrate the school context, generating dissonances and contradictions along students’ narratives and indicating that students’ experiences of connectedness is not a straightforward one. For example, a student who deeply connects with a caterpillar during a walk around the neighborhood may be, a little time later, immersed in the screen of his phone. In that sense, students swing from a state of presence to one of numbness, from a feeling of fulfilment to one of insecurity, and from moments of sharing to others of loneliness. The analysis of students’ narratives shows that they are not always able to mediate these conflicting experiences; in fact, they are often trapped by a binary outlook toward the world. This duality can be visualized in Elisa’s storyboard (Figure 36), which illustrates the life of the protagonist diverging into two paths: the “white path” represents the path walked by Elisa and shaped by her school experience (represented by a book and a
taekwondo uniform), while the “black path” represents the life that she could have lived had she made the same life choices than her brother (represented by blood and a police station turned upside down). This simplistic view of reality also manifests in the way students reproduce preconceptions in their narrative, suggests a low level of reflexivity about their daily lives.

Figure 36. Elisa’s storyboard illustrates the divide between experiences lived within and beyond school

In the case of the Waldorf School, students demonstrate a heightened criticality in their attempt to reconcile this divide between school and out-of-school experiences, as well as an effort to reduce it. For example, the episode when Maria questions her overuse of Instagram [an image-focused social media] and decides to delete the app is a concrete demonstration of their critical attitude, just like the several critiques that they make toward individualism: “The ego makes us bigger while at the same time it reduces the others to an icon—an icon on Instagram, Snapchat or Facebook.”

In both schools, however, the narratives include moments when the protagonists feel overwhelmed or powerless in the face of the highly disconnected world that they encounter outside the school. In those cases, neither critical nor binary thinking seem to be enough to accommodate the conflicts lived by the students, and thus they make a move toward detachment.
In Elisa’s story, it appears that fear prevents students from engaging aesthetically with their contexts, hijacking their sensitivity and their agency and pushing them to the position of passive spectators, mostly confined to their homes. This move also manifests in the strategy to escape to the virtual world, where adolescents use their headphones and screens to disconnect from reality and from real relationships and to immerse in games, music and social media. While the virtual environment often reproduces the real world (e.g., in the shooting games), it also allows students to shift from the position of the oppressed to that of the “winner” or the oppressor. This desire to be the one who has power is also expressed in Elisa’s aspiration to “become a police officer with a gun,” which echoes Freire’s (1980/1967) argument that, when education is not emancipative, the dream of the oppressed is becoming the oppressor.

The move toward detachment is also implied in the narrative moves in which students circumvent potentially conflicting situations, such as when they avoided discussing Elisa’s race, or when they moved her to Paris—and later from Paris back to Brazil—without discussing the situations of oppression that she was escaping from. This narrative resource is also used by the students at the Waldorf School, who several times avoided controversial parts of Maria’s story by resorting to an ideal, imaginary world—like when a student suggests that Maria could be an elf (being a genderless entity seems easier than dealing with actual gender issues), when they consider teaching at a Waldorf School as Maria’s future profession (an attempt to remain in the magic school world), or when a student affirms that “she wishes to take to the external world all that she experiences in the school.” A detachment strategy is implied in those comments because when students chose to dwell in the ideal world, they are escaping from reality rather than confronting it.
At the *Integral School* in particular, detachment is accompanied by another unconscious move, characterized by a mismatch between discourse and practice. In my interpretation, while the school provided students with new perspectives on reality, they have not yet been able to embody these new mindsets. This gap between what students believe and what they actually do can be illustrated by their relationship with their phones. On the one hand, the narrative indicates that students are conscious about the negative effects of the excess use of their phones, to the point that two students raised this theme in the *encontro* when we discussed current issues that concerned them. On the other hand, their stories show that they are highly dependent on their phones—“When we do not have internet connection, we play with the little dragon icon that indicates no connection”; “Sometimes I get really bored and still I don’t stop.” In the *Waldorf School*, this mismatch between discourse and practice is much less accentuated, although students admit that they often struggle to enact their thoughts, like when they comment about how hard it is to adopt a more sustainable lifestyle. According to them, “being the change” is especially difficult when they look around and realize that they do not have support from other people.

Another move that students from both schools make to reconcile the experiences is using the artistic tools that they experiment at school to acknowledge, understand, and transform the feelings evoked by the highly disconnected world. The arts make them lighter and hopeful and help them (Conte, 2001; see also Ammentorp, 2007; Padilha, 2007). This move appears in the illustration of the sunflower “that always turns to the sun” (at the *Waldorf School*) and in the following comment made by a student from the *Integral School*: “[Music] helps me imagine other places when I feel overwhelmed.” Unlike phones and tablets that take students to a virtual world where they are only spectators (thus, representing an escapism from reality), the arts bring...
them to their inner world, where they can encounter within their souls meaningful ways to respond to the challenging reality (Carlton & Graves, 1991). Building on Greene (1995), I would argue that the arts create openings in reality that allow students to try out movements of reconnection.

