

“Students” as Nodal Point of Identity: Analyzing the Discourses of  
Quebec’s News Media and Students in the 2012 *Printemps Érablé*

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## Abstract

### **“Students” as Nodal Point of Identity: Analyzing the Discourses of Quebec’s News Media and Students in the 2012 *Printemps Érablé***

**Jonathan Turcotte-Summers**

This thesis presents a comparative discourse analysis of Quebec’s news media and students in the context of the 2012 student strike and more broad-based uprising known as the *Printemps érable* (Maple Spring). More specifically, the analysis concerns how educational issues were represented in the discourse of the news media compared to that of students, as expressed in mainstream newspapers and student association press releases, respectively. It also addresses the role of these discourses in either reproducing or contesting hegemonic political and economic ideologies. The discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe (1985) is operationalized as the primary methodological framework for this study, focusing on the articulation of polysemic signifiers as moments and nodal points. Ten texts were selected from *The Gazette* and ten from *La Presse*, as well as ten press releases from the FECQ/FEUQ and ten from the CLASSE. Analysis reveals that the signifier “students” represents a nodal point of identity or master signifier central to each discourse, as they fail to conform to notions of a common media or student discourse. The discourse of *The Gazette* may be described as that of an illiberal or neoliberal democracy, while those of *La Presse* and the FECQ/FEUQ are more or less both liberal democratic and neoliberal capitalist. The discourse of the CLASSE is identified as postliberal, with features of direct and participatory democracy, and though it reproduces few neoliberal articulations it also contests few. In the end, challenging the political order appears more practicable than challenging the economic one.

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Thanks, first and foremost, to my family, my eternal wellspring of comfort and strength.

Thanks to my friends, old and new, who find ways to make my world a better place every day—and who will hopefully forgive my neglect.

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Finally, thanks to all those who contributed in their own way to the *Printemps érable*. Let's get together again soon!

The land upon which sits Concordia University, upon which this thesis was completed, and upon which took place the events described herein is the traditional territory of First Nations peoples such as the Saint Lawrence Iroquoians and the Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk).

## Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis paper to the memory of my late grandmother, Cynthia May Kong, and to my new niece, Jasmine Alexia Grigore.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

After delivering a rushed, ill-prepared presentation of my half-finished thesis paper at Concordia's Graduate Symposium in the Department of Education, I was asked by a colleague in attendance what had led me to study the subject of Quebec's 2012 *Printemps érable*. I replied that I was fascinated with the way in which the striking students tried to spark discussion and debate about this system in which we are all working, how they tried to raise questions about fundamental issues in education, about what we are all doing here—in academia, of course. I said I was equally interested in the way in which this debate caught fire in certain circles but was largely ignored or snuffed out—but by whom? And for what reason? Why do we talk—or not talk—about our field the way we do?

My response was not entirely truthful; I largely ignored the student strike myself until the night of Saturday, May 19, 2012—one day after Quebec's provincial government passed Bill 78 into law. Upon our arrival at Place Émilie-Gamelin, someone handed my brother and I red felt squares with safety pins. We took to the street with the marchers, were chased by police, and witnessed their intimidation and brutality—the riot squad of the Montreal cops and the provincial paramilitary in their soviet-green fatigues, equipped with helmets, shields, clubs. Pepper spray and tear gas were soon deployed, including a canister blasted directly into a crowded Saint-Denis terrace, and the irritants forced a bunch of us into a bar across the street. Inside was packed with people trying to recover from what they had just experienced as the wait staff made their way through the crowd with pitchers of water to flush the chemicals from reddened eyes. The police would not let anyone leave the bar until much later, and only through a designated route across the street, through another bar, out its back door, and away from the area.

My brother did not attend another protest, but I would wear my red square and go out almost every evening after that.

Only a couple of months prior, another teacher at my union's general assembly had put forward a motion to have us support the striking students in their struggle against the government's planned tuition fee increase. Like many others, I had not understood the need for such a motion, and it had been defeated by a wide margin. However, by the end of May, I was



reading up on the strike online, following the protests on social media, talking to my colleagues about it at work, and even getting involved in community organizing in my neighborhood of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce. As the *casserole* protests started up in response to Bill 78, we would meet at Girouard Park and march through NDG with our pots and pans clanging in the spring night.

This thesis paper is intended primarily for educational theorists, although my hope is that it will find particular resonance with fellow practitioners who sympathized with the 2012 Quebec student strike, and others who were with us in the street, concerned with how we address those fundamental questions about our present system of mass education. The first objective of this paper is to analyze the news media's discourse surrounding educational issues, and particularly its discourse concerning students, as expressed in newspaper articles during the strike and the broader uprising known as the *Printemps érable*.<sup>1</sup> Its second objective is to analyze the students' discourse surrounding the same issues as expressed in student association press releases during the same period. Its third objective is to compare how the discourses of students and the media represent these issues in order to explore their similarities and differences, both in the context of the events of 2012 and more generally.

From the objectives listed emerge the following four research questions: (1) How are educational issues represented in the discourse of major newspapers in the context of the *Printemps érable*? (2) How are educational issues represented in the discourse of the main student associations in the same context? (3) What are the similarities and differences between how educational issues are represented in the discourses of students and the news media? (4) How do the discourses of students and the news media fit into wider political and economic discourses?

I begin this thesis paper with a review of the literature concerning issues related to the student strike, the mass media, the education system, and the broader political and economic discourses that have become hegemonic in the world's most privileged societies. In the following

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<sup>1</sup> There are a number of English translations for *Printemps érable*, including Maple Spring and Quebec Spring. However, these fail to capture the original's pun on the Arab Spring (or *Printemps arabe*), and thus the creativity and youthfulness associated with such a pun.

chapter, I present the conceptual model of the study, exploring the differences among discourse analytical theories as well as between them and others, ultimately describing that of Laclau and Mouffe (1985) as my primary methodological framework. I then delve into the study's methods, analyzing articles from *The Gazette* and *La Presse* as well as press releases from the Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec (FECQ), Fédération étudiante universitaire du Québec (FEUQ), and Coalition large de l'Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante (CLASSE). After describing my analysis of these texts in some detail, I present an interpretation of my findings and some conclusions based on how these discourses compare with each other and with the broader, hegemonic ones.

## Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

In this chapter of my thesis paper, I first introduce several different perspectives on the formal education system present in the literature, beginning with the popular but troublesome conception of education as the production of knowledge. The second section then provides a brief overview of the context of the *Printemps érable*, including the origins of Quebec's student movement and some of the key factors in 2012. Next, I explore the literature on the news media's framing of this uprising compared to previous social movements, from the new left of the 1960s to the more recent Occupy efforts. After that, I discuss the related and possibly even competing functions of mass media and mass education. Finally, before analyzing the discourses of the newspapers and student associations, I examine the broader political and economic discourses of liberal democracy and neoliberal capitalism that they either challenge or reproduce.

