



## A Guided Democracy For Children? A Case Study Of Summerhill School, Suffolk, England

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Article History	Abstract
Received: 26 March 2023 Revised: 12 July 2023 Accepted: 29 July 2023	<p><i>This study explores Summerhill School in Suffolk, England, established by A.S. Neill in 1921. It examines the characteristics defining the school as a democratic institution. Interviews with school staff, students, and visitors reveal the application of democracy in non-academic activities. Participants shared experiences related to decision-making, law creation, and equality, highlighting democratic challenges. The data suggest that Summerhill's democratic practices resemble guided democracy models, as seen in Sukarno's guided democracy in Indonesia and B.F. Skinner's Walden Two. This study employs various interview methods, with serial interviews serving as the primary tools for collecting data and identifying key themes.</i></p>
<b>C License</b> CC-BY-NC-SA 4.0	<b>Keywords:</b> control, democracy, guided democracy, freedom, influence, power, small community

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Modern political philosophy historically viewed children as incapable of engaging in politics (Wall, 2011), reserving democracy for adults and questioning its feasibility in schools (Apple and Beane, 2007). However, evolving perspectives acknowledge children's active participation in governance, influencing school rules, legislation, and committee elections (Apple and Beane, 2007). Children's involvement in democratic processes has become commonplace, shaping their understanding of democracy as a governance system based on consent and equal opportunity (Apple and Beane, 2007, p.7). Schools, while providing education, also serve as environments for democratic education (Apple and Beane, 2007). Notably, democratic schools differ from traditional ones, emphasising individualised learning and student engagement (Howells, et. al. 2022).

### 2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Democracy varies in definition, but for this study, it aligns with human rights principles, cautioning against equating democracy with absolute personal freedom (Gollob et al., 2010). It's crucial to note that democracy is about freedom, but not unbridled freedom, as emphasized by Drake (1931). A child's 'complete freedom' at Summerhill School is confined to specific actions, referred to as 'controlled freedom' (Neill, 1962). This study delves into the democratic practices at Summerhill, addressing issues such as preserving key student freedoms (Clabaugh, 2008) and compliance with educational regulations (Saukkonen, Moilanen, and Mathew, 2016). Summerhill School in Suffolk, England, is renowned as the world's oldest children's democracy (Readhead, 1996; Stronach and Piper, 2009; Saukkonen, Moilanen, and Mathew, 2016). Founded in 1921 as the Neue Schule, it changed its name to Summerhill in 1927 (summerhillschool, n.d.). With Neill's emphasis on children's freedom to learn at their own pace, this study explores the specific democratic practices that make Summerhill unique among schools (Thayer-Bacon, 1996).

### 3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions of this study are:

1. In what ways can Summerhill School (sometimes referred to as a 'children's democracy') be considered democratic?
2. What are the main problems and issues of a democratic community where the majority are children, as at Summerhill School?
3. What kind of democracy, if any, is Summerhill?

### 4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research is significant due to its contribution to the limited qualitative literature on children's democracy, providing educators, school administrators, and professionals in the field of education with valuable insights. The results of this study provide a foundational principle for educators who are looking into unique learning frameworks; they highlight the significance of democratic practices in educational institutions and identify Summerhill School as a possible model for innovative learning environment approaches. By utilising literature discussions on guided democracy and incorporating utopian community models and real-world illustrations, this study offers novel perspectives on democracy systems, with a particular focus on the case of Summerhill School, for the benefit of educators, students, and scholars.

### 5. LITERATURE REVIEW

#### *Democracy and Democratic Education*

Democracy, extending beyond politics, is a way of life actively practiced in schools, notably in the prominent example of Summerhill (Beane and Apple, 1995). In modern understanding, democracy involves the full participation of young children, contributing to their development, and preparing them for responsible citizenship (Alshurman, 2015). Influenced by Dewey, democratic education embraces innovative, child-centred pedagogies, challenging traditional educational paradigms (Sikandar, 2015). The term 'progressive' aligns with the innovation of modern schools, and democratic schools represent a new policy direction, accepting diverse teaching approaches (Tisdall, 2019). The continuous development of educational philosophies is highlighted by the influence of democratic ideals in schools, particularly at Summerhill, a private flagship institution (Darling, 1992; O'Hair, McLaughlin, and Reitzug, 2000; Carnie, 2003).