Based on students’ narratives from both schools, it is also fair to affirm that nature takes a role similar to that of the arts. In most of the drawings and metaphors shared by students from the *Waldorf School*, nature appears as an element that helps them to find meaning in the challenges that they encounter in their lives. In the same vein, students from the *Integral School* express the desire that their protagonist “could spend more time outside, closer to nature.” Elisa’s storyboard contains a scene of a girl laying on top of a mountain (Figure 37), which students described as, “When Elisa is overwhelmed, she goes to a place where she stays by herself, looking at the sky.” Different authors have discussed the effects that nature may have on individuals, from Rousseau (1979/1762) to Louv (2008). Drawing from these thinkers, I do not interpret this scene as escapism, but as an existential search for meaning and connectedness that finds in nature an important doorway (Emerson, 2003/1841). Elisa is not simply in nature; she is there by herself in an attitude of contemplation. And such attitude, as has been discussed in *Chapter 2*, nurtures the soul and reconnects individuals with the larger human community (Carlton & Graves, 1991; Miller, 2005).
In this chapter, I examined the narratives from student-participants to understand how they experience connectedness in their aesthetically-oriented schools while also inhabiting a highly disconnected world. The narratives were composed by memories, descriptions, reflections, imaginary stories and illustrations shared by students during the exercise of collective storytelling, as well as by my reading of scenes, notice boards, artwork and body language during fieldwork. After analyzing the experiences according to the narrative context where they belonged—i.e., within or outside their schools—I examined the moves made by students to reconcile the experiences from these two contexts.

In both schools, the aesthetically-oriented curriculum allows students to experience different dimensions of connectedness (with their selves, with others, and with the world) in a way that confronts the disconnecting rationale prevailing in the outside world. The narratives indicate that the participants struggle to mediate this divide through different and often contradictory moves. Sometimes, and particularly in the case of the Waldorf School, they adopt a
critical attitude toward the disconnecting forces that they encounter in their daily lives, and are able to resist conformity. To deal with the emotional overload that is involved in this effort of reconciliation, participants from both schools resort to the arts and to nature as a means to acknowledge, understand, and transform their feelings, and to reconnect with the essential meaning of an interconnected reality. At other times, however, they are not able to enact the discourses of connectedness that they construct at school, resulting in a mismatch between what they believe and what they actually do. Participants from the Integral School also end up trapped into a binary thinking that prevents them from seeing possible openings in reality. Finally, when the phenomenon of disconnectedness seems too difficult to handle, students look for mechanisms to detach from reality, such as isolating themselves or escaping to fantasy or virtual world. In the next and final chapter of this dissertation, I draw from these experiences shared by student-participants to suggest some pedagogical paths that schools can explore to cultivate connectedness as an embodied form of citizenship.
In Chapter 5, I explored the narratives collected during fieldwork to understand how student-participants experience connectedness as they engage in aesthetic experiences in their schools while inhabiting a highly disconnected world. Building on Dewey’s (1997/1938) notion of experience, I looked at school and out-of-school contexts as a continuum, inquiring into the ways in which students reconcile the conflicting narratives that characterize these spaces. Since the study focused on adolescent students, and since adolescence is a unique period in the formation of social and political views and attitudes (Marshak, 2016), I see the analysis of their compounded experience as a source of valuable insights into the education of young citizens who may engage with themselves, with others, and with world from a more connected perspective.

In this final chapter, I will be addressing the last subsidiary question, i.e., “what can we draw from students’ experiences to illuminate a “Pedagogy of Connectedness?” To that end, I draw on an analysis of the narratives to suggest seven pedagogical praxes: 1) artistic engagement; 2) sensory explorations; 3) valorization of authentic cultures; 4) caring relationships; 5) habits of reflexivity; 6) uncomfortable dialogues; and 7) collective agency. The first five praxes of this list stood out from students’ experiences. The last two were less remarkable in the narratives, but they address key challenges that students encountered in their effort to enact connectedness in their daily lives.
6.1 Artistic Engagements

When I was in the process of writing this dissertation, I attended a presentation by Angela Davis on the lawn of a large park in Sao Paulo. Given the current antidemocratic climate in Brazil, I felt like I needed to listen to some critical pedagogy. At some point in her speech, Davis addressed the theme of the arts. She said: “The artists help us imagine a new world and dream about a different future, and that is why we feel pleasure in listening to them; they make us experience a collective joy.” While she simply echoed a point that has been extensively explored by Greene (1995, 2001) and by several other authors that I revisited for this study, it was meaningful to hear such statement coming from someone whom I had always associated with more hardcore activism and partisan politics. It reminded me that arts and political struggle can and should overlap, even more so in times of dehumanization like those we live nowadays.

The point tackled by Davis appears to be central in the experience of students from both schools where I conducted this study. In the face of a brutal, disconnecting, and excluding world, they often resorted to artistic language (e.g., drawing, poetry and metaphors) to question conformity, bring in new perspectives to the public debate, and imagine transgressive realities—or in the words of Greene (1995), to create “as if” worlds (p. 4). During our encontros, the times when I gave participants the opportunity to engage with the arts, even if just during a warm-up activity, they became more imaginative, reflexive, and engaged.

