The School Library: An Important Place for Adolescents' Well-Being

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An Ethnographic Experience in a French Middle School

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The present study focuses on the diverse relationships between middle-school students and their school library. Students between the ages of 10 and 15 were observed in an urban French middle school during an ethnographic experience. The results show the importance of the school library as a refuge for marginalized, younger, and/or feel bad students as well as those who like to read. The library also contributes to student well-being by acting as a bulwark against the cold and agitation of the playground. The recommendations call on school administrators to recognize the importance of the school library to adolescents and to provide ongoing access.

Keywords: CDI, space, students, school climate, well-being

Introduction and Literature Review

It is essential to explore the well-being of adolescents while at school in view of the amount of time they spend in this institution (Hui & Sun, 2010). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) recognizes school well-being as part of adolescent well-being (UNICEF, 2017). Low levels of well-being at school are likely to lead to high anxiety scores and depressive symptoms (Huebner & Gilman, 2006), while high well-being levels have a positive impact on students' mental health (Salmena-Aro & Tynkkynen, 2010; Shin et al., 2010). Thus, school well-being is a significant health issue in need of further study. The quality of school experiences is also critical to adolescents' academic success, development, later trajectory, and quality of life (Baker et al., 2003; Danielson et al., 2009). Yet survey results reveal that a significant proportion of French students do not like school or like it very little (AFEV, 2017) and that this level of school well-being tends to decrease as students progress through middle school (Guimard et al., 2015, 2017; Joing et al., 2020). Thus, there is a challenge to better understand the dynamics of student well-being in middle school.

The question of location is almost completely absent in the study of well-being in the literature: subjective well-being is mainly studied at the school or class level. However, recent work has shown that global data are not stable but fluctuate according to the places frequented by the student (Joing et al., 2020). Therefore, it is necessary to take a spatial approach to well-being at school to better understand the role of each place in the dynamics of well-being.

In France, from kindergarten to high school, the number of places in addition to the traditional classroom is increasing and diversifying: the playground, physical education changing rooms, corridors, toilets, etc.

The school library, commonly known in France as the Documentation and Information Centre (CDI), is a singular place in the school space. As part of its functions, it provides suitable resources to the public (like a public library) and hosts classes (Govoreanu & Tillard, 2020). While the literature links public libraries to well-being (Wexelbaum, 2016), the role of school libraries for school quality of life has not yet been truly studied (Merga, 2020).

Therefore, we study the role and the specific place of the CDI in the daily dynamics of school well-being. Through an ethnographic experience in a French urban middle school, the objective is to examine how this singular place is perceived, used, and experienced by diverse students.

Library and well-being

Student well-being can be defined as "a sustainable state of positive mood and attitude, resilience, and satisfaction with self, relationships and experiences at school" (Australian Catholic University, 2008, p. 5). Many intrinsic and extrinsic factors can impact this well-being.

Some work has focused on the role public libraries play in supporting well-being. For example, Wexelbaum (2016) found that public libraries were a safe place for youth and

vulnerable individuals. Research has also shown that a positive attitude toward reading can be associated with mental well-being (Clark & Teravainen-Goff, 2018).

While the role of public libraries in individual well-being has been examined, the role of school libraries has primarily been studied to highlight the value of libraries for student learning and achievement (Godfree & Neilson, 2018; Harper, 2017; Lance & Kachel, 2018), increasing the knowledge level of struggling students (Merga, 2019b), and fostering of student engagement in reading (Merga, 2019a). Very little work has focused on the role that school libraries play in student well-being (Harper, 2017; Merga, 2020).

However, a study that looked at different parts of the school premises in France found a significantly elevated affective well-being score in the library that was not correlated with the overall well-being score at school (Joing et al., 2020). This suggests that this space plays a positive and singular role in the daily school lives of students. Joing et al. (2020) have concluded that more qualitative approaches are needed to better understand the role played by this place in the dynamics of school well-being.

The school library: a singular space on the school premises

In France, the school library (CDI) is managed by a documentalist teacher (the librarian). As noted by Spear (2018, p. 518), "chief among her responsibilities is teaching but she also supervises people, collections, and spaces." The CDI is a "place where formal and non-formal practices from unstructured learning meet explicitly. Thus, it is a place apart from the school space even if it is part of it, characterized by its rules of use but also by a relative freedom of movement and activity (Govoreanu & Tillard, 2020). Even though it is a pivotal space between school life and the teaching teams (Govoreanu & Tillard, 2020), it belongs more to the school culture "where meritocratic values of work are disseminated and learned" (Monnard, 2014, p. 99). Moreover, the missions allocated to documentalist teachers are

4

mainly centered on the provision of knowledge (Govoreanu & Tillard, 2020), which seems to mask the other possible functions of this place, notably that of supporting student well-being.

Materials and methods

The school

The school in which the ethnographic experience took place is located in the Hauts-de-France region of Lille in France. The school has 560 students aged 10 to 15 who are socially and academically heterogeneous, with academic success that is well above the academic average, which gives the school a good reputation.

As highlighted by an initial quantitative survey, the school's main problem is the presence of bad relationships between the children and the adults in the school, which significantly impacts students' pleasure in coming to school.

Architecturally, the school dates back to 1967 and has a classic courtyard-type construction (Rigolon, 2010) with corridors feeding into classrooms on both sides and a large asphalt playground outside the buildings. The CDI was renovated in 2007 and is located on the second floor behind a large mezzanine overlooking the entrance to the school. It is a rectangular space, very bright, with high ceilings and walls decorated with posters and friezes/drawings by the students (Photos 1 and 2).

[Photo 1 near here]

[Photo 2 near here]

Understanding the students' lived world through the ethnographic approach

The results presented in this article come from a local ethnographic experience (geographical proximity) in an urban middle school for a period of five months from November 2017 to April 2018.