#### *Summerhill as a Democratic School Pioneer*

A.S. Neill founded Summerhill School in 1921 with a focus on democracy and children's rights (Carnie, 2003), becoming known as the founder of the democratic school movement. Despite its international influence, the school faced controversy during a 1999 Ofsted inspection, challenging its child-centred, freedom-focused approach and leading to threats of closure (Keeble-Ramsay, 2017; Newman, 2006). The clash with Ofsted highlighted the tension between Summerhill's commitment to democratic ideals and mainstream education standards, emphasising the ongoing challenge of integrating alternative educational philosophies within the regulatory framework (Carnie, 2003; Langer-Buchwald, 2010).

Summerhill School's longevity may be attributable to the community's defence of the founder's ideology rather than the safeguarding of children's freedom. It is beneficial to study Neill's understanding of democracy in the context of Summerhill School, since this helps to contextualise the type of democracy that may be practised at the school.

#### *A.S. Neill's Freedom Not Licence*

Neill's foundational notion of inner freedom, characterized by the absence of fear and intolerance, aligns with his commitment to children's development and autonomy, rejecting authoritarian approaches in favor of happiness and self-discovery (Neill, 1995; Darling, 1992).

Despite the alignment of Neill's principles with renowned scholars, Ofsted's 1999 rejection of Summerhill's "freedom not license" raises questions. Neill's belief in children's responsibility for their education clashes with mainstream academic norms, challenging conventional practices and prompting ongoing scrutiny from regulatory bodies like Ofsted (Appleton, 2017). The tension between Neill's democratic self-government and traditional educational approaches remains a central challenge for Summerhill School's continued operation (Keeble-Ramsay, 2016).

Neill stresses that students are individually responsible for their learning process, emphasising that choosing not to learn has no adverse impact on others, aligning with the school's freedom concept (Darling, 1992). However, issues arise for Neill and the community if a child's actions, such as causing harm, throwing objects, violating rules, or being a persistent nuisance, affect others (Neill, 1962, p. 53; Snitzer, 1970, p. 11). Ena Neill underscores the consistency of Summerhill's education with the "Summerhill way," synonymous with A.S. Neill's approach tailored to the students' best interests (Snitzer, 1970, p. 13).

### ***Essential Features of Schools with Democracy: What Could They Be? An Outlook of Democracy in a Small Community***

Schools aspiring to embody democracy prioritise key features in fostering a democratic community (Korkmez and Erden, 2014; Gazman, 2018; Gribble, 1998). Notably, self-governance stands out, with democratic schools emphasising collective rule-making by both students and staff (Gazman, 2018). The democratic ethos extends to social behavior, where issues like classroom rules are subject to democratic discussions (Feu et al., 2017; Furman and Starratt, 2002). Organising social structures and non-classroom activities further define democratic practices (Dundar, 2013; Simó, Parareda, and Domingo, 2016).

The General School Meeting serves as a vital democratic institution, emphasizing joint decision-making and accountability in the school community (Korkmaz and Erden, 2014; Fielding, 2013). Voting mechanisms, including straw polls and consensual decision-making, underscore equal participation (Gastil, 1993; Wilson, 2015). However, challenges may arise in achieving consensus, necessitating strategies for conflict resolution (Hartley, 2008; Erbes, 2006). Additionally, critical thinking and articulation skills are fundamental for effective democratic discourse (Quantz, Rogers, and Dantley, 1991; Crow and Slater, 1996).

Democracy in schools further emphasises relationships marked by equality, consideration, and comprehension (Aspin, 2018; O'Hair, McLaughlin, and Reitzug, 2000). The promotion of equality extends beyond opportunities to include equal responsibility for students (Rietmulder, 2019). Good listening skills and the ability to comprehend diverse perspectives strengthen relationships within the school community (Gastil, 1993; O'Hair, McLaughlin, and Reitzug, 2000). Overall, these characteristics collectively contribute to a democratic and inclusive school environment.