This exercise of creating “openings in reality” (Greene, 1995) becomes particularly important in the recent context in Brazil, where public debate has been hijacked by private interests and, what is worse, has become dangerous for the manifestation of nonconforming identities and ideas. Just like the arts fostered “social imagination” (Greene, 1995) in the microcosm of this study, they can open new channels and new languages which are pivotal to
restore the public debate in the macrocosm. To illustrate this point, I reproduce here some translated verses from a popular Brazilian song named “A novidade” (The news), by Gilberto Gil:

The news came to the seashore  
In the rare quality of a mermaid  
Half the bust of a Mayan goddess  
Half a big whale tail

The news was the best  
Of paradoxes lying on the sand  
Some wishing her goddess’ kisses  
Others wishing her tail for supper

The news was the war  
Between a happy poet and a starver  
Ripping apart a beautiful mermaid,  
Shattering the dream to both sides

Inequality, which is the central theme in Gil’s song, is one of those social issues that, while being exhaustedly discussed, remains unresolved (Souza, 2018). Approaching it through the aesthetics, like Gil does with his poetry, is a way to move the question from the intellect to the heart, mobilizing individual’s humanity and their impetus for social action. No matter how many times I sing that song, it always makes me feel privileged for being “the happy poet admiring the beautiful mermaid” while others, in their state of poverty, can only see a large piece of fish. This feeling renews my empathy and my sense of social responsibility, more than any moral principle would do.

The findings also suggest that the arts help students mediate the emotional overload they experience outside the school due to everyday brutality and segregating relationships. Through artistic engagements, they are able to process these emotionally charged experiences and, in doing so, they feel more confident and empowered to venture into social activism. The
resourceful noticeboards in the *Waldorf School*, fully furnished by students themselves and
addressing different social issues, are a good illustration of this process.

Something that I noticed in the research, however, is that artistic experiences gain more meaning when they are accompanied by opportunities for reflection. These moments of reflexivity constitute an aesthetic experience per se, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

### 6.2 Sensory Experiences

“What color is the sky?” One day, when my eldest son was in first grade, he came home with this question as his school assignment. He was supposed to look at the sky after dusk and try to represent it on a blank page. That evening, we sat together on the balcony in silence, observing the sky. Then he colored his sheet combining indigo, blue green, and Prussian blue, carefully attending to the nuances he perceived in the sky. I bring in this personal anecdote to illustrate how sensory explorations—in this case, visual sensations—can be powerful vehicles of connectedness. Here, I do not only refer to the momentary state of connectedness enabled by the full presence and flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008) that characterized that particular experience, but also to the profound sense of oneness (Capra, 2004; Seymour, 2004) that was evoked by the attunement of our senses.

In the two school sites, I observed several moments of aesthetic experiences enabled by sensory explorations of the environment. In the *Integral School*, these explorations happened, for example, during gardening work (touching the soil, smelling spices, or watching the growth of the plants), during lunchtime (learning to enjoy the food while listening to classical music), and during students’ excursions around the neighborhood (encountering little animals or feeling the freshness of the woods around the local creek). In the *Waldorf School*, the accounts of sensory
explorations permeated students’ narratives (the experience of being in a dark cave, working on the farm, or building the cob house) as well as my observations (like the class about cave painting in which students simulated a battle between wolves and hunters in the patio to feel the everydayness of the Paleolithic era). To this group of students, the sensory experiences also included situations of physical and psychological discomfort, such as the callus in their hands after working hard to assemble their own bicycle or the butterflies in their stomach before entering the stage for the eighth-grade play. In our conversations, research participants acknowledged the importance of these uncomfortable moments for their personal growth, as opportunities to build resilience and confidence.

As these examples show, sensory explorations involve tactility, attuned seeing, deep listening, intuition, movements, and different experimentations with the senses that adolescents feel intimidated to undertake in the oppressive environment that prevails outside the school. The enhanced sensibilities that are enabled through these explorations expand their perception, cultivate a sense of oneness, and instill an embodied form of social and environmental responsibility. Furthermore, they liberate students from the passive position of spectator that they often assume in their engagements with the world outside—and sometimes in regular classes as well—and allow them to experience the pleasure that one can have by actively participating in the wider world.

6.3 Valorization of Authentic Cultures

In the two research sites, the narratives shed light on the negative effect that hegemonic cultures such as patriarchy, eurocentrism, and individualism have in students’ processes of connectedness with their selves, with others, and with the world. Participants from the Integral
School reproduced these cultures, in a mostly unconscious manner, in their aspirations, in the clichés that they incorporate in their stories, in their visual identity. In the Waldorf School, students demonstrated a higher awareness of the disconnecting force constituted by these hegemonic values, yet they also drew attention to the predicament of resisting their dissemination by the mass and social media.

On the other hand, the narratives highlight the potential of authentic cultures to counterbalance these influences by filling students’ identity, perception and aspirational spaces with meaning. By authentic cultures I refer to the cultures that arise from the sharing and collective expression of people’s subjectivities instead of commercial or colonial interests of dominant groups. These cultures permeate students’ local communities, ancestral groups, and marginalized spaces, although they are often silenced or overshadowed by the dominant ones. Studies on culturally relevant pedagogy have underscored the importance of bringing these cultures to the curricula (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The experiences of the students from the Integral School contribute to this debate by showing the importance of expanding the spaces and time for the exploration of these cultures.

The excursions around the neighborhood allowed students to meet inspiring people and “hidden treasures” in their community (like the encounter with Dona Julia, “the guardian of seeds”), as well as to resignify places they were already familiar with (like the visit to the quilombola community). These new models and meanings are pivotal to their reconnection with their ancestry and their place. On the other hand, the excursions to other places in the city allowed students to occupy and appropriate spaces where they thought they did not belong or where they had always felt uncomfortable due to the way people looked at them. As one participant externalized, it was important to be with her classmates in these excursions, as the
group gave her courage and allowed her to enjoy the new places even when people seemed to be asking, ‘what are those black kids doing here?’