### 2.1. Perspectives on Education in the Literature

What are we talking about when we talk about education? Illustrating the strong influence of Marxist tradition in defining society in terms of production, education is widely discussed in the literature as “knowledge production,” and scholars as “knowledge workers” (Arshad-Ayaz, 2008; Naseem & Arshad-Ayaz, 2012). For example, efforts to move from knowledge acquisition to knowledge production in undergraduate honors programs are described as a progressive measure by Manathunga, Kiley, Boudd, and Cantwell (2012). On the other hand, scholars such as Metcalfe and Fenwick (2008), Akena (2012), and McNeely address the problematic nature of the concept of *knowledge*, while the latter further challenges the definition of education as *production*—a definition which promotes the troubling “incursion of economic and managerial imperatives” into the system (2009, p. 345).

Instead of knowledge, Peters and Besley (2006) assert that the formal education system is concerned with dominant metanarratives, and that students at the lower levels are tasked with their reproduction while those at the higher levels are involved with their production. Schools thus both shape and are shaped by hegemonic ideologies. However, others insist that students never actually have the opportunity to produce new narratives at all, being limited to the more and more creative reproduction of the prevailing discourses (Bellamy, 1994; Gintis & Bowles,

1982; Lynes, 2012). According to this view, the production of knowledge becomes warped into the mere reproduction of hegemonic metanarratives at all levels of schooling.

An alternative view of education is that of *the creation of possibility*—more specifically, of possible alternatives to dominant discourses. Greene, for example, suggests that the purpose of schooling should be “[t]o encourage the young to develop visions of what might be and then, against those visions recognize how much is lacking and what is” (2003, p. 66). Manning (2012) similarly insists that “[e]ducation is not about mimicking what already exists, it is about opening the field of potential toward the invention of new modes of existence.” Naseem and Arshad-Ayaz aim “to recast the role of education as a conduit to real democratic possibilities” (2012, p. 153). Finally, Lynes (2012) presents Spivak’s (2003) understanding of education as “a *preview*” or as “teleopoeisis”—in other words, “the work of imagination for an emancipation-to-come as a result of one’s labor in the present.” On the other hand, if education is considered by some as the creation of possibility, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) consider discourse—which will be discussed in greater detail in the conceptual framework section below—as the *reduction* of possibility (Phillips and Jorgensen, 2002).

## **2.2. Overview of the 2012 Student Strike and *Printemps Érablé***

Authors such as Ayotte-Thompson and Freeman (2012) and Sorochan (2012) describe the 2012 student strike in the historical context of Quebec’s Quiet Revolution of the 1960s, and particularly the Parent report which proposed the idiosyncratic system of post-secondary education we know today as well as other changes to make this system more accessible to the province’s French-speaking majority, more democratic, and ultimately free of charge. In addition to the above-mentioned authors, Asselin (2012) and Lamoureux (2012) acknowledge Quebec’s long history of student strikes—including the one in 2005 that first adopted the red square as its symbol—as having kept the vision of the Quiet Revolution alive and tuition fees relatively low in the face of repeated attempts to raise them. Furthermore, authors such as Bordeleau (2012), Manning (2012), and McGray (2014) also connect Quebec’s students to other contemporary progressive forces at home and abroad such as the province’s anti-poverty collective, Occupy Wall Street and, of course, the Arab Spring from which their uprising would draw its name.

The immediate cause of the 2012 student strike was the Quebec Liberal government's planned \$1,625 increase of the undergraduate university tuition fee for Quebec residents, from \$2,168 to \$3,793, over five years—an increase that Asselin (2012) argues “may seem absurdly low, but the stakes [were] high.” Sorochan (2012) asserts that pre-strike organizing actually stretched back to the government's initial announcement of the increase in 2010, while both authors mistakenly state that the first strike votes of 2012 were taken on February 13.<sup>2</sup>

Whereas provincial governments had previously managed to exploit differences between them, Ayotte-Thompson and Freeman (2012) credit the success of the 2012 strike in part to the common front shown by Quebec's three largest student organizations: the Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec (FECQ), Fédération étudiante universitaire du Québec (FEUQ), and Coalition large de l'Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante (CLASSE).<sup>3</sup> However, the literature pays much more attention to the CLASSE than to the other two. Sorochan (2012), for example, “distinguishes CLASSE from its more moderate counterparts” in terms of “its commitment to the principle of free post-secondary education as well as its organizational structure, which is based on direct democratic decision making.” Ayotte-Thompson and Freeman similarly focus on the CLASSE's continued call for the abolition of tuition fees, its coordination of protest actions, and its manifesto *Nous sommes avenir*<sup>4</sup> that extends far beyond the question of tuition.

The 2012 student strike is widely recognized as having been the longest and largest in North American history. Furthermore, as they addressed other issues and attracted new allies, the striking students found themselves at the heart of a broad-based social movement whose focus shifted from a simple budgetary choice to “a choice of society” (Massumi, 2012). Its support—

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<sup>2</sup> Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois (2013), who served as co-spokesperson of the CLASSE during most of the strike, claims he was involved in pre-strike organizing as early as 2009, when news of a tuition increase was first leaked by the rector of the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM). Furthermore, he describes in some detail the drama surrounding the first strike vote of 2012, taken at Collège de Valleyfield on February 7, which passed by the close margin of 460 to 448.

<sup>3</sup> Conspicuous by its absence is a fourth such organization, the Table de concertation étudiante du Québec (TaCEQ).

<sup>4</sup> The title of the CLASSE manifesto is translated into English as *Share Our Future*, although in French it represents wordplay between We Are to Come and We Are the Future—similar to the wordplay in *Printemps érablé*.

and its demands—grew even broader with the scandal-plagued government’s refusal to engage earnestly in negotiation, as well as its introduction of emergency anti-protest legislation that served to embolden police, even though the law itself was “so unreasonable that up until now the police have dared not make arrests under its provisions” (Bordeleau, 2012).<sup>5</sup> Bill 78 led to the mobilization of entire neighbourhoods, including a massive May 22 demonstration that has been billed as the biggest act of civil disobedience in Canadian history, and drew people into the street who may initially have even been in favour of the tuition increase. Although Lamoureux (2012) contends that “other segments of the population did not follow the lead of the student movement” and that the situation never evolved beyond an essentially student-generated conflict, Bordeleau claims:

Because [Bill 78] directly attacks all citizens’ freedom of association and free expression, large segments of the population that had not previously felt called upon to demonstrate spontaneously pour into the streets, returning evening after evening to demonstrate their displeasure and their commitment to the common good and the fundamental values of democracy, to the accompaniment of banging pots and pans.