The unique aspect of democracy in small groups introduces the stages of autonomous decision, guardianship, and provisional guardianship (Gastil, 1993). Autonomous decision underscores individual capacity, while guardianship and provisional guardianship address situations where group decision-making is challenging. These elements align with the concept of deliberative decision-making, emphasizing structured, collaborative approaches for inclusive governance (Mabovula, 2009; Simó, Parareda, and Domingo, 2016). Despite occasional challenges, the democratic principles inherent in these features promote an environment where all members, regardless of age or background, contribute to shaping the community's decisions and values.

### ***Guided Democracy and Its Theoretical Framework***

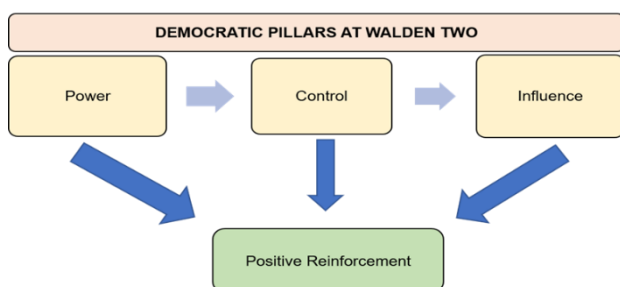
This study, faced with the challenge of aligning guided democracy with the Summerhill context, opts for a stipulative definition tailored to the school's unique setting (Child, 1989). Defined as 'authoritarian democracy,' guided democracy, introduced by Indonesian President Sukarno, involves a government claiming democratic principles while imposing restrictions to ensure stability, a concept rooted in a flexible understanding of democracy adapted to specific societal needs (Sukarno, 1959). The theoretical framework underscores the idea that democracy must be tailored to a society's circumstances, allowing the government to guide the democratic process for long-term stability. Despite criticism for potentially undermining democratic principles, proponents argue its effectiveness in ensuring stability, while acknowledging controversies and human rights concerns (Sukarno, 1959; Human Rights Watch, 2021). The study further explores guided democracy in political and community contexts, examining real-world examples, like Sukarno's Indonesia, and B.F. Skinner's Walden Two community, providing insights for comparing and identifying similarities with A.S. Neill's children's democracy at Summerhill School (Sukarno, 1959; Human Rights Watch, 2021).

### ***Guided Democracy in Political Perspectives***

Sukarno, the former president of Indonesia, exemplified guided democracy, presenting it as a unique, domestically inspired form (Van der Kroef, 1957). His approach involved strong leadership control, advocating for 'guided democracy' to promote national unity (Van der Kroef, 1957). Sukarno's guided democracy, influenced by Western democratic struggles, aimed to address recurring crises and strengthen government authority (Van der Kroef, 1957). However, the regime evolved into an autocracy, with Sukarno relying on the military to suppress dissent, leading to human rights abuses and economic and political instability (Cribb, 2005). Ultimately, Sukarno's vision collapsed, replaced by military-led rule in 1965 (Cribb, 2017). Despite

Sukarno's failed implementation, his concept of guided democracy shaped the discourse on adapting democracy to specific societal needs (Adagbabiri and Chuks, 2015). (1)

### *Guided Democracy in a Small Community perspectives*



### *Conceptual Framework of Guided Democracy at Walden Two*

B.F. Skinner's Walden Two envisions a utopian society governed by the principles of behaviourism, employing a system of 'guided democracy' where power, control, and influence shape behaviour to enhance community well-being (Skinner, 2005). Frazier, the founder, asserted Walden Two's democracy as closer to the democratic ideal, with the will of the people carefully ascertained through study rather than election campaigns (Skinner, 2005, p. 269). Power dynamics are central, with Frazier guiding the community but emphasising equality and discouraging individual achievement (Skinner, 2005, p. 235). The power structure involves the democratic selection of leaders who use expertise to guide the community towards set goals (Skinner, 2005). However, critics argue this 'guided democracy' may be prone to manipulation, questioning the potential for censorship and suppression of dissent (Mason, 2018; Kincaid, 2012).