A key undercurrent of this movement of unveiling as well as expanding cultural references, and of questioning social divides, stereotypes and stigmas, is the process of identity formation, which is particularly important during adolescence. As contended by Noguera (2008), this is when the perception of the self becomes highly dependent on the acceptance by others, and when the youth understands the political and social implications of their physical appearance.

6.4 Caring Relationships

In the preface of this dissertation, I shared a personal experience which moved me toward my first reflections on connectedness. I was able to draw so much meaning from my conversation with Miquelina because it transcended the utilitarian relationships which are typical from today’s world. It was, to me, a truly aesthetic experience that connected us through our souls. And, in so doing, it was deeply humanizing.

The narratives that I collected in this study consistently included accounts of such meaningful relationships. While out-of-school interactions were marked by physical and verbal violence, loneliness, or apathy (e.g., “I ask my mom if I can tell her a story, and she tells me to tell her later”), most of the interactions that participants developed with teachers, instructors, and peers within the school were embedded in affection, empathy, and caring. In fact, caring relationships were a remarkable feature across both research sites, which contrasts with the rationale of competitiveness, technicism, and individualism that characterizes conventional schooling today.
In search of the conditions that enable the development of close and intimate relationships in these schools, I identified two essential factors. The first one is the existence of flexible time and spaces for longer conversations on themes that transcend class subjects. Students from the *Integral School* often refer to the morning out-of-class activities with the instructors as those spaces. As an example, the Taekwondo instructor always reserves a moment either at the beginning or at the end of the practice for debates around deep questions, behavioral issues, and group dynamics (the one I observed was a game about the value of personal names). Students from the *Waldorf School* encounter such moments during classes that have a more flexible time structure, but their narrative underscores the fieldtrips as the most conducive moment to cultivate intimacy (Gaudelli, 2010) due to the extended unstructured time that they spend together with their peers and teachers.

The second factor that enables close relationships in the two schools is the feeling of being listened to with openness and genuine interest. This seems to be the decisive factor in students’ choice of the teachers or school staff with whom they share their questions and concerns (like the principal in the *Integral School*). Students need to feel safe to share their vulnerabilities, and they need to trust their interlocutor as someone who truly cares for them. A characteristic that I identified in these caring relationships is that they are never unilateral. In other words, when students are cared for, they also develop care and empathy towards others. And this feeling tends to resonate in their relations in the public space, through a social and environmental responsibility that really “comes from the heart” (Batalloso, 2011; Boff, 2010; Seymour, 2004).
6.5 Habits of Reflexivity

In the two school sites, students have the opportunity to experiment ways of seeing, touching, feeling, representing, and acting upon the world which disrupt the disconnecting pattern that rules in the outside world. Furthermore, they interact with their peers and with adults who listen to them and offer them support and guidance to face the challenges of daily life. All this learning comes wrapped in intense feelings such as wonderment, curiosity, and pleasure, which allow student-participants to tap into an intuitive level of experience that is much-needed to counter the dominance of rational thinking. However, it is also important to transcend this intuitive space and create opportunities to reflect upon and draw meaning from these experiences. These habits of reflexivity allow students to transition from experimentation to more consistent attitudes as they become citizens.

The literature on Whole Child Education suggest several spiritual practices that can be introduced in schools to promote opportunities for students to reflect upon and signify lived experiences, such as contemplative practices, biographical writing, mediation or yoga. Authors recognize that the notion of state/church separation poses a challenge to the implementation of these practices, but they underscore that spirituality, within the WCE debate, is very different from religion; it is a “permanent search for meaning” (Miller, 2000). To stress the permanent character that these practices must assume, I will call them “habits of reflexivity.”

These habits were more evident in the Waldorf School, particularly the practices of contemplation and journaling, in addition to the reflexivity that impregnates their artistic works. These are encouraged by teachers as a way to enhance understanding (of the self, of others, and of the world), reconnect with feelings, transcend pre-determined thoughts, and enable purposeful doing. In that sense, the habits of reflexivity differ both from pure intuition and from pure
intellectual thinking; it is a combination of both, mediated by the feelings. To students at the Waldorf School, these habits allow them to develop an autonomous thinking that lies at the core of their school experience. This thinking, they explain, is what makes their actions “embedded in meaning.” In the context of global citizenship, this conscious, or purposeful doing means, for example, connecting their daily actions at their local context to global issues.

6.6 Uncomfortable Dialogues

Dialogues were a central piece of my research methodology. Building on Freire, I conceived of dialogues as mediating spaces where participants could, through aesthetic encounters with the others, engage in collective explorations of their experiences of connectedness. However, the analysis of the narratives revealed several moments when, confronted with conflicting or uncomfortable situations, participants withdrew from these aesthetic encounters.