### 2.3. The News Media’s Framing of the *Printemps Érablé* and Other Social Movements

Baillargeon (2012) is critical of the mainstream media’s representation of the *Printemps érablé*, insisting that many either admitted outright that they did not understand what was happening or revealed as much through their comments and analyses.<sup>6</sup> Al-Saji adds that, because the media “[missed] its nature as *movement*” and as “an *élan*” that extended beyond the familiar confines of the status quo, the media’s framing of it “imposed on the movement predefined parameters and positioned it within an already mapped field of meaning” with electoral politics and previously historicized social movements as reference points (2012, emphasis in original).

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<sup>5</sup> The literature demonstrates some confusion about “*la loi spéciale*” (the special law)—the controversial legislation pushed through by the provincial Liberal government in response to the student strike. It was referred to as Bill 78 before it was passed in Quebec’s National Assembly, and continued to be identified as such in popular parlance even after it was passed, although it officially became Law 12. The Parti Québécois repealed part of it when they were elected in the fall, although Montreal bylaw P-6 and federal bill C-309 remain on the books.

<sup>6</sup> The term “media” is used in the literature sometimes as a singular noun and sometimes as plural. I will here follow the contemporary convention of using it as singular, although some of those cited use it as plural.

Asselin (2012) acknowledges the challenge of historicizing an ongoing movement, but Bordeleau (2012) is less sympathetic to the media, qualifying the divergence between its representation of the demonstrations and the actual lived experience shared by the demonstrators as a “schizophrenic gap.”

McGray (2014) asserts that, whereas the mass media and the state once formed what Hall et al. (1978) termed an “ideological state-apparatus,” the market has since replaced the state in a reciprocal relationship with the media that legitimizes the neoliberal project of “new debt politics” and delegitimizes its opponents by infantilizing and even criminalizing them. Meanwhile, Manning (2012) addresses the media’s fixation with dollar amounts, what Lynes (2012) calls the neoliberal “logic of calculation”—the amount of the tuition increase, the cost of the demonstrations, or the disruption of productivity. Al-Saji (2012) also criticizes media attacks on the CLASSE based on its commitment to direct democracy, which Massumi (2012) argues was “snidely ridiculed in the press [...] as childishly inefficient.”

The literature similarly challenges the mainstream media’s representation of past protest movements and their participants. Gitlin (1979), for instance, argues that the “new left” of the 1960s was dependent on a mass media that used various framing techniques to trivialize and marginalize it in the eyes of the public while exacerbating its inner conflicts. He suggests that the media consist of “core systems for the production and distribution of ideology” (p. 12) that force activists to choose between being consigned to irrelevance and being neutralized and assimilated into the hegemonic worldview. Ashley and Olson (1998) come to similar conclusions in their study of the print media’s framing of the women’s movement from 1966 to 1986, asserting that when this movement was not being ignored entirely it was being delegitimized using a variety of techniques, such as focusing on rivalry among activists, on their physical appearance, or on their deviant—though rarely violent—behavior. The authors even insist that the iconic imagery of burning bras was invented by an overzealous female reporter trying to pass muster at *The New York Times*. Furthermore, Smith, McCarthy, McPhail, and Augustyn (2001), in studying protest events in Washington, DC in the 1980s, argue that activists increasingly turned to public protest to attract the attention of a media that actually undermined their agendas by focusing on protest events themselves rather than the underlying issues, making these events more effective at building internal solidarity than reaching broader reference publics.

More recently, others have obtained comparable results in studying mainstream media coverage of the anti-globalization movement (Boykoff, 2006), opposition to the G8 summits (Juris, 2005; Rosie & Gorringer, 2008), the Occupy movement (Gibbons, 2013), and resistance by Indigenous people in Canada and the United States (Baylor, 1996; Wilkes & Ricard, 2007). Conversely, environmentalist groups have largely benefitted from being incorporated into prevailing news frames, and literature dealing with these groups in the media focuses principally on optimizing rather than problematizing their relationship (Gitlin, 1979; Corbett, 2002; Lester & Hutchins, 2009; Andrews & Caren, 2010). Although Smith et al. (2001) suggest that “movements are not wholly dependent on media sympathies” (p. 1400), Andrews and Caren argue that the news media play “a pivotal role in shaping whether and how movements generate broad social change” (p. 841) and explore why some movements are more successful than others at garnering media attention. Ashley and Olson (1998) similarly claim that “[n]ews media play a crucial role” in the success or failure of movements (p. 263).

#### **2.4. The News Media and the Education System**

The news media has an interesting and complex relationship with the formal state-sponsored education system that likely influenced its representation of the events of 2012. Cooley (2010) argues that fundamental problems in education allow the public to be manipulated through the media, which then “exerts negative energy upon our educational system and any ‘reform’ efforts meant to remedy its ills” (p. 591). He turns to Chomsky for inspiration and calls on educators and activists alike to “push back against the provocateurs of this regime of political misinformation” (p. 582), although his line of reasoning is problematic in its unquestioning acceptance of the romanticized past of the media as a trusted watchdog of the public.

Along the same lines, Greene (2003), in her discussion of education as possibility, dismisses the media as counterproductive to this purpose. She describes its power as one of the great “violations and erosions” of our time (p. 62), accusing it of sustaining “backward leaning, inhumane” talk of standards and technology (p. 63) and even of producing “chaos due to nameless pollution and [...] falsifications” (p. 72).

Phillips and Jorgensen cite Althusser’s assertion that “all aspects of the social are controlled by ideology, which functions through ‘the repressive state apparatus’ (e.g. the police)



and the ‘ideological state apparatus’ (e.g. the mass media)” (2002, p. 15). However, they also cite his student Foucault in elaborating that, although power is wielded not only by the state, the productive function of ideology is more significant than its repressive one. Thus it could be asserted that ideology quashes some possibilities while, more importantly, producing others, and that the mass media—and perhaps our system of mass education as well—is more essential than police in maintaining the state’s hold on power.

Meanwhile, Arnoldi (2007) claims that the media gains influence through its close ties to the powerful political and economic fields, and uses this influence to lead the public away from the crisis-ridden university as a source of expertise and toward new “hybrid institutions” like think tanks and market research companies—or what McNeely (2009) terms “the laboratory.” Drawing on Bourdieu, Arnoldi suggests that the media and academia are both situated within the field of cultural production, but that the media itself is not involved in the production of knowledge. However, Gintis and Bowles, in their conception of society “as an ensemble of structurally articulated *sites of social practice*” (1982, p. 49, emphasis in original), locate academia within the state site while contending that it serves that of capitalist production. At the same time, proponents of the political economy or propaganda model of the media would situate it and the hybrid institutions close together in the economic domain.