In order to understand the ordinary daily life of the students, the aim was to live as close to them as possible by refusing the attraction of the adult world, which offered itself in a more natural way with regard to age. This work is thus anchored in the field of the socio-anthropology of childhood, and is marked by the desire to see and hear adolescents while being vigilant against the traps of adult centrism (Delalande, 2007).

For five months, I lived at the school and used the same places and spaces as the students used. The tracking method (Coulon, 1987) was sometimes used to "follow" the students over an extended period of time (at least a week) to take part in all activities scheduled in the students' timetable. This choice of mobility (in space) and tracking (in time) made it possible to be as close as possible to the students' daily lives while accessing the interconnection of different school scenes. Other observation methods were also used, such as staying in a place like the CDI, or moving freely around the school.

It was an overt participant observation insofar as my role was known to the students. In light of the age gap that distinguished me from the students, I was a "visible seer" (Merleau-Ponty, cited in Laplantine, 2015, p. 23). I observed, heard, exchanged, smelled, and felt while being visible to the students.

Instruments

The approach used is in line with what Delalande (2007) described as the socio-anthropology of childhood, which implies a reversal of the situation since the researcher adopts the position of an adult who comes to learn from children (Delalande, 2010). This approach sometimes leads to "methodological tinkering" in the field to allow the researcher to best grasp "the point

of view of the native" (in this case, the student) and "pitch his tent in the middle of the village" (Malinowski, 1989, p. 63).

Several tools were constructed and mobilized.

The field journal was the main tool for collecting observations. It includes different types of notes, such as descriptions of places, people, scenes, verbatim transcriptions, etc. These were intermittently transcribed as opportunities for privacy or relative intimacy arose. The CDI was sometimes one of these places.

Non-directive interviews with the students and also with some adults were conducted, recorded, and transcribed. The interviews with the students were conducted as opportunities arose; for example, inviting them to an interview in a warm room was a lifesaver on a cold day when all the students were locked out in the playground with no access to the interior. Interviewees were therefore randomly selected according to the events and availability of the students I met.

The aim of these interviews was to understand how students interacted with the various places in the school space, and the role these places might play in their well-being at school. The main questions that guided the discussions during these non-directive interviews are detailed in Appendix A.

A questionnaire was also constructed to identify places in which students felt particularly comfortable and those they disliked. The tool had three parts. The first part collected not only the student's gender and grade level but also the student's overall school satisfaction with coming to school using an adapted Cantril (1965) scale ranging from 1 ("I hate school. I'm sick of coming to school") to 10 ("I love coming to school. I wouldn't miss a day of school for the world"). This type of single-item question facilitates student comprehension and is a

robust indicator of subjective well-being (Diener, 1984; Dolan et al., 2008; Veenhoven, 1993).

The second part consisted of a map of the school that we made that included almost all the places in the school. The student had to put 20 symbols (either + or -) on this map. The + symbol represented positive experiences and the - symbol represented negative experiences. The symbols could be in the same place or in different places. The goal was for all of these symbols to spatially represent what the adolescents were experiencing at school. The student could also place a heart on the map to materialize a zone of super well-being (a "refuge"—i.e., a zone in which they felt particularly well and which "boosted him or her in positive energy"[1]); conversely, the presence of hostile elements (people or other elements) was represented by arrows. The third part invited the students to explain certain symbols by writing some examples of positive and/or negative experiences associated with the symbols and their location.

The complete questionnaire is shown in Appendix B.

Ninety-five students completed the questionnaire (17% of the school's population), mainly on "citizenship days" during which I was able to conduct whole-class workshops. On these days, I was able to welcome three classes randomly chosen by the head (a class of first-year secondary school students, a class of third year students, and a class of fourth year students) to whom I proposed the questionnaire. The sample is therefore non-probabilistic insofar as it is mainly the students of these classes who completed it.

With these three classes, I also proposed a work involving illustrations: the pupils were divided into groups of three or four, chose a place in the school, and idealized it through the realization of an illustration.

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[1] Terms used in the questionnaire.

Analysis

The present study is primarily a qualitative and inductive one in that it "produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 11). The grounded theory method (Glaser & Strauss, 2010; Bryant & Charmaz, 2019) was used to analyze the different materials (i.e., interviews, student illustrations, the field journal, and a questionnaire). The findings were based on open, axial, and selective coding (Lejeune, 2014). The responses to the questionnaire were also examined using more quantitative methods; that is, by calculating the number of times the students viewed the library positively (the number of + symbols), negatively (the number of - symbols), or as a place of refuge (the number of hearts). The R ratio was calculated by dividing the total number of positive experiences (+ symbols) by the number of negative experiences (- symbols). A ratio greater than 1 meant that the library was more often associated with positive experiences. A I-score of place importance was calculated by dividing the total number of symbols (+ and -) by the number of students who completed the questionnaire. An I-score greater than 1 meant that the students associated the library with a meaningful experience (whether positive or negative).

Ethical Precautions

In accordance with French law and the European regulation on data protection, a declaration was made and authorization was registered and published under no. 2018–7 of the University of Lille's data processing register. This procedure guarantees the anonymity of participants (students and school) and that there is secure data storage (data encryption and authentication required). In addition, the head of the school was informed of the purpose of the study and of the right to access, rectify, and delete data concerning the school. The researcher's personal details and the CIL declaration number were sent to the head of the school.

Results and Discussion

An important place in the adolescents' daily school life

Results from the questionnaire on spatialization of middle school experiences reveal the importance of the CDI to students (Table 1). Generally, students systematically chose to place a symbol in this place (I = 1), which testifies to the importance of the CDI in their daily school life. Far from being a space in the shadows, the CDI occupies an important place. When students chose to associate it with a meaningful experience, it was more widely associated with positive emotions (in 72% of cases) regardless of the student's gender.