This was more prominent in the Integral School. This movement of withdrawal becomes evident, for example, when we compare Elisa’s portrait on Figure 12—which suggests the existence of personal situations of violence to be explored amongst student participants—and the oral narrative—where these situations are described only superficially, without being elaborated or questioned by the group. I wonder what I could have done to encourage participants to inhabit this vulnerable space where they could share more about the emotional dimensions that frame their daily lives and where they could have developed more intimate relationships with each other. Perhaps, students need more time to work their vulnerabilities than what we, researchers, commonly have to offer them; or perhaps they need other spaces where school authority is not so strongly felt; or still we must find other languages and formats of dialogue.
In the *Waldorf School*, dialogues around controversial issues appear much more often in students’ routine. One of the engaging debates that I witnessed during my observations was the one about gender and inequality in the labor market, which occurred during the *Jornal* (newspaper) class. The teacher did an extraordinary job to foster students’ critical thinking, and he did tap into the emotional terrain by inviting the class to reflect upon their feelings before discussing the text *per se*. Still, I feel that the conversation remained within a certain zone of comfort. Given the diverse student population of that particular class, which includes evening tuition-free students, I wonder whether some of the students had personal experiences as young workers to share with the group. Are there evening students who work during the day? How is this experience? Have students witnessed their parents going through similar situations? How does the problem intersect with the socioeconomic factor? Discussing these kinds of questions might have deepened students’ critical view of reality and nurtured empathy, social responsibility and a sense of community in the group.

I acknowledge that, in times of rising intolerance, it may not be easy to share personal stories which exposes one’s vulnerabilities. Yet, drawing from scholars like Boler (1999), Boler and Zembylas (2003), Gaudelli (2010), and Garrrett (2017), I highlight the intrinsically educative value of these uncomfortable, or even risky, conversations. The current state of affairs calls for young citizens who can live with ambiguity, discomfort and uncertainty, and who, motivated by these feelings, rethink habits and ways of thinking which tend to “remain unexamined because they have been woven into the everyday fabric of what is considered common sense” (Boler & Zembylas, 2003, p. 111). In that vein, schools can and should assume a pivotal role by creating

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37 This is the class that gathers middle class students from morning school and more vulnerable students from free-tuition evening school.
opportunities for students to transgress their comfort zone and experience uncomfortable feelings and emotions that motivate them to interrogate the social structures in which they are embedded.

6.7 Collective Agency

Participating in uncomfortable dialogues is an important step toward critical thinking; however, it might not be enough to empower young people to go out in the world and fight for the things they believe; in other words, to develop a sense of agency. In fact, the mismatch between theory and practice was recurrent in students’ narratives, and students often justified it in terms of powerlessness and lack of a group to enact those ideas together. Also, it stood out to me that, when students imagine their protagonists in the future, they do it from a self-centered perspective, focusing on individual actions which have limited scope.

Building on Freire (1984/1968), I would argue that it is easier to practice agency collectively, with fellows who are going through the same struggles. This is what I refer to as collective agency. As stated by Block (2009), when dialogues are guided by powerful questions, and are combined with some sort of collective project that awakens individuals creative capacity, they feel empowered to assume new responsibilities in the world. This collective agency was evident in the work of the students’ association and of the feminist collective in the Waldorf School. I wonder how it could be further explored if these collective actions were integrated with themes being discussed in class (like the aforementioned conversation on gender wage inequality). Likewise, I wonder how, in the Integral School, collective projects that students undertaken in the morning could open a dialogue during their afternoon regular classes. How would the painting of the school walls look differently had it been part of an interdisciplinary work on engaged arts involving the history, geography, and arts teacher?
6.8 Contributions to a Pedagogy of Connectedness

Drawing from students’ experience, and in dialogue with literature, I have suggested seven pedagogical praxes that seem to be key in the construction of a Pedagogy of Connectedness. Figure 38 shows how each of these praxes relate to some key capacities that the literature highlights as critical in the formation of more connected young citizens. The orange shape in the center represents a young person who, like the students who participated in this study, cultivates connectedness through aesthetic learning experiences. In the yellow circle, these aesthetic experiences of connectedness are unpacked into seven pedagogical praxes. Outside the circle I outlined the key capacities which can potentially be built through these praxes.

Figure 38. Seven praxes towards a Pedagogy of Connectedness

These pedagogical praxes should not be read from a compartmentalized thinking approach. Instead, they interplay with and mutually influence each other. For example, an experience that begins with sensory explorations and with the valorization of authentic cultures...
can unfold into a collective work that promotes collective agency through artistic engagements, while also encouraging uncomfortable dialogues mediated by caring relationships. And when this process is permeated by opportunities for reflexivity, students can expand and transform the meanings of the whole experience.

On the other hand, these praxes are not to be taken as a recipe. In fact, they are likely to assume different emphasis and nuances according to the particular pedagogical approaches and socioeconomic contexts of the schools where they are to be implemented. These nuances were evident in the two research sites where I conducted this study. Students from the *Waldorf School* clearly have more opportunities to develop habits of reflexivity and to engage with the arts, while the valorization of authentic cultures is more strongly present in the *Integrated School*. Likewise, it is my belief that a “Pedagogy of Connectedness” will incorporate new variations and praxes as it starts to be nurtured in a wider range of educational institutions.