Control in Walden Two extends across physical, health, safety, emotional, and social aspects, maintaining order for the community's tranquilly and future (Skinner, 2005). The leader's influence, wielded by Frazier, is considered desirable, with a Code of Conduct reflecting his ideals governing members (Skinner, 2005). Despite Frazier's claim to lack absolute authority, his planned cultural and behavioural surroundings significantly influence the community (Skinner, 2005). The influence extends to using propaganda and education to shape members' attitudes and beliefs, evoking criticism for potential manipulation and control (Skinner, 2005; Till, 2021).

Positive reinforcement, a key element, replaces punishment, aligning with Frazier's vision of promoting happiness and health without coercion (Skinner, 2005). This technique, grounded in positive reinforcement, aims to shape desired behaviours by creating conditions that individuals enjoy, reinforcing Frazier's desired pattern of behaviour (Skinner, 2005). However, Frazier's authority is crucial for the successful implementation of positive reinforcement, maintaining order, and preventing opposition that could jeopardise his Walden Two plan. The combination of democratic deliberation, reinforcement, and propaganda in Walden Two raises concerns about potential manipulation and abuse, emphasising the need for critical evaluation of this 'guided democracy' model (Skinner, 2005; Mason, 2018; Kincaid, 2012).

### *Issues and Predicaments of Democracy in Schools*

Issues in democratic schools stem from challenges in aligning school democracy with true democratic values. Skinner differentiates school democracy from political democracy, highlighting the pragmatic nature of the former (Skinner, 2005, p.8). Beane (1995) identifies democracy as dedicated to human dignity, social justice, and equity, offering numerous opportunities for individual development and societal contributions. However, democratic schools face specific challenges, such as time-consuming decision-making processes, discouraging topics in school meetings, and the potential tedium of meetings for students (Beane, 1995; Gastil, 1993; Wilson, 2015). Additionally, transitioning to a democratic setting can pose discipline issues, as students grapple with the balance between freedom and responsibility, sometimes confusing positive and negative freedom (Smith, 2020; Morrison, 2008).

Egalitarianism, a core principle of democratic schools, presents its challenges, as it may lead to a devaluation of academic achievements and qualifications, focusing more on life skills (Kelley, 1939; Sen, 2009). Ensuring equal treatment and opportunities for all students in an environment that grants a high degree of autonomy can be challenging (Bauwens, 2020; Gleason, 2021). Haraldstad, Tveit, and Kovač (2022) argue against centralization of power in schools, emphasizing that truly democratic environments should distribute decision-making influence equally. The complexities of daily school programs and pre-existing systems can impede genuine student participation, challenging the democratic nature of schools (Furman and Starratt, 2002;

Haraldstad, Tveit, and Kovač, 2022). Teachers may grapple with the tension between fulfilling regulatory requirements and providing the most beneficial learning experience, while financial constraints and alternative funding sources may affect the accessibility and inclusivity of democratic schools (Kamppila, 2017; Perry, 2009; Jones et al., 2018).

In essence, despite the challenges, the commitment to democratic ideals remains crucial for educators, policymakers, and reformists involved in creating and sustaining democratic schools. The shortcomings inherent in these schools should not deter the pursuit of democratic education reform but rather serve as areas for ongoing improvement.

### ***Theoretical Framework of Organic Approach in Children's Democracy***

John Dewey, a prominent figure in pragmatism, advocated for an organic approach to education, considering it as a holistic and collaborative process of growth and development (Dewey, 1916). Emphasizing experiential and inquiry-based learning, Dewey envisioned a democratic and inclusive educational framework where students and teachers collaboratively create a dynamic learning environment (Dewey, 1938). In 'The Ethics of Democracy,' Dewey asserted the organic approach's necessity for securing individual rights, highlighting democracy's role in achieving social unity through citizen participation (Westbrook, 1991, p.40).