The results from this questionnaire also show a plurality of experiences by grade level. The ratio of positive to negative experiences in the CDI declines as the student's education progresses; while students in the first year of secondary school largely associated it with positive experiences (24 positive symbols out of 27), the associations of students in the third and especially the fourth year were more nuanced (14 positive symbols out of 27 for the fourth year; Table 1).

[Table 1 near here]

A school "home" for readers and younger adolescents

An individual needs a territorial anchor to feel good (Moser, 2009). Students are no exception to this fundamental need to build a "home" at school by positively investing certain school places with or attributing to them "qualities of safety, comfort, and a symbolic place to which the individual likes to return" (Moser, 2009, p. 80).

For a number of students, especially readers and younger students, the CDI plays a key role in this process of appropriation and construction of this school 'home'.

10

The CDI is above all a space associated with reading. This place attracts students who are readers regardless of their grade level. Students take advantage of recess time to "borrow books and read," so much so that some "have so many books in their satchel that they love to read" (second year boy). Others desert this place simply because they "don't like to read" or because they have already read everything; for example, a fourth-year student explains that he used to go to the CDI in first grade to read manga (Japanese comic strips) but that he no longer goes there since he has read everything.

The student readers see the CDI as a place that is congruent with their needs and with which they identify. This feeling of familiarity allows students to appropriate this place, thus contributing to a sense of security in their daily school life.

In addition, 14% of the students attributed to the CDI the role of a refuge (Table 1), as a space of "super well-being where they feel particularly good and which boosts their positive energy" (terms used in the questionnaire). First-year students identified the CDI in 41% of the cases, which means this refuge function is central for these students. In other words, four in ten first-year students identified the CDI as a place that is particularly resourceful in their daily school life.

Entry into secondary school (middle school) is marked by a feeling of loss of control and security that is caused, in particular, by the discovery of a new establishment, a multiplicity of classrooms that make it difficult to appropriate and identify with a place of learning, and the loss of a single point of reference because there are multiple teachers. This can generate stress in students, who must quickly rebuild a primary territory—in other words, a school "home"—to satisfy their need for security and reference points. The CDI seems to play this important role of refuge for many first-year students by offering a quieter environment than, for example, the playground and also allowing for more privacy.

11

A bulwark against cold and restlessness

Cold management is a central theme in students' daily lives so much so that this term was a category of its own during open coding of my field journal. Repeated observations revealed that weather conditions impacted students' spatial occupation strategies.

Cold acts as an environmental stressor (Moser, 2009). The individual must be able to control it to avoid the harmful effects of a stressful environment on health (Baum et al., 1982; Cohen et al., 1980; Glass & Singer, 1972). While some students, especially older students, seek refuge in the toilets, others prefer the CDI when it is open to moderate the effect of this environmental stressor. They go there to perform a quiet activity, such as reading or "chatting and coloring in the warmth" (second-year boys). On a day in March when the weather was cool (5–10°C) and humid, a first-year student confided during a break in the CDI that "even the boys color! Usually it's the girls, but now even the boys come to color...". Another mixed group of students that combined first- and third-year girls and boys explained that "it's cold outside" and that "in the summer, [they] stay in playground."

The CDI is sometimes open at lunchtime; it hosts a creativity club. A second year explains that by participating in this club "at least [she doesn't] get cold for an hour".

Students also come there for the quietness that is associated with it and that facilitates work (compared to the supervised work room, which is often noisy) or "because there are fewer people" than in the playground (first-year girl).

Finally, a third-year student (excused from physical education class and going to the CDI) explained that it is a singular "atmosphere" that she comes to find, without knowing precisely how to describe it.

A rather solitary place that is not suitable for older students

Despite a generally positive perception of the CDI, students gradually desert this place because they cannot talk with their classmates. This place is perceived as "the opposite of home" because the students are "not very free [...] it's really work–work. Whereas normally, we have to work in groups [...] we can't work in groups" (fourth-year girl).

However, there are two small work rooms adjoining the CDI in which students can discuss, but the librarian reminds them that "if I hear them, they come back to the common room!" The students very rarely mentioned the presence of these work rooms during the course of the study. They more widely attributed the possibility of working in groups to the supervised work room, even if it is so noisy that the students prefer "even to stay outside than to go there"; "it's no longer [a] work room to study, it's to laugh [...] all the people, they shout"; "it's always shouting" (fourth-year students).

Older students seek out spaces to work in groups in a quiet setting that reflects their expressed needs for social interaction and independence. Repeated observations show students looking for these spaces: they "beg" educational staff for a work room to be opened or for permission to move the table in the supervised work room to "work better together," a request that was rejected because the students were "close enough." Finally, the observations highlight the absence of spaces adapted to satisfy this requirement for cooperative work; thus, if students have to construct a collective presentation, they either go to "the CDI or we go... we do it at home," or "we invite ourselves to our place" (fourth-year girls).

While they chose the CDI to work in groups, some second-year students explained that a classmate was punished because he was working on a presentation and the librarian "yelled at him because he was speaking for the project. She gave him a sanction." A fourth-year girl also lamented that she was given a sanction because she was "whispering, not loud!" Students say they can "only read—we can't do anything else, so we don't go any more. Only the first-year

students go there because they don't know, and then maybe the older ones to read, but the second-year students don't go there any more, they know."

The CDI could play the role of a resourcing space, making it possible to counterbalance the stress and the pressure of punishment, grades, and exams; and it could be perceived as a social and lively space (Merga, 2021). But in this school, it is very close to the dominant school culture of imposing individual work in silence (Monnard, 2014), which leads some students, especially the older ones, to desert it.