On the other hand, authors such as Zelizer (2004) and Coddington (2013) insist that the media is in fact a site of knowledge production much like the education system. Robinson and DeShano, along the same lines, suggest that traditional journalists and citizen journalists are members of a common “information-producing community” (2001, p. 963). McGray similarly contends that, in advancing new debt politics and delegitimizing dissent, the media seeks to “establish a popular educational project of their own” (2014, p. 43). Gitlin, for his part, is highly critical of “the culture industry as a whole, along with the educational system, that specializes in the production, relaying, and regearing of hegemonic ideology” (1979, p. 15).

## **2.5. The Ideologies of Liberal Democracy and Neoliberal Capitalism**

One of the hegemonic ideologies referred to in this study is that generally identified as liberal democracy. Although there are various reasons why critics may object to the “liberal” in “liberal democracy,” Rhoden (2015) asserts that what we commonly refer to as simply

democracy is in fact liberal democracy; rule by the people alone, even with free and fair elections and egalitarian values, is “not so far from despotism” without the “institutional brakes and constitutional liberties” that come with liberalism (p. 564). According to Rhoden, liberalism’s core tenets extend beyond just individual rights and constitute a relatively recent addition to democracy: “executive rule of law or constraints, judicial independence or review, civil liberty, property rights, religious freedom, media independence, [and] minority rights” (p. 565). He concedes that, while some of these tenets reinforce and are in turn reinforced by those of pure democracy, others are in near constant conflict with them, as is illustrated by Norton (2012) in his discussion of the struggle between “illiberal democracy” and “undemocratic liberalism” in Thailand.

In the same way, liberal democracy has a turbulent relationship with its ideological offshoot, neoliberal capitalism. Peters argues that neoliberalism is dominated by “an ideology of individualism as the most fundamental and unifying premise which emphasizes individual responsibility within a free-market economy” (2011, p. 2). Similarly, Harvey introduces neoliberal principles as “the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade” (2007, p. 22). The role of government is consequently reduced to preserving such a framework and, in areas such as education where it does not exist, to introducing it. Apple (2000) instead discusses economic rationality, private enterprise, and consumer choice as the key components of neoliberal ideology, suggesting that this ultimately produces atomized decision-making and a reduced scope for collective action—and, in education, a conception of students as human capital. A recurring theme throughout these definitions of neoliberalism is individualism, which Manning (2012) asserts is furthered by replacing such rights as that to education with that to debt, entrapping each person “in their own bubble trying to make their way out of a vicious cycle of credit.”

### Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework

In the following chapter, I present discourse analytical theories in contrast with theories on the analysis of framing and content. I then compare Fairclough's (1995) critical discourse analysis with Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) discourse theory, as I ultimately settle on the latter as the primary framework for my research. I go on to describe the implications of operationalizing discourse theory as a methodology for empirical research—defining such key terms as *moment*, *nodal point*, and *articulation*—as well as how I intend to supplement it with tools from critical discourse analysis. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that both approaches present weaknesses, which will be addressed in the final part of this chapter.

#### 3.1. Framing, Content, and Discourse Analytical Theories

Matthes (2009) laments that there is a lack of concrete, operational definitions of framing in the literature, despite its regular use as a concept in media studies. Nevertheless, he reveals that the one most frequently cited is that used by Entman (1993; 2007), who distinguishes between the four functions of a frame: problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation. Entman explains that framing analysis “illuminates the precise way in which influence over a human consciousness is exerted by the transfer (or communication) of information from one location—such as a speech, utterance, news report, or novel—to that consciousness” (1993, p. 51-52). Iyengar and Simon, for their part, describe framing as “the connection between qualitative features of news [...] and public opinion” (1993, p. 366), distinguishing between psychological and sociological perspectives on the public's attributions of causal and treatment responsibility. Also useful is their distinction between episodic and thematic frames, depicting public issues in terms of either specific events or general context, with mainstream news relying heavily on the former.

Meanwhile, Altheide (1987) contrasts qualitative or ethnographic content analysis to more conventional quantitative content analysis. Ethnographic content analysis involves a reflexive rather than serial analysis of documents, including text as well as images, and “is used to document and understand the communication of meaning, as well as to verify theoretical relationships” (p. 68). On the other hand, quantitative content analysis is based “in positivistic

assumptions about objectivity” (p. 67) and “is used to verify or confirm hypothesized relationships” (p. 68). Whether ethnographic or quantitative, however, Entman argues that content analysis uninformed by framing theory falls into the trap of treating all positive or negative messages “as equally salient and influential” and failing to gauge the relationships of frames to the audience’s schemata (1993, p. 57).

Ultimately, however, it is not framing or content analysis but a form of discourse analysis that is employed as the methodology for this study. Compared with “framing” and “content,” Bogdan and Biklen cite Biklen’s (1995) definition of discourse as “institutionalized ways of understanding relationships, activities, and meanings that emerge through language (talk, rules, thoughts, writing) and influence what people in specific institutions take to be true” (2007, p. 22). Phillips and Jorgensen (2002), by contrast, employ a broader definition of discourse that may, depending on the approach, be extended beyond language. They suggest that discourses, “by representing reality in one particular way rather than in other possible ways, constitute subjects and objects in particular ways, create boundaries between the true and the false, and make certain types of action relevant and others unthinkable” (p. 145).

### **3.2. Differing Approaches to Discourse Analysis**

According to Phillips and Jorgensen (2002), discourse analysis is a series of interdisciplinary approaches that share a social constructionist foundation and “the starting point that our ways of talking do not neutrally reflect our world, identities and social relations but, rather, play an active role in creating and changing them” (p. 1). To varying degrees, the different approaches assert that subjects and objects mutually create and recreate each other and that discursive practice actively shapes the social world. In addition to being social constructionist, they may all also be considered critical in that they all, again to varying degrees, “investigate and analyse power relations in society” and critique such relations “with an eye on the possibilities for social change” (p. 2).

The research methodology of the proposed thesis will be based partly on Fairclough’s (1995) critical discourse analysis. Following Fairclough, I am interested in linking everyday texts by individual journalists and press attachés with broader, more abstract discourses. Fairclough lays out a wide array of methods for doing so, as well as a three-dimensional model of discourse

whereby the relationship between text and the social practice within which it is situated is mediated by discursive practice. Such a conception presents the possibility of studying discursive and social change and resistance through the processes of *intertextuality* and *interdiscursivity*—the sharing of signifiers between texts and between discourses, respectively (Phillips and Jorgensen, 2002).