#### ***Organic Approach as Democratic Education***

In self-governing or democratic schools, the unique educational approach, as explored by notable experts including John Dewey, stands in contrast to conventional methods. Dewey's examination of Mrs. Johnson's organic education experiment, outlined in "Schools of Tomorrow," defines the organic approach as following the natural development of individuals (Dewey and Dewey, 1915, p.23). Similar principles are echoed in Holmes's utopian elementary school, emphasizing freedom for students to progress at their own pace and encouraging collaborative problem-solving (Holmes, 1914, p.154-156). Dewey, Holmes, and Lane converged on the importance of an organic approach, emphasizing children's freedom as essential for learning (Dewey and Dewey, 1915, p.25; Holmes, 1914, p.155; Lane, 1928, p.162). This approach, while promoting freedom, imposes limitations to ensure responsible conduct (Dewey and Dewey, 1915, p.25; Holmes, 1914, p.158). Dewey rejects punishment and reward, believing children find satisfaction in their work without such incentives (Dewey and Dewey, 1915, p.298). Neill, inspired by Dewey and Holmes, incorporates similar principles at Summerhill School, highlighting the impact of organic education on the holistic development of children (Holmes, 1914, p.160).

## **6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study focuses on exploring democratic practices among children at Summerhill School. This chapter provides a detailed overview of the methodology employed, encompassing the use of case study methodology, adaptations made to data collection techniques due to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on participant recruitment, and a comprehensive explanation of the steps involved in the data analysis process.

### ***Case Study Designs***

The research employs a case study design, defined as the systematic gathering of comprehensive information about a specific community, to understand its dynamics, participants, and social forces (Lune and Berg, 2017). This qualitative approach is chosen for its flexibility and suitability in educational research, enabling an in-depth examination of Summerhill School, known as the "oldest children's democracy" (Dawidowicz, 2011; Zainal, 2007). The study focuses on a particular school unit, selecting participants to represent the community. Case studies, widely used in qualitative methodology, allow for an extensive exploration of complex phenomena and the integration of various data sources (Yin, 2014; Starman, 2013). This design facilitates an in-depth analysis of democratic characteristics, challenges, and comparisons with other democratic schools (Thomas, 2017; Punch and Oancea, 2014).

### ***The Procedures of Data Collection***

The qualitative research design employs a case study approach with online interviews, encompassing individual, paired, and serial individual formats. The study focuses on a population of staff and pupils at Summerhill School, with a sample size of less than 30 individuals. Purposive sampling is utilized to select key informants, including the principal, vice principal, secondary and primary teachers, KS4 students, former students, and general visitors, totaling 10 participants. To enhance reliability and credibility, guided research ethics and triangulation are employed as measures. The online interviews offer a diverse perspective through

various formats and participants, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the democratic practices at Summerhill School.

### ***Sampling Technique***

This study utilises purposeful sampling, a non-probability method, focusing on Summerhill School to gather in-depth insights into democratic practices. Recognising constraints in data collection, the study strategically selects participants, including the principal, vice principal, teachers, students, and former students. Specific criteria are established for adult and student participants based on their tenure at Summerhill School, aiming for comprehensive perspectives on democratic systems. Opportunistic sampling is introduced during data collection to capitalise on evolving events, such as the annual visitation day for general visitors. These visitors provide an external viewpoint crucial for understanding democratic cultures within the school. Interviews are designed to explore the multifaceted aspects of school community life, addressing challenges, limitations, and problems experienced by various stakeholders. The inclusion of adults, children, former students, and visitors ensures a nuanced and comprehensive exploration of Summerhill School's democratic ideals.

### ***Restrictions Amidst a Worldwide Pandemic***

The COVID-19 pandemic posed significant challenges to the intended data collection methods for this study. Physical access to the community became a major obstacle due to social distancing measures and lockdowns worldwide (Wolkewitz & Puljak, 2020; Ziegler & Mason, 2020). The restrictions on human interaction necessitated a departure from traditional qualitative research approaches, limiting data collection to remote interviews. This adjustment, prompted by the prolonged pandemic, aligns with the broader difficulties faced by qualitative researchers in accessing study data during these unprecedented times (Lapan et al., 2011). The study had to adapt to the constraints imposed by the pandemic, emphasizing the importance of utilizing remote technology for data collection while acknowledging the limitations imposed by the global health crisis.