The librarian confirmed this during a prolonged exchange—"Often they come in the first year and after in the second year we don't see them anymore!"—without questioning the reasons for this desertion.

My first experience of the place turned out to be very characteristic of this observation, as shown in this excerpt from the field journal:

> It is 9:00 a.m. I am waiting in front of the study hall, and I am about to follow 23 students taken in charge by the librarian. She takes them to the CDI. As soon as they enter, the teacher focuses on calm. All the interventions will be in silence and the noise level. "You can't tell the difference between the rules of the foyer, the playground, the CDI...." "Too much noise." The noise level seems acceptable and comfortable to me.
>
> At 9:30 a.m., the students are separated by the librarian. They are forbidden to exchange even in a low voice because they do not respect the instructions: "do not play the game (of whispering)"... A group of three first-year girls who were working together on the computer ask:
>
> - "Even us, madam?"
>
> - "Yes, even you, you don't follow the rules so that goes for everyone."
>
> - "But we have to do a job with three...," one of them tries to justify, without much hope.

The three girls quickly organize themselves, divide the tasks in a whisper, and separate. They each sit down in front of a computer without discussing or protesting.

The decision may seem unfair considering the behavior and intention of most of the students (which was obviously to work in groups on a well-defined project. All this in silence).

9:45: The CDI is perfectly calm. Some students are reading, some are working on computers, some are cutting and drawing, some are getting up, fetching books, working from a dictionary.

While cooperation and interdisciplinarity are advocated both by the teaching staff (proposing group work) and by the academic and scientific world, few spatial arrangements support this learning format either in class (only one experience of a classroom in islands during class tracking) or outside. Yet fourth-year students are clamoring for these group work spaces, which are virtually absent in the school. There are only two small workrooms integrated into the CDI and another room next to the study hall that is used most of the time to accommodate sanctioned students. This room is generally forbidden to the students unless exceptional authorization is obtained after having "begged" (as the adolescents put it) the educational staff. Elsewhere, students are either subjected to strict silence that does not allow group work, such as in the CDI, or to intensive noise that is incompatible with cognitive work (such as the foyer or supervised work room).

In addition, the rules of the CDI explicitly state that "students who are doing their homework or learning their lessons go to the study room if they do not need the resources of the CDI. The CDI is used for document research, use of computer stations, and reading on site."

A group of fourth-year students expressed through a drawing the need for a space that would allow for group work. They chose the supervised work room ("permanence" in French) to idealize a place in the school. Their drawing represents an integrative space that allows all the useful and necessary activities when they are not in the classroom. These activities include not

only those traditionally supported by the CDI, namely reading, but also private spaces allowing for group work (photo 3).

[Photo 3 near here]

A refuge or safe haven for students who are feeling bad

The analysis of the questionnaires on the spatialization of experiences at school reveals a function of refuge or even safe haven for students who are victims of ostracism and/or are unhappy at school.

The CDI is sometimes a place to escape from the playground. A third-year student who rated her enjoyment of middle school at 2/10 (knowing that a score of 1 corresponds to hating middle school and being sick at the thought of coming there) said she felt isolated from her friends (who were in a different class); she explained that she had many problems with a classmate whom she "couldn't stop. When one [problem] is over, another one comes up. It's a vicious cycle." This student identified the bench in the playground and the CDI as spaces associated with positive experiences (Figure 1). She stated in writing:

> The bench: where me and my friends go to the playground (the only place in the school where I really feel [underlined by the student] comfortable), but we are not in the same class, so they are not often there. CDI: I love books, and I prefer to be there than in the playground, because I am often all alone.

> The playground is then the worst place in the world (too much bad news), looked at by others because I am all alone, a place I can't escape when the CDI is closed.

Another student attributes the same function to this place. This is a first-year girl who is unhappy, rating her pleasure at coming to school at 1/10—in other words, she hates the school and is sick at the thought of coming there. Her questionnaire spatially identifies the CDI as a refuge zone (Figure 2), which the student does not hesitate to fill with hearts (used to materialize a refuge zone), wishing to show the great importance of this place in her daily

school life. This experience is contrasted by the numerous arrows (used to materialize an enemy) in the playground. This student did not provide any details on her questionnaire, but the symbols (Figure 2) allow us to understand that the CDI is a place where she takes refuge from malevolent classmates in the playground.

An interview with the librarian confirmed this aspect by confiding that it is often the same students who occupy the CDI during breaks. They come to read or to be on the computers. Some isolated students regularly confide in the teacher, mentioning the fact that some of their classmates "are stupid, they undermine them." These unhappy students take refuge in the CDI to escape from their peers. There may also be "students in groups [a group of first-year boys, for example] who come to color. They meet in the CDI. They were together in elementary school and one of them was left out. So they come to the CDI and they meet there..." (excerpt from the field diary recounting the exchanges with the librarian. The librarian stated that she was "aware that some students also come to the CDI to get away from the other students and the playground [...]. The students don't always know when I'm open. So sometimes the CDI is closed and I'm sure some of them are waiting there [in the hall] to be warm and not to go to the playground or be in the hallways."

Field observations confirmed this refuge function for some students. When I was passing in front of the CDI during recess, I came across a group of students there when the place was closed: "From the look on their faces, I deduce that they [the students] are afraid of being 'kicked out.' This is probably a strategy to escape the playground" (excerpt from field diary).

[Figure 1 near here]

[Figure 2 near here]

Limited accessibility

Students generally call for extended opening of this place, as evidenced by a sharing of ideas among third-year students about what "the ideal middle school" might be (Photo 4).