6.9 Conclusion

When I decided to enroll in this PhD program, Brazil was completing a decade of progressive policies in all sectors, including a series of educational policies that promoted cultural diversity, inclusion, environmental awareness, democratic school management, and a more holistic vision of curricula. The civil society was closely participating in the formulation of these policies through a highly democratic process that entailed local, regional, and national conferences and which culminated with the elaboration of a National Education Plan, adopted by the national government in 2014. The scenario could not have been more conducive to initiating a conversation about a Pedagogy of Connectedness.
However, as I approach the conclusion of this dissertation work, things have turned upside down. Since the end of 2018, with the election of an ultra-conservative president, radical neoliberalism has been characterizing national policies. In education in particular, the recently constructed national plan was put aside and a strong market-oriented model of schooling was adopted, marked by antidemocratic values such as intolerance, exclusion, and censorship. How to raise a conversation about pedagogies of connectedness in such a context?

I had an insight into this dilemma some weeks ago, as I watched the news about the social uprisings in Chile. In one of the scenes of the street manifests, a group of protesters opened a circle in the middle of the crowd and began a circular dance. As they danced, they invited new people to join the circle, who would then invite more, and more, in a beautiful flow that quickly transformed the rally into an engaged poetry. This highly aesthetic moment reminded me that, in times of brutality, the sublime becomes relevant. Sublime like dancing on a street rally, but also like caring in a time of indifference, revering in a time of apathy and selfishness, loving in a time of hate. Moreover, it hit me as a realization that, like in a dance, the first steps towards connectedness may be the hardest ones. Once some daring souls initiate the movement, many more in the middle of the crowd will tend to follow. And they will do so not because this movement seems to take them in the “right direction,” but because it is beautiful and fulfilling as we dance. In other words, despite the unquestionable ethical call for pedagogies of connectedness in today’s world, its most powerful trigger might be its aesthetic dimension.

This dissertation work sheds light on students’ stories that show what it looks and feels like to experience the sublime experience of connectedness in educational settings. I hope that these stories may move beyond their niches of resistance and illuminate the debates between the wider community of education scholars and policymakers. I strongly believe that pedagogies of
connectedness can and should be cultivated within any educational institution—and particularly within public school systems. The work will certainly be more challenging in schools that are embedded in the individualistic and competitive culture of “teaching for the tests”—essentially antithetical to the idea of connectedness. Borrowing from Morin (2008) and Nicolescu (2002), I would argue that educators who work in these settings should focus on the creation of new learning spaces and times that can work as “openings” for the experience of connectedness—openings where students can explore the world from new perspectives through all their senses, through the arts, through encounters with different cultures; where they can engage in more genuine relationships (which require time to be nurtured) and also difficult, but necessary dialogue; where they find moments for introspection but also for collective creation.

Even within the most conventional school, these openings hold a strong potential to ripple and grow once students and the entire school community live them—for, just like the dance in the Chilean protest, movements towards (re)connectedness (with our selves, with others, and with the world) fulfill us a human beings. In fact, this wave of connectedness shall transcend the school walls and ripple through society as well, insofar as fulfilled human beings become young citizens who read the world from an integrative and critical perspective; who engage with the world through heightened sensibilities; who appreciate diversity and interact with others dialogically, empathically, ethically, and affectively; and who, feeling empowered and moved by a social and environmental responsibility that emerges from deep in their souls, engage in the construction of social imagination and in a transgressive activism toward a world where connectedness can thrive.
REFERENCES


Yoon, I. H. (2016). Trading stories: Middle-class white women teachers and the creation of collective narratives about students and families in a diverse elementary school. *Teachers College Record, 118*(2).

APPENDIX A

Research Protocols

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<thead>
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<th>Time</th>
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<tr>
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<td><strong>Encontro # 1</strong></td>
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| 25’  | - Circle of Introductions: Participants will be invited to represent themselves using either drawing or photo-collage. “What images best represent you? Use the same technique to introduce myself.  
  - After 10 minutes working with the photo-collages, make a circle on the floor and ask students to introduce themselves using the artworks (2 minutes per student + 2 minutes for me).  
  - Wrap up by explaining that the group we are forming today will be together for a few weeks, and that we want to make sure that this circle is a safe place for our different identities to manifest. Reinforce the fact that they do not have to agree on everything, but that discussions must be respectful and healthy. |
| 35’  | - As a sensitization to the research’s theme, play the short movie “Are you lost in the world like me?” by Steve Cutts: [http://www.stevecutts.com/animation.html](http://www.stevecutts.com/animation.html)  
  - Explain that this study grows out of a concern with the phenomenon of disconnectedness in the recent times, and that the animation clip somehow conveys that idea. After the movie, give them a couple of minutes to close their eyes and contemplate any thoughts that may come to their minds.  
  - Invite them to share their reflections with the group. Some triggering questions in case the group does not take the lead: “How do you feel?” “Any question that arises from watching the movie?” “Anything in the movie that resonates with you?” “Anything you dislike or disagree?” “Do you share the feeling of being lost? Lonely? Isolated? Alienated?” “How do you envision the future?” “Is this a theme you have discussed lately/at all?”  
  - Explain how the collective storytelling exercise will work.  
  - Ask the group to decide on a name for their protagonist, as well as her main physical and personality traits. |
| 10’  | - After wrapping up the discussion, give them instructions for the next meeting: “For our next *encontro*, each of you will bring one image that represents a current issue that you are concerned about. The image can be an artwork that you create, or a photograph clipped from any media.  
  - Take some minutes for an overview of the fieldwork and to insist on the importance of their commitment throughout the process. Discuss any questions they may have. |