### ***One-on-one Interviews, Dyadic Interviews, and Serial Interviews***

The study utilized a multi-stage approach to interviews, acknowledging the central role of qualitative research in understanding participants' perspectives and interpretations. *One-on-one interviews*, primarily conducted face-to-face or online, allowed direct interaction with participants (Monforte & Ubeda-Colomer, 2022), including teachers, former students, and general visitors. Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions facilitated a comprehensive exploration of perspectives and experiences. *Dyadic interviews* involved questioning two participants simultaneously, fostering group engagement and diverse viewpoints (Cohen et al., 2011). This collective approach was particularly beneficial for discussions among school pupils and with the assistant principal and principal.

*Serial interviews* were employed with the school's principal, providing an in-depth exploration (Read, 2018; Murray et al., 2009) of the democratic experience at Summerhill School over multiple sessions. While recognizing the drawbacks of serial interviews, the study emphasized their value in obtaining rich life histories and understanding changing perceptions. This comprehensive interview strategy, despite challenges posed by the pandemic, enriched the study's data and deepened the exploration of democratic practices within the Summerhill School community.

### ***Reliability and Validity***

Reliability and validity, crucial in both quantitative and qualitative research, enhance the credibility of findings (Noble and Heale, 2019). In qualitative research, dependability is a substitute term for reliability, emphasizing the consistency of analytical techniques and acknowledging potential biases (Hamilton et al., 2012; Newby, 2014; Neuman & Neuman, 2012; Cohen et al., 2011). While reliability traditionally suits quantitative approaches, in qualitative studies, it hinges on methodological transparency (Newby, 2014). Achieving 100% validity is impossible, but researchers strive to maximize it by ensuring credibility. Credibility involves decisions on data gathering and interpretation, emphasizing an authentic, fair, and balanced portrayal of social life (Matthews & Ross, 2010; Neuman & Neuman, 2013).

### ***Triangulation***

Triangulation, employing multiple data sources and methods, addresses validity concerns (Sands and Roer-Strier, 2006). The study employs detailed descriptions, evidence, and validation, using probing techniques during interviews. Group interviews, especially with students, contribute to a comfortable and secure environment, fostering genuine responses. The gatekeeper's role as both school owner and participant adds

depth to the study, with ten interview sessions exploring various aspects of democracy at Summerhill School, ensuring critical thinking and comprehensive responses.

This study employed Thematic Analysis to identify, analyse, and report on patterns (themes) in the data (Flick, 2014, p.421). This study selected to employ thematic analysis since the technique is suitable for attempting to comprehend experiences, thoughts, or behaviours across a data collection (Kiger and Varpio, 2020). Meanwhile, Braun and Clarke (2022) define thematic analysis as a strategy for constructing, analysing, and understanding patterns throughout a qualitative dataset, which requires systematic data coding methods to produce themes. From the literature, it demonstrates that thematic analysis consists of six steps (Braun and Clarke, 2022; Kiger and Varpio, 2020; Flick, 2014; Maguire and Delahunt, 2017) which this study employs.

Table summarises the six-phase guide of thematic analysis for this research:

Step 1: Become familiar with the data,	Step 4: Review themes,
Step 2: Generate initial codes,	Step 5: Define themes,
Step 3: Search for themes,	Step 6: Write-up.