[Photo 4 near here]

Students recurrently complained that the CDI was never open, "that she [the librarian] is never there" (second-year boys) or that it is "open every 36th day of the month" (fourth-year girls).

An interview with the librarian confirms patchy opening:

> It opens at 9 a.m., never before, then there is a break from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m. in general to try to be open from 12 p.m. to 2 p.m. Then it's variable, depending on the needs and sometimes personal constraints. She works at 80 per cent. She makes sure to "arrive on time." Never opens during the afternoon recess. (...) "To arrive on my time wheel. A quarter of an hour here, a quarter of an hour there." (Excerpt from field diary)

These exchanges show that there's not a real reflection about this place and its importance in daily school life. The needs of the students and the role that the CDI can play in the school ecosystem are never mentioned by the staff. The librarian's way of thinking is mainly guided by personal constraints and time accounting that allows for the "right number of hours." The management team does not mention the importance of this place in the dynamics of school experiences. When the subject of the CDI and its regular closure is raised, it is above all the importance and potential richness of the actions and projects set up by the previous librarian that are mentioned:

> She was very much into pedagogical innovation [...] on cross-curricular things, media education, things that can generate a sense of belonging, that can also influence the climate, I think, by being on cross-curricular skills [...] by trying to set up strong times in the school, the digital month, things like that, things to create a collective. (Deputy Head)

These accessibility constraints are consistent with the findings of Durpaire and Durpaire's (2017) study that revealed reduced accessibility to the CDI in middle school compared to high school, even though school well-being is lower in middle school (Guimard et al., 2015, 2017).

[Photos 5 & 6 near here]

In addition to the regular closures, there are variable open hours that are sometimes difficult for students to understand (photos 5 and 6) as well as strict rules that may discourage some students from coming. Among other things, the rules mention the "five-minute rule," which stipulates that students must arrive "within five minutes of the bell ringing, after which it is too late, access is no longer possible," which implies that the student "does not go to the playground or to the toilets and then join the CDI [not allowed to go back up]"; "in the case where he/she has been detained by a teacher at the end of the lesson and the five minutes have passed, he/she will not go to the CDI this time." They are also reminded in several places that "it is strictly forbidden to stay on the mezzanine under penalty of a disciplinary observation" and that in the case of a teacher's absence, for example, students must "line up against the wall of the supervised work room and wait quietly for the librarian to come and get the interested students. At lunchtime, students "must be in the playground at 12:10 or 1:10 p.m. and wait quietly for the librarian to come and get the interested students to work in the CDI"; the student "will not be accepted if he/she has not waited in the playground" (excerpts from the CDI rules).

The entry of students is thus very regulated and sometimes subject to the choice of the adults if too many students want to go there (the teacher limits the number of students to 20). At recess, you have to "go as soon as the bell rings" or during the lunch break, "but you have to go for at least an hour" (first-year girl).

Conclusion

Even if the qualitative approach contextualized to one school does not allow generalization of the conclusions, the study nevertheless reveals the importance of the school library (CDI in France) in the daily school life of many adolescents.

As a quiet place sheltered from peers during recess, the school library sometimes constitutes a refuge for students who feel bad—in other words, a zone of withdrawal that the individual appropriates for him- or herself (Fischer, 2011). It is the need for privacy (Zeisel, 1975, 1981) that is expressed: generally speaking, individuals aspire to regulate the nature and quantity of their contact with others (Altman, 1975). This need for privacy is all the more important when students experience uncomfortable situations (Dumur et al., 2004). This is the reason that if the school space must encourage social relations, it must also make isolation and withdrawal possible. The school library plays an essential role in this respect. It constitutes a refuge for isolated students, allowing them to escape the playground. The results of this study agree with Wittmann and Fisher-Allison (2020, 46), who stated that "in many schools, the library is the only public space intentionally put forward as a refuge." The institution should be more aware of this aspect by allowing permanent access to the library as, for example, a real protective factor against ostracism. The institution would also benefit from considering the library as a lively and social space that which would allow isolated students to meet and build new positive social relationships, as identified by Merga (2021) in her study.

As a quiet place to read, the library contributes to a sense of security and well-being by creating a school "home" for many students, especially younger students and readers.

This quiet space meets the need of some students to recharge their batteries. It is a kind of pressure relief valve, far from academic and social pressure, especially for the more active students (Merga, 2021). It is a place that contrasts with the playground, the corridors, and the supervised work room, which are perceived as too noisy by a majority of students.

As the only sheltered place accessible during break times, the school library also constitutes a bulwark against cold and agitation, which makes it a refuge for students. The issue of cold is a central element in understanding the dynamics of school well-being. The institution would benefit from giving this aspect greater consideration when rethinking the spaces and their accessibility.

The school library thus meets a set of needs of the students (need for privacy and/or quietude, physiological need to be warm). In this sense, it is an essential place in the well-being of students because it contributes to making the school a psychologically healthy environment (Baker et al., 2003).

This ethnographic survey reveals the necessity for prolonged opening of the library during the whole school day in relation to health, adolescent issues, and the role played by the place. During certain time slots that are essential for the well-being of students (such as afternoon recess), the library is not open in the particular school investigated. Despite the issues of security and belonging, neither the library's accessibility nor the replacement of the librarian in cases of absence is really questioned by the adults. The institution seems to minimize the importance of the school library in the adolescents' daily school life.

Older students end up deserting the library because it is too closely tied to the codes of the dominant school culture that impose individual work in silence (Monnard, 2014), an outcome that is in agreement with the conclusions of Joing and her colleagues (2020) on a significant decrease in subjective well-being over the course of middle school. A reflection can thus be engaged to increase the adequacy of the school space and, in particular, the library to better fulfill both the needs of students and academic expectations. The idea of a larger resource center with different spaces that allow diverse activities, such as reading, rest, and individual or group work, would better respond to the diversity of expectations. This conclusion joins those of Durpaire and Durpaire (2017) on the spatial inadequacies of the CDI.