However, for the purpose of comparing and contrasting the discourses of particular social groups as represented by documents they have produced, I will turn primarily to Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) discourse theory. Whereas Fairclough (1995) suggests that discourse is equally constituted by and constitutive of the social world, discourse theory emphasizes the latter. Similarly, it rejects Fairclough's (1995) distinction between discursive and non-discursive social practices such as ideology, as all social practices are assumed to be encompassed by discourse. As a result, there is no dialectical interaction in this theory between discourse and something else, and discourse is transformed solely through contact and struggle with other discourses; hegemony here signifies the dominance of a particular discourse (Phillips and Jorgensen, 2002).

Laclau and Mouffe (1985) fuse Marxist social theory with structuralist thinking about the meaning of language. The resulting post-Marxist, post-structuralist approach is particularly relevant to my research because of my focus on the group-subject and my analysis of individual journalists and student organizers as products of the groups they represent and their discourses. To put it another way, the discourse of these groups is assumed to represent the entirety of their social practice. Moreover, Laclau and Mouffe's approach "is theoretically strong when it comes to analysis of group formation and collective identity" (Phillips and Jorgensen, 2002, p. 146).

### **3.3. Operationalizing Laclau and Mouffe's Discourse Theory**

Applying the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe (1985) as a methodology for empirical research requires exploring *articulations*: the relations between polysemic signifiers that fix their meanings in relation to each other in specific though contingent and ever-changing ways. *Moments* are those discursive signs whose meanings are more or less fixed through their differential positions in various articulations, ultimately through the exclusion of other possible meanings. Furthermore, *nodal points* or *points de capiton* are privileged moments around which others, which give them meaning, are ordered. *Nodal points of identity* or *master signifiers* are

particular nodal points that represent either individual or group subjects, whose identities are formed through articulation. Finally, nodal points *within* each discourse must be considered, *between* discourses, as *floating signifiers* devoid of any meaning of their own, since competing discourses struggle to ascribe meaning to them through different articulations (Phillips and Jorgensen, 2002).

Laclau and Mouffe thus define discourse as “[t]he structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice” (1985, p. 105); alternatively, it is “an attempt to fix a web of meanings within a particular domain” (Rear and Jones, 2013, p. 378). Each discourse struggles to eliminate ambiguity and transform elements into moments by reducing their polysemy to a particular meaning through closure—although this closure is never complete (Phillips and Jorgensen, 2002). Those elements that fail to have their meanings reduced and are excluded from a discourse, constituting nothing more than floating signifiers, are said to be situated in the *field of discursivity*, a depository for all that is left out of articulatory practice, including meanings a sign may have in other discourses. Phillips and Jorgensen (2002), however, critique this notion of the field of discursivity as failing to distinguish between those elements that are completely foreign to a given domain and those that may be transformed into moments in rival discourses, borrowing Fairclough’s term *order of discourse* in order to designate discourses competing in the same domain—such as the educational domain.

Phillips and Jorgensen (2002), along with Rear and Jones (2013), further recommend borrowing from Fairclough’s (1995) critical discourse analysis in order to compensate for what they perceive as a lack of analytical tools proposed by Laclau and Mouffe (1985). Following their advice, this study draws on three main tools from Fairclough. The first of these tools are the aforementioned concepts of intertextuality and interdiscursivity, which represent the possibility for social change and resistance in critical discourse analysis. The second of these tools is Fairclough’s focus on the analysis of grammatical features, and particularly that of nominalization, whereby a noun stands in for a process, serving to absolve the agent of responsibility and naturalize the effect of its action. The third tool is an examination of boundary maintenance, which represents the extent of separation or merging of the primary and secondary discourses, or the representing and represented discourses, in a text—particularly useful for

analysis of news reports, which incorporate outside sources more often than do press releases, and may present multiple voices in an attempt to appear neutral and objective.

Although supplemented with strategies from critical discourse analysis, Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) discourse theory remains the core methodological approach for this study, and Phillips and Jorgensen (2002) make a number of recommendations on how to conduct analysis using this approach. They suggest first identifying nodal points, and particularly nodal points of identity, as key signifiers in the organization of discourse, and then exploring how these key signifiers are articulated with other signs within the discourse to give them meaning, in addition to what potential meanings are excluded. They further suggest examining competing ascriptions of these floating signifiers between discourses as well as how various articulations contribute to the formation of individual and group identity.

### **3.4. Drawbacks of Discourse Analytical Approaches**

Phillips and Jorgensen (2002) address salient weaknesses in both of the aforementioned approaches to discourse analysis. Laclau and Mouffe (1985), as mentioned, provide few tools for analysis, and moreover they present their own theory as an objective representation of reality while describing reality as a social construction and truth as solely discursive. Meanwhile, Fairclough (1995) suggests that the researcher can produce both ideological and non-ideological discourses—discourses somehow free from ideology—without explaining who would be “sufficiently liberated from the discursive construction of the world” to distinguish between the two, and how they would do so (Phillips and Jorgensen, p. 22). There is also the difficulty in empirically proving the theoretical distinction between the discursive and non-discursive.

A further drawback of these approaches is that neither addresses what is excluded from texts, or incorporates the social semiotics analysis required to properly understand those which are multi-semiotic or multi-modal. While both approaches acknowledge the importance of taking into account visual elements, for instance—as do Atheide (1987), Entman (2007), and Matthes (2009)—they generally tend to analyze these in the same manner as linguistic texts (Fairclough, 1995; Phillips and Jorgensen, 2002). I acknowledge this critique and suggest that it be addressed in further research, but in the interest of limiting the scope of my own, I will be restraining myself to linguistic textual analysis.

## Chapter 4: Research Methods

This chapter begins by providing a general outline of my research design and the sources chosen to represent the discourses of the mainstream media and the students during the *Printemps érable*. Then, it describes the data collection process for each of the four discourses under study, including the search terms used and the process by which the final sample was selected for analysis. The chapter goes on to address the specifics of data coding, the emergence of the student identity as the focal point of the study, and the discursive maps included in the figures below. Finally, before moving on to the analysis of the data, the issues of researcher positionality, bias, and objectivity are explored.

### 4.1. Research Design

As cited in the introduction, the objective of this research is to analyze how educational issues are represented in mainstream media and student discourses in the context of the *Printemps érable*, what similarities and differences exist between these discourses, and how they fit into the wider political and economic discourses of liberal democracy and neoliberal capitalism.