Six-phase guide of Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022)

## 7. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This part addresses the analysis and discussion of data acquired from interviews, which pertain to the Summerhill School community's understanding of democracy and its values. This study analyses data collected through interviews with various members of the community, including the school's visitors, current and former senior students, the assistant principal, and teachers. The breakdown of the participants was as follows:

Interview Transcript			
Position	Pseudonym	Years of Teaching / Study	Year of Visit
Principal	n/a	37	n/a
Deputy Principal	n/a	20	n/a
Teacher 1	Anna	10	n/a
Teacher 2	Sam	9	n/a
Student 1	Jenn	5	n/a
Student 2	Vee	8	n/a
Alumni 1	Pam	9	n/a
Alumni 2	Yoon	5	n/a
Visitor 1	Vic	n/a	2019
Visitor 2	Brian	n/a	2019

**Table 1: Structural Codes of Informants**

The findings were organised chronologically based on the study's research questions. Compiled data, codes, and categories were analysed to establish connections between notes (Flick, 2013, p. 305). Conclusions were drawn from both inductive coding, directly derived from the data, and deductive coding, representing theoretical themes from existing literature (Skjott Linneberg and Korsgaard, 2019). The conceptual framework of guided democracy and small-group democracy guided the analysis. Thematic and sub-thematic summaries were independently illustrated for each research question.

### **RQ1: In what ways can Summerhill School (sometimes referred to as a 'children's democracy') be considered democratic?**

To answer research question one, data from interviews held with all participants were analysed. The themes of data analysis in the context of democracy at Summerhill School encompass **governance procedures** including *lawmaking, amending, and abolishing laws*, as well as understanding *social structures*. It involves *community decision-making through consensus, majority rule, and voting mechanisms in general meetings*. These processes are deeply intertwined with fostering **relationships** based on *equality, comprehension, and*

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consideration among members. Additionally, the approach emphasises **deliberative decision-making** that is *autonomous*, based on *guardianship* principles, and utilises *provisional guardianship* where needed.

### **RQ2: What are the main problems and issues of a democratic community where the majority are children, as at Summerhill School?**

Examining challenges within a democratic community, such as at Summerhill School, was tough as the administration vetted interview questions. However, the study aimed to address concerns, including discontent, school meeting issues, daily life, and rule violations, similar to broader democratic society challenges. Findings revealed issues at Summerhill, comparable to other democratic schools outlined in the literature review.

This research question delved into problems and issues within Summerhill's democracy, highlighting challenges such as **lengthy meetings** affecting efficiency, **limitations for new children**, conflicts arising from **iteration and paperwork**, and the struggles related to an **emphasis on egalitarianism** within the school's democratic structure.

### **RQ3: What kind of democracy, if any, is Summerhill?**

This study employed a stipulative definition to explore a suitable democracy for Summerhill School. It suggests guided democracy as the closest match, drawing from a review of representative and participatory democracies common in educational settings. By synthesising various definitions of guided democracy, the study resolves its research question on Summerhill's governmental classification.

The democracy at Summerhill School diverges from political democracy. Interviews revealed a practice more akin to 'guided democracy,' aligning with Sukarno's real-world example though it was unsuccessful (Sukarno, 1959; Mackie, 1961;) and John Dewey's notions, notably distinct from B.F. Skinner's Walden Two, which, like Summerhill, embodies guided democracy but extends beyond a children-focused community.

The responses gathered were classified into three categories: **power, control**, and **influence**. In all parts of children's lives, the **organic approach** is maintained through preserving these three pillars.

## **8. CONCLUSION**

The conclusion categorises Summerhill School as a guided democracy for children, stressing the significance of a controlled environment in fostering children's happiness and holistic development, echoing Dewey's assertion about the essentiality of the school's environment in shaping children's thoughts and actions. It draws attention to B.F. Skinner's Walden Two as an exemplar of guided democracy, advocating for a system where experts play a pivotal role in decision-making to ensure equity and prevent the pitfalls of majority rule, aligning with Skinner's belief that individuals' freedom should not be curtailed by the tyranny of majority opinion.

While Summerhill exemplifies children's active involvement in democratic processes, the study recognises the necessity for boundaries and supervision, echoing A.S. Neill's reservations about granting unrestricted freedom to children and understanding the potential pitfalls. Acknowledging the importance of maintaining the school's policies and objectives, the study acknowledges that appropriate measures and programmes are essential to prevent adverse impacts while facilitating democratic participation. Therefore, the study concludes that guided democracy, operating under the shadow of an authoritarian framework, ensures a balance between democratic freedoms and necessary boundaries, vital for the functioning of Summerhill School's "children's democracy."

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