Finally, the results from this ethnographic experience reveal the importance of reflecting on spaces (not only built but also perceived, used, and experienced by students) to better understand the dynamics of school well-being and to foster quality of life at school for all adolescents.

Further work on the role of the library for the well-being of students in various school and period of the year and cultural contexts is necessary to confirm these first findings and reveal the importance of this place for a majority of adolescents.

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Student non directive interview guideline

Brief presentation of the study:

"I'm a researcher at the University of Lille working on well-being in secondary schools. I'd like to gain a better understanding of students' daily lives in order to improve their well-being. Everything you tell will be strictly confidential and anonymous; if I were to relate some of what you say, nothing would allow to identify you. This is very important for me, for the research and for you, the principle being that you should be as honest and sincere as possible. Could I record this interview?"

Opening question:

"Can you tell me what a typical day at school is like, from the moment you arrive at school (by bus, car...) until you leave in the evening? Can you also tell me whether you like or dislike the different moments you experience in your school day and why you like or dislike them?"

During interview:

To go back over each moment and ask if the student likes or dislikes it, and why? To ask for details about what the student is doing there? Does he sometimes have problems or, on the contrary, pleasant moments when he goes to such and such a place... or at such and such a time...?

There are several spaces in a school (mention them) and go back over the ones that weren't mentioned. Why?

If he could avoid one place, which would it be and why?

Where does the student prefer to go? Why?

To go back over any problems mentioned and ask "how could things be improved? If he could change anything at school to feel better, what would it be? If he could change anything at school to enjoy himself more, what would it be?"

Appendix B

Student questionnaire: spatializing middle school experiences

Tu es : ☐ une fille   ☐ un garçon

Tu es en : ☐ 6ème   ☐ 5ème   ☐ 4ème   ☐ 3ème

Ma note « plaisir de venir au collège » : (/10)

0   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Je déteste le collège.
Je suis malade à
l'idée de venir à
l'école.

J'adore venir au
collège. Pour rien au
monde, je ne raterais
une journée d'école.

PARTIE 1 :

Tu disposes de **20 symboles** (soit des +, soit des -) à disposer comme tu veux sur le plan. Les + représentent des expériences positives que tu as vécues au collège ; les – sont associées à des expériences négatives. Les symboles peuvent être au même endroit ou à des endroits différents, il peut y avoir des + et des – au même endroit… Comme tu veux ! Le but est que cela reflète au mieux ce que tu vis dans le collège en général.

Tu peux compléter et/ ou préciser le plan si tu le souhaites.

PARTIE 2 :

Donne quelques exemples d'expériences positives et/ou négatives associées aux symboles que tu as mis (explique pourquoi tu as mis tel ou tel symbole sur le plan).
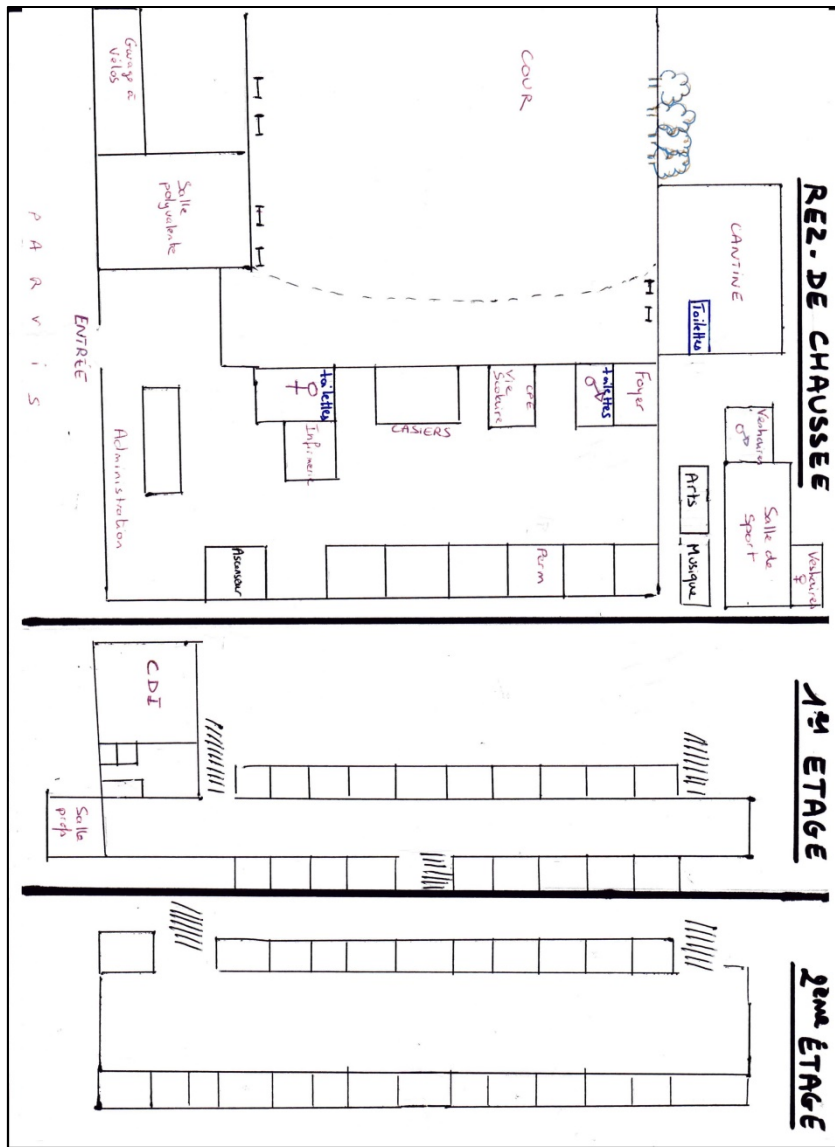
Exemple(s) de + :