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<td><strong>Encontro # 2</strong></td>
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<td>10’</td>
<td><em>Acolhimento</em> (welcoming activity): Sit on a circle and hand out to each student a little slip with individual instructions. Ask one student to wear a blindfold. Then, place an art craft in the middle of the circle. The instructions previously distributed explained how each one should engage with the piece. One student will be asked to contemplate it for a few minutes, another will be invited to pay attention to the personal memories that the object awakens, the third one will imagine where the object comes from, how it is used and by whom, and the importance it may have for those who use it. The student with the blindfold will be able to engage with the object through all senses except seeing. Each participant will then share their observations, and we will discuss the countless possibilities of interaction with an artwork.</td>
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<td>30’</td>
<td>Exhibit and discussion: the four images brought by students will be displayed at the center of the circle, and we will go around them observing, making comments, and then listening to the author’s explanation (audience first, then the author). A few triggering questions I could ask: how do the images relate to each other? Any overlaps? Any contradictions and conflicts? Any discomfort? Any concern? Do you see any of these situations happening in your daily life? How do you see yourselves in those situations?</td>
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1h  Collective storytelling: Give them the following prompt: “Let’s bring (name of the narrator as defined in encontro #1) to the world depicted in those images. What is her/his story? What is she/he experiencing here?” The story does not have to be factual; it can be totally fictional, but it must be grounded in the reality represented in the images (one or more).  
**5-minute break for reflection before the story starts**.
- Ask a volunteer to choose one image to begin the story. The other participants will follow on a sequence, and afterwards any one can intervene, until we have a story with a beginning, a development, and an ending.
- Ask how they feel about the story they created. Other follow-up questions, if needed: how the story relates to their daily lives, how they feel implicated, and what could be done differently to change the story.

20’  Closing: In preparation for the following encontro, ask students to observe their school routine and try to identify classroom and out-of-classroom experiences that they consider key in their formation as a young citizen. If they can find or create an image that represents these experiences, they should bring it to our next meeting

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<td><strong>Time</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>10’</td>
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<td>30’</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Time</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>10’</td>
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<tr>
<td>1h30</td>
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<td>20’</td>
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<td><strong>Time</strong></td>
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| 40’ | - Share my initial findings with research participants in the form of a poem.  
- Ask participants to read the poem for themselves, then read it out loud.  
- Ask them to share their feelings, suggestions, questions, corrections… |
| 20’ | Closing:  
- Final conversation about the research process, while we have tea together. |
A história da Elisa

Elisa é uma menina de 15 anos. Como toda adolescente, vive um pouco em dois mundos. De um lado as memórias da infância; de outro os sonhos e responsabilidades da vida adulta.

Elisa, menina da pele parda e do cabelo roxo. Porque é assim que ela gosta. Às vezes Elisa é feliz; outras nem tanto. Elisa gosta de shopping, carros, celular, E tantas outras coisas que ela vê na TV. Mas será que ela gosta mesmo? Ou será a propaganda que faz ela gostar?

Elisa gosta de estar sempre conectada. Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram. Mas também se sente sozinha... No meio de tanta gente virtual. Queria mais atenção, mais conversa, Mais amizade verdadeira.

Queria estar perto das suas origens. Da roça, da Bahia, do colo da avó. Mas se há tanto amor pela sua história, Por que chamar de parda a pele negra Que ela herdou dos ancestrais?

Elisa vive tensa Como um joguinho de videogame. Tem violência com arma, com mão e com fala. Tem muita injustiça também. Outras vezes tem tédio, tem falta de atenção, Tem a vida que passa sem ser vivida. Matando o tempo no celular. Passa-tempo sem significado.

E a violência da TV, às vezes acontece pertinho. Com o irmão, com a mãe. E com ela. Vê amigos fugindo disso tudo, Com as drogas que oferecem pela rua.

Mas Elisa sabe que esse caminho é curto. E o que ela quer é crescer para mudar isso.
Quer ter paz na rua e em casa.
Elisa quer estudar, viajar, conhecer outros mundos.
Mas no fundo, sonha com o príncipe encantado,
   Como ela viu na TV.
E quando Elisa acha outra forma de escapar
Uma cordinha a puxa de volta para o mundo cão.
   Será essa a única realidade possível?
   Tem dias que ela pensa que sim.
   Tem dias que tem certeza que não.
   “Você é do tamanho dos seus sonhos”,
   uma vez ela ouviu na escola...

Ah, a escola... Lá, Elisa se sente mais leve.
   Lá ela corre, dança, joga, luta...
   Seu corpo é livre e cheio de vida.
   Suas mãos encontram a terra,
   E fazem o verde brotar na escola.
   E seus sentimentos saem pelos dedos,
Viram arte, poesia, e pintura nos muros.
   Viram musica do Dolín Dolá.
   Lá ela tem quem a escute.
   Tem atenção, confiança, conselho.
   Tem os seus exemplos de vida:
A professora, a diretora, o mestre de TaeKwonDo.
   Até o policial da escola é diferente,
   Porque ele quer de verdade o bem dos outros.
Mas tem a escola da manhã, e a escola da tarde.
   De manhã, ela vive por inteiro.
Com vontade, com curiosidade, com presença.
   De tarde, o corpo volta a ficar preso
Naquele espaçinho entre as carteiras.
   E o pensamento voa...
Buscando algo que faça sentido.
   A voz perde o volume,
   E a vontade perde intensidade.
Na escola, Elisa conhece outros mundos.
A cidade ali do lado, passa a ser sua cidade.
E o mundo lá longe, fica um pouco mais próximo.
   Até as estrelas Elisa aprendeu a olhar.