In order to conduct an analysis of the discourse of the mainstream media, I turned to texts from two major Quebec newspapers, *The Gazette* and *La Presse*. *The Gazette*, formerly and now again known as *Montreal Gazette*, is Quebec's most widely read English-language daily newspaper and is owned by Canadian media company Postmedia. Meanwhile, *La Presse* is owned by Power Corporation subsidiary Gesca and represents the mainstream of Quebec's French-language daily newspapers; it had a significantly smaller total circulation than its Québecor-owned rival *Le Journal de Montréal* in 2012 but a slightly larger one in 2014, due to its free tablet edition (Newspapers Canada, n.d.). Quantitative studies of the newspapers' coverage of the *Printemps érable* suggest that, in many aspects, that of *The Gazette* and *La Presse* fell somewhere between that of *Le Journal de Montréal* and independent publication *Le Devoir*, also based in Montreal; *Le Journal de Montréal* was more sensationalist and relied more on the frame of violence and vandalism, while *Le Devoir* addressed underlying issues in greater



depth and was more sympathetic to students (Influence Communication, 2012; *Centre d'études sur les medias*, 2014).

As for the student discourse, it is represented in this study by press releases produced by the main student organizations identified in the literature. The majority of those produced by the Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec (FECQ) and Fédération étudiante universitaire du Québec (FEUQ) during the period under study were actually produced jointly by the two groups, and thus they are assumed to share a common discourse. The other main student organization identified in the literature, and that which received the most attention, is the Coalition large de l'Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante (CLASSE), a temporary coalition formed by the Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante (ASSÉ).

Ten texts were collected from each of the newspapers selected for this study, including news articles, columns, and editorials, but excluding other forms not attributed to their regular staff, such as op-ed pieces and letters to the editor. Likewise, ten press releases were selected from the FECQ and FEUQ as well as ten from the CLASSE. All of the documents were chosen from among those published between the first strike vote on February 7, 2012 and the announcement of a general election on August 1, 2012, although the majority used in the final sample were from the months of March and April.

#### **4.2. Data Collection**

The advanced search function of the Canadian Newsstand Major Dailies database, operated by ProQuest, was used to locate content published by *The Gazette* during the designated period. The search terms, chosen reflexively, were *Quebec, student\** (which produced both the singular *student* and plural *students*), *strik\** (which produced *strike, striker, strikers, and striking*, exactly the same number of results as *protest\**, and far more than alternatives *boycott* and *movement*), *tuition, universit\** (which produced *university* and *universities*), and *education* (which also produced *teaching* and *instruction* as synonyms). These terms were searched anywhere in the text. Once duplicates were removed, the search yielded 221 results, which were narrowed down to ten through an inductive, multi-step process of purposeful internal sampling in order to select texts that would offer the most data in terms of discourse surrounding education-related signifiers as well as best provide a sense of the prevailing attitudes of the whole.

Although I was hesitant to exclude articles based on word count, I ultimately established a minimum of 500 words in order to eliminate the shortest texts; the final sample of ten texts included a total of 6,870 words.

The content from *La Presse* was located using the Eureka.cc database, owned by Cedrom SNI. The print version of the newspaper was selected from among the sources available as the definitive version over the web site, since the web site included multiple variations of some texts while excluding others altogether. The terms entered into the search engine to locate the final sample were *Quebec, etudiant\** (which produced *étudiant, étudiante, étudiants, and étudiantes*), *grev\** (which produced *grève, grèves, gréviste, and grévistes*, as well as significantly more results than alternatives *manif\** and *conflit*), “*droits de scolarite*” or *frais* (although *droits* was ultimately the preferred term), *universit\** (which produced *université, universités, universitaire, and universitaires*), and *education or enseignement or instruction* (to reflect the synonyms offered for *The Gazette*). These search terms yielded 175 results for the period under study, narrowed down to ten in a process similar to that used for *The Gazette*. A lower 400-word minimum was implemented in order to accommodate shorter texts, including the relatively brief editorials, although the final word count for the ten texts chosen was 7,335.

The press releases from the FECQ and FEUQ were found through the CNW Telbec newswire service, owned by New York-based PR Newswire. The service provided a total of 155 press releases produced by the FECQ during the period under study and 139 by the FEUQ, of which about 90 were attributed to the two student federations jointly. The final sample of ten press releases contained a total of 4,953 words.

Finally, CNW Telbec was also used to find the press releases from the CLASSE, the coalition formed around the Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante (ASSÉ). The search yielded a total of 113 press releases, although this included many brief notices as well as “*reprises*.” The ten press releases chosen to represent the discourse of CLASSE contained a total of 4,556 words.

### **4.3. Data Coding and Preliminary Analysis**

Although a rudimentary inductive analysis began with my multiple readings of the texts during the selection process, the texts were then coded using HyperResearch qualitative analysis

software for more thorough study. I started the coding process by using the program's autocoding function to locate and identify all instances of initial search terms including "student," "*université*," and "*éducation*." I also had the program autocode other potentially education-related signifiers that I had encountered, such as "class" and "*études*," in addition to still other signifiers that I determined might constitute moments in the various discourses under study. Once autocoding was complete, I proceeded through the autocoded signifiers, beginning with those appearing the most often, in order to apply additional codes indicating their potential articulation with other signifiers, which I also coded as possible moments had they been neglected during the autocoding phase, creating new codes as necessary. For example, in the sentence fragment, "As student opposition to tuition fee hikes keeps growing" (Seidman, 2012b), the signifier "student" was autocoded and I then applied the additional code "student–tuition hike" to indicate a possible articulation, as well as ensuring that "tuition" was coded as a possible moment in the articulations "tuition–student" and "tuition–hike." I repeated this process at least once more for each potential moment in each discourse, continually creating new codes, ultimately identifying more than 4,350 individual instances of over 630 separate codes, in both English and French, that I categorized into 96 groups; many of these codes, however, turned out to be red herrings that did not represent legitimate discursive articulations or true moments in any of the discourses under study.

It became clear during the coding process that the signifier "student" and its French equivalent "*étudiant*"—or, more specifically, the plural "students" and "*étudiants*"—were the most recurrent education-related signifiers in each discourse and, furthermore, that they would constitute not only nodal points but nodal points *of identity* around which would be ordered other signifiers that would endow them with particular meanings. Deconstructing the student identity thus emerged as the primary focus of my study, although it is important to note that not all moments in the discourses under study are necessarily articulated with "students," as I will discuss below in my interpretation of the results.

In order to help me understand the sometimes intricate articulations of the discourses I was studying, I began taking pen to paper to create discursive maps, which evolved into the thirteen figures included in the forthcoming analysis chapter. In line with the rest of my analysis, these maps represent the three main themes appearing in each discourse, along with the fourth

theme of “criminalization and infantilization” unique to *The Gazette*. The figures were created using Microsoft Paint software and would admittedly benefit from a program designed for the express purpose of discursive mapping, if such software exists. Each of the discourses would ideally be represented in three dimensions, or even in four, depicting change over time. The size of each circle is intended to signal the relative frequency of each signifier, with double-walled circles indicating nodal points, single-walled circles moments, and dashed lines suggesting elements and potential but unsedimented articulations. Moreover, thicker lines between circles are meant to illustrate relatively strong discursive articulations while thinner lines show weaker ones. Additionally, a smaller circle adjoining a larger one indicates a less frequent signifier that appears exclusively with a more frequent one, and overlapping circles—representing an even more intimate relationship—generally mean either that those signifiers are used interchangeably or that one has been adapted from the other.