Exemple(s) de - :

PARTIE 3 :

Les opposants/ les « ennemis » : personne *a priori* mais si tu le juges nécessaire, tu peux les matérialiser sur le plan par le symbole suivant :

Le/ les refuge(s) (les zones de super bien-être ou de réconfort) : si tu veux tu peux matérialiser une ou plusieurs zones dans le collège où tu te sens particulièrement bien et qui te booste en énergie positive. Dans ce cas, mets le symbole suivant : ❤

REZ-DE-CHAUSSEE

COUR

Groupe à vélos

Salle polyvalente

PARVIS

ENTRÉE

Administration

CANTINE

Toilettes

Foyer

Toilettes

CPE
Vie Scolaire

CASIERS

Toilettes
Infirmerie

Vestiaire
♀

Salle de Sport

Arts

Musique

Vestiaire
♂

Perm

Ascenseur

1er ETAGE

CDI
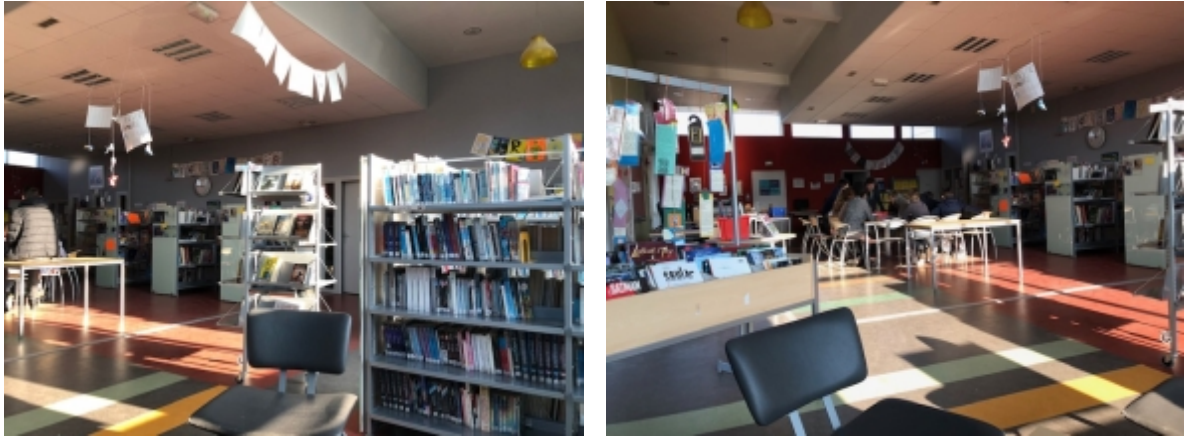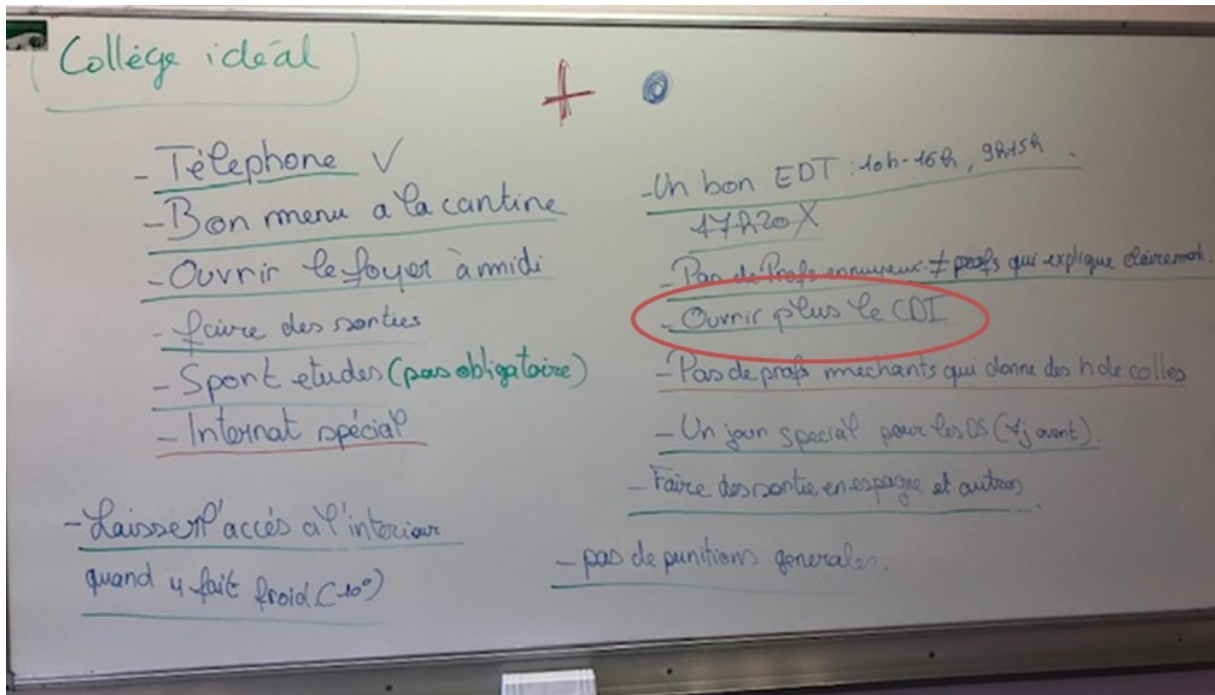
Salle profs

2ème ETAGE

29

Photos, Tables and Figures

Photos 1 and 2. Views of the CDI

Photo 3. Fourth-year students' illustration depicting an idealized version of the supervised

work room ("salle de permanence").