Uma vez, Elisa ouviu na escola
   O relato de uma escritora.
   Como ela, Elisa quer escrever um livro.
   Quer contar sua história
para ajudar outras pessoas.
Quer ficar famosa. Quer reconhecimento.
Mas para contar sua história,
Elisa precisa ter quem se interesse.
Quem a ouça com atenção.
E com o coração.
E tem que ter segurança.
Porque Elisa não é ingênuas:

Ela sabe que tem muita gente que não quer que as coisas mudem.
Tem o traficante, o político e o ladrão.
Então ela fica entre confiar nas leis
E ter medo de cobrá-las. Medo de denunciar.

Por isso às vezes é mais fácil entrar para o sistema.
“Virar policial para ter uma arma”.
Para ter privilégios e segurança.
Mas também para “fazer o bem”.

Mas ter uma arma não piora a violência?
Sim, ela sabe bem disso.

E no fundo, queria mesmo é seguir seu sonho
De ser professora.

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A história da Maria

Maria, menina-girassol.
Gira e observa o mundo.
Ali, conectada à terra que a sustenta,
Ela se encanta com tudo
que está ao redor.
As árvores, as abelhas,
O cheiro da chuva.
Os livros, as músicas, os versos.

Maria, menina em tempo de transição.
Assim como o mundo que a cerca.
Não é fácil esse despertar.
Perceber que no meio
De tanta beleza e bondade
Há também injustiça e opressão:
Oceanos de plástico
Com canudinhos boiando;
Violência no ônibus
A caminho da escola
E também
Bem ao lado da escola.
Tem mentira na TV,
E no grupo do whatsapp
Tem os *likes* do Instagram
Tão vazios de sentido.
E tem quem não aceita o outro
Quando ele pensa diferente.
Não, nem tudo no mundo é verdadeiro.

Mas Maria gosta desse despertar
De enxergar os problemas.
De ir atrás para entendê-los.
De questionar, dialogar,
Tentar resolvê-los.
Sim, Maria sente medo,
Mas também vontade de mudar.
Maria, menina-girassol,
Gira pra lá e pra cá.
Tem horas que fica inseguira
Tudo parece volátil,
Difícil de agarrar.
Então ela se refugia no verso,
Tentando dar sentido ao que vê.

Para Maria,
O mundo está muito individualista.
Tem horas que isso a sufoca.
Porque Maria ama o outro.
Mas não o outro virtual,
Um ícone de redes sociais.
Maria gosta é do outro “real”
Como a família que fez na escola.
Amigos que lhe dão as mãos
Quando as lanternas se apagam
Na escuridão da caverna.
Mas para quem dar as mãos
No mundo lá de fora?
Às vezes, Maria se sente um pouco
como sua boneca elfá.
Vivendo no mundo de Micael.
Mas ela sabe que é hora de sair
E enfrentar o mundo que aí está.
Onde a democracia estremece,
Promover o debate.
Onde a alienação contagia,
Levar o questionamento e a crítica,
E ir atrás da verdade
Com empatia e respeito.
Difícil não ir com o fluxo...
“Não querer que a estrada tenha cinco pistas”
ou “ir às compras com potes de vidro”.
Então Maria gira pra lá e pra cá.
Às vezes se incomoda; noutras se acomoda.

Mas Maria aprendeu na escola
A crescer com o desconforto.
Aquele frio na barriga que dá quando está na coxia.
Aquele sentir-se esquisita na “arte da fala”.
Aquele calo que surge na mão
Ao montar sua própria bicicleta.
Porque ela sabe que de repente, “bum!”
“Não tem outro jeito de descrever”.
De repente o desconforto passa.
Ela se sente pronta e solta a voz.
E morre de orgulho de si mesma.
Quantas vezes ela repetiu:
“Nossa, eu consigo fazer isso!”

E desse esforço
que vem das suas próprias mãos
Talvez venha o maior tesouro
Que Maria guarda do tempo de escola:
O encontro do sentido.
Maria coloca sentido em tudo que faz:
Montar uma bicicleta,
Trabalhar a terra,
Construir a casa de pau-a-pique.
Vencer os medos e subir no palco
Fazer a fogueira!
Ah, a fogueira...
“É muito diferente ver a fogueira e fazer a fogueira”.
“É como se houvesse duas fogueiras:
uma com madeira e uma com emoções”.
Maria “se torna a chama; vira calor”
Não, Maria não quer apenas assistir o mundo.
Quer fazer o mundo.
Sabendo que “junto do peso da tocha,
Há o da responsabilidade”.

Para Maria, menina-girassol

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Talvez o mundo se transforme
A partir desse fazer com sentido.
Com sentido e sentimentos.
E desse fazer nasce a *autonomia*,
Talvez a palavra que resuma
Sua experiência na escola.
Hoje, quando Maria olha o mundo,
Sente-se mais forte para caminhar
Com autonomia,
Fazendo aquilo em que acredita.
Com o coração, a cabeça e as mãos.