#### **4.4. Researcher Positionality and Bias**

As a researcher, I must acknowledge the possibility that I have already been largely naturalized into one or more of the meaning-systems to be studied, taking for granted the discourses or certain articulations therein, and must approach my research as an ethnographic study. Phillips and Jorgensen (2002) suggest to “imagine oneself as an anthropologist who is exploring a foreign universe of meaning in order to find out what makes sense there”—even in analyzing texts (2002, p. 21). Altheide (1987) similarly proposes conceptualizing document analysis as ethnographic fieldwork.

I engage in this research as the son of a university-educated French-Canadian mother and a Jamaican father with a working-class background. I present as white and was raised in a largely anglophone Montreal suburb with English as my mother tongue, attending French-immersion programs at English-language schools. I had already completed my bachelor’s degree by the time of the *Printemps érable*—with significant parental support—and was employed as a teacher at a public elementary school in the west end. Although lacking in theoretical background knowledge, I bring to the current research the insights gained from six valuable years of experience in the education system as well as my experience from the *Printemps érable* itself.

Although proponents of a positivistic conception of objectivity might consider my background more of a liability than an asset in conducting such research, Laclau and Mouffe define objectivity as simply sedimented ideology, “the historical outcome of political processes and struggles,” that is made to seem natural and unchangeable through the hiding of its contingency and of alternative possibilities (as cited in Phillips and Jorgensen, 2002, p. 36). Harding distinguishes between the “weak” objectivity of modern science, failing to take into account its own historical and cultural contextuality, and “strong” objectivity, “achieved through strong reflexivity which involves an exploration of our own cultural and social locations as researchers” (as cited in Phillips and Jorgensen, 2002, p. 202). However, Haraway (1988) instead promotes the concept of “situated knowledges”—erroneously quoted in the singular by Phillips and Jorgensen—arguing that it is impossible to produce a neutral description of reality, no matter how much self-reflection is demonstrated by the researcher, and that research is essentially performative.

Instead of disingenuously attempting to hide them in the name of objectivity, I embrace my biases in favor of making quality and potentially emancipatory education available to all without user fees; in favor of offering the people most affected a greater voice and more meaningful participation in their institutions and their society; in favor of balancing individual rights with the common good, community decision-making, and collective action; and in favor of ending unjust practices and reforming or abolishing oppressive structures. Through the performance of an analysis that is equally rigorous in regards to both mass media and student discourses, I aim to learn from the past and contribute to efforts toward my vision of a better future.

Although incompatible with the traditional notion of research validity, this work requires me to establish a certain level of what Glesne (2011) refers to as “trustworthiness,” or what Phillips and Jorgensen (2002) call “scientificity.” I can say that the process of conducting a *comparative* discourse analysis, analyzing multiple cases across social groups and even across languages, has presented me with the opportunity to move reflexively back and forth between each with insights gained from the others, ultimately strengthening the final analysis of individual cases as well as my understanding of the whole. I have furthermore spent an extended amount of time over a relatively long period with the texts under study and have maintained separate

process notes that I have shared with my supervisor throughout the course of my research. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that my data analysis would have benefitted from the perspectives of other researchers and from having drawn on multiple kinds of sources to represent student discourses—as will be discussed below in my conclusion.

## Chapter 5: Analysis of the Discourse of *The Gazette*

The ten texts selected to represent the *Printemps érable* discourse of *The Gazette* include three editorials, ostensibly produced by the newspaper's editorial board; three articles credited to Karen Seidman, the paper's most prolific reporter on the topic of the *Printemps érable*; one article credited to reporter Brenda Branswell; and one column each by veteran *Gazette* contributors Henry Aubin, L. Ian MacDonald, and Don MacPherson. The editorials make the board's position against the striking students and their allies very clear<sup>7</sup>—a position which is generally shared by the columnists, as is evidenced by the fact that they frequently echo the same language, themes, and arguments.<sup>8</sup> The board's position is even reflected in the particular attention paid in supposedly neutral and objective articles to opposition to, and criticism of, the motives and actions of those involved in the spring uprising of 2012.

In the *Printemps érable* discourse of *The Gazette*, as in that of the other three cases studied, the signifier “students” is one of the most frequently appearing, if not the single most frequently appearing, and plays a pivotal role. From the perspective of Laclau and Mouffe (1985), “students” serves as a *point de capiton* or nodal point *within* this discourse, and as a floating signifier and object of contention *between* the discourses. Furthermore, it represents a nodal point *of identity*, or what Lacan refers to as a master signifier (Phillips and Jorgensen, 2002). “Students” is thus void of meaning in and of itself, although it is employed to represent a group of people key to each discourse, and occupies in each a central position in the articulation of other signifiers. It is from these articulations that “students” draws significantly different meanings in each discourse, as each strives to sediment meanings in particular ways that either reproduce or challenge dominant ideologies.

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<sup>7</sup> An editorial titled “Fight over tuition hike is about more than principle” (2012), published on February 24 but not included in the final sample for this study, appears to be the earliest one outlining “this newspaper's position” in favor of a tuition increase, although its tone is slightly more sympathetic, or at least less hostile, to students than that of other editorials on the subject.

<sup>8</sup> Notable but rare examples of columnists taking the students' side include Donna Nebenzahl's “Keeping the protest alive” (2012) and sportswriter Jack Todd's “Protest and perspective” (2012), both published later in the conflict.

The signifier “students” is put to use both as an independent noun and as a noun adjunct, serving a descriptive function much like an adjective. It is noteworthy that, as a noun on its own, it is most often used in its plural form, evoking, for better or for worse, a unified mass—a large, homogenous, cohesive unit—counter to the neoliberal goal of individualizing collectivities (Manning, 2012). For instance, the headline of one column suggests bluntly that “[s]tudents have their priorities all wrong” (Aubin, 2012a). Another column argues that “students have crossed the line from expressing their own freedom of speech and assembly to disrupting the lives of the very citizens and taxpayers who pay their bills” (MacPherson, 2012). There is also an article citing CLASSE co-spokesperson Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois: “Students are more united than ever and, of 23 votes taken since last week, only one association didn’t renew its strike mandate, he said” (Seidman, 2012d). Although this last excerpt constitutes secondary discourse, there is a low degree of boundary maintenance with the primary discourse, since it is only subtly signalled by tacking “he said” on to the end of a relatively lengthy paraphrasing of Nadeau-Dubois.