Photo 4. Sharing brainstorming ideas for the construction of an ideal middle school with a third-year class

Photos 5 and 6. Examples of the CDI's open hours

Table 1. Summary of students' experiences at the CDI

	Number of positive experiences (+ symbols)	Number of negative experiences (- symbols)	Number of times the SL is identified as a place of refuge (♥ symbol)	Ratio R Positive experiences/ negative experiences	I* Emphasis on place (density of experiences per student)
Total sample (N = 95)	70 (72%)	27 (28%)	14 (14%)	2.6	1
Girls (n = 52)	44 (75%)	15 (25%)	9 (17%)	2.9	1.1
Boys (n = 39)	25 (69%)	11 (31%)	5 (13%)	2.2	0.9
1st year (n = 24)	24 (89%)	3 (11%)	10 (41%)	8	1.1
3rd year (n = 45)	32 (74%)	11 (26%)	2 (4%)	2.9	0.9
4th year (n = 26)	14 (52%)	13 (48%)	2 (8%)	1.1	1

*I = total number of symbols in this place/number of students

Figure 1. Spatialization of the experiences lived by a third-year girl evaluating pleasure at coming to the college at 2/10: the CDI is associated with a positive experience and most of the time constitutes a refuge to escape the playground (in which blue circles indicate the presence of "enemies").
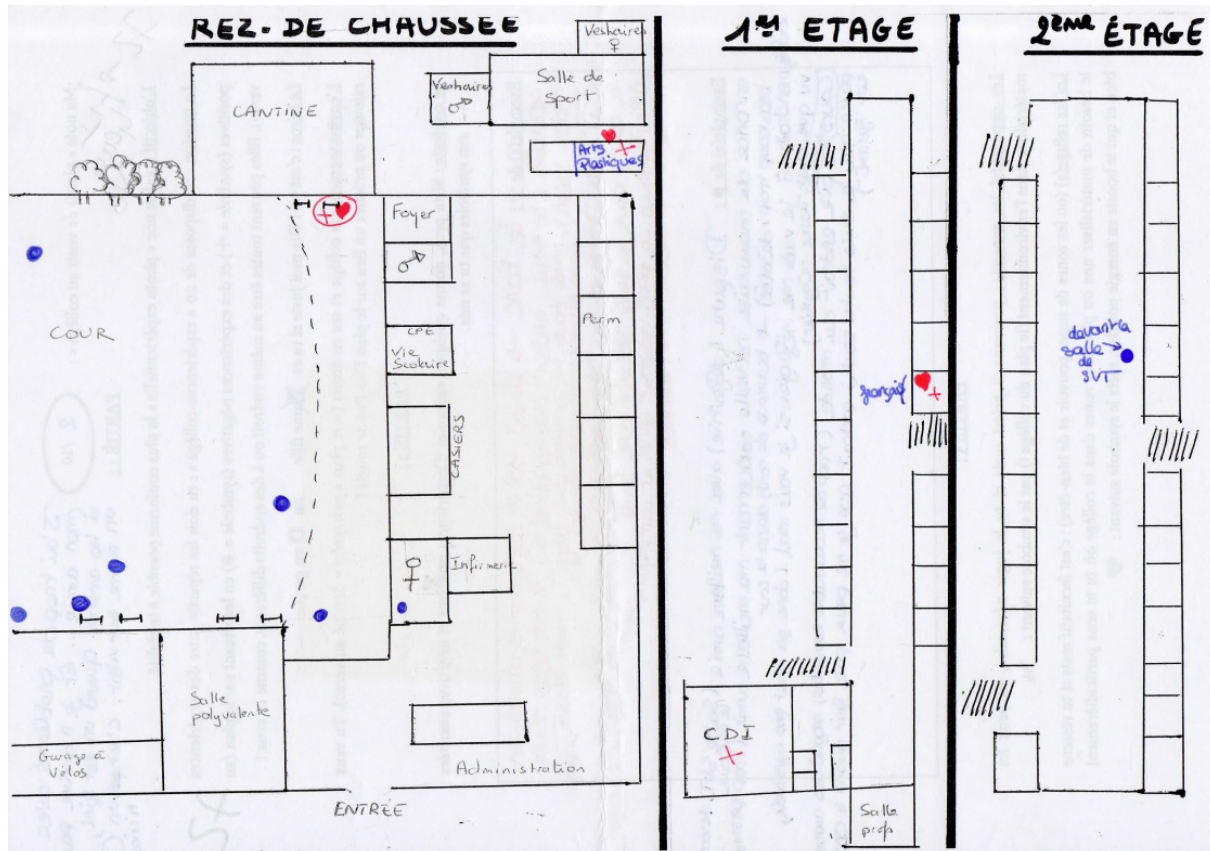

Figure 2. Spatialization of the experiences of an unhappy first-year girl who rates her pleasure at coming to school at 1/10: the CDI is identified as a refuge zone to escape the playground in which she seems to have problems with one or more classmates (notably "Sonia").

REZ. DE CHAUSSEE
1ᵉʳ ETAGE
2ᵉᵐᵉ ETAGE

CANTINE
Vestiaires ♀
Vestiaires ♂
Salle de sport
MUSIC

COUR
Foyer
CPE Vie Scolaire
CASIERS
Perm
SONIA
Infirmerie

Salle polyvalente
Garage à vélos
Administration

ENTRÉE

Transports
CDI
Salle profs

MATH 215
parce que j'ai peur de la prof