Working from the perspective of “students” as a nodal point of identity and central signifier in the *Printemps érable* discourse of *The Gazette*, four major themes emerge that will be explored below. First, I will look at the articulation of “students” with signifiers denoting actions of resistance, such as “strike,” “protests,” and “demonstrations.” Second, I will examine the articulation of “students” with concepts including “disruption,” “violence,” and “intimidation”—which are related to students’ discursive treatment as criminals and as children. Third, I will see how “students” is articulated with the issues motivating their collective action, particularly “tuition” and “access.” Finally, I will look at the role “students” plays in relation with “associations,” “leaders,” and, indirectly, with “government.”

### **5.1. Articulations Pertaining to Student Action**

The articulation of “students” with signifiers representing collective action in the *Printemps érable* discourse of *The Gazette* is dominated by the signifier “strike”—in contrast with the contending signifier “boycott”—which becomes a nodal point or *point de capiton* through its key position here as well as its alternative articulations in other discourses. “Marches” is also articulated with “students,” much like the similar signifiers “protests” and “demonstrations,” which are made additional nodal points in this discourse, as will be further discussed in the section on the criminalization and infantilization of students below. “Protests”



and the associated signifier “protesters” have a particularly significant articulation with “students” that compares in interesting ways to “strike” and “strikers.” Furthermore, “students” has clear and direct discursive links with “red square,” the symbol of the strike, as well as “Parti Québécois,” the political party forming the official opposition in Quebec’s National Assembly. On the other hand, “students” has no such connection with “vote” or “democracy,” the latter being closely linked to “government.” (See Figure 1.)

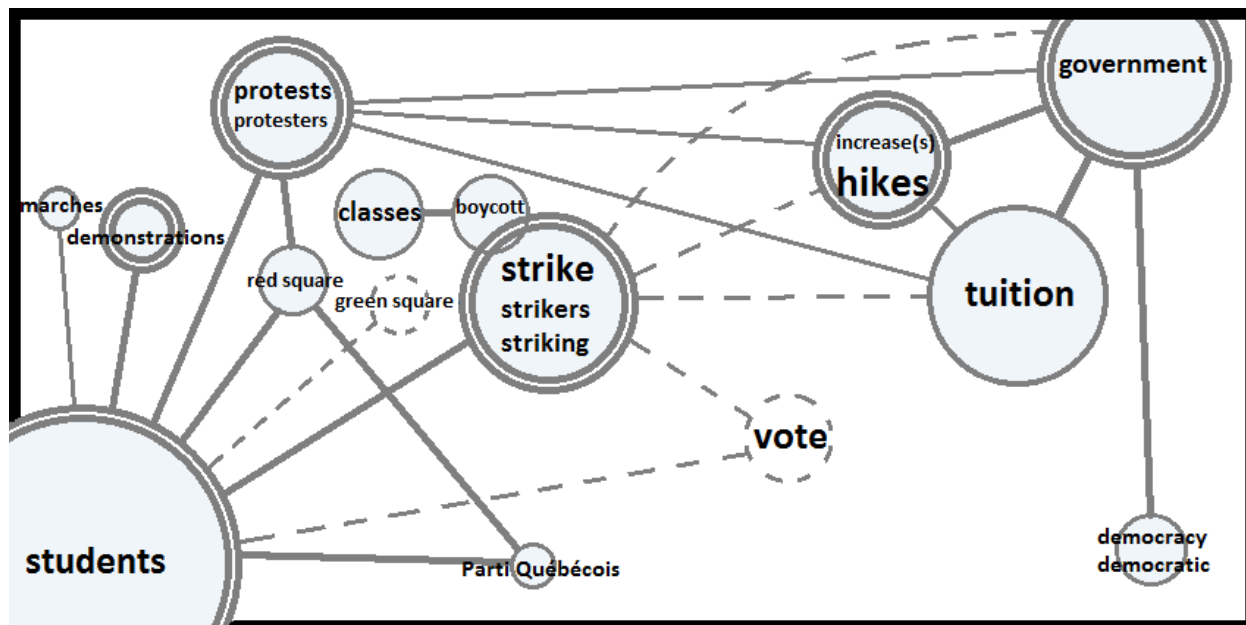


Figure 1: Map of articulations pertaining to student action in the discourse of *The Gazette*

**Student strike.** The nodal point of identity “students” is, predictably, articulated in this discourse with signifiers relating to collective opposition to the tuition hike, particularly the signifier “strike.” The latter is employed most commonly as a singular noun, implying a unity of action and of purpose among those having voted in favor of this tactic, with little concern for the varying durations and modalities of the mandates of their different associations. It would appear that it is not an assortment of separate strikes but one strike that students collectively join. Seidman (2012a), for instance, talks about “student leaders promoting the strike,” while Aubin (2012a) suggests that, “if the strike continues after Easter, the government could have to extend the school year into June.”

Although the plural noun “students” serves as nodal point of identity in the discourse of *The Gazette*, individual students are presented more frequently in this discourse than in the others, and most often as being opposed to the strike. In one article, for instance, Seidman (2012b) cites UQAM law students Celina Toia and Ryan Martin as being “scared” of and “bothered by” the strike, respectively. In another, she quotes Valleyfield college students Guillaume Sauve and Gabriel de Repentigny—the field of study is apparently irrelevant when it comes to CEGEP students—and describes them as “disappointed” and the victims of “insults” and “intimidation” by their striking peers (2012d). Meanwhile, MacDonald (2012) uses the situation of his own daughter, a Concordia student, in attempting to prove his argument against the strike.

One variant of “strike” consists of the plural agent noun “strikers.” For example, there is the headline “Strikers accused of blocking class access” (Seidman, 2012b) and a discussion of “Quebecers’ approval for the strikers falling from 44 per cent in February to 39 per cent” (Aubin, 2012a). The signifier “strikers” appears to denote a subset of “students” and introduce a discursive breach in their unity, with those on strike even coming into confrontation against those who are not. Additionally, the use of “strikers” discursively turns the act of striking into a vocation; those who employ the tactic of the strike become defined by this action.

Similarly, the present participle “striking” is used with “students” to form the phrase “striking students,” referring more specifically to the subset of students who are responsible for such actions. For example, according to one article, “Striking students say the government’s plan [...] poses a serious threat to access to higher education” (Seidman, 2012c). Another article refers to “intimidation used by striking students who formed the blockade” (Seidman, 2012d). Although this formation is relatively infrequent, the need to refer specifically to “striking students,” in contrast with the assumed opposite of non-striking students, again reveals a discursive rift in the apparent aforementioned unity among those individuals interpellated to this identity; perhaps not all students have joined the strike, after all.

The signifier “strike” is also sometimes paired with “student” to form the term “student strike,” used to refer broadly to the totality of actions taken in opposition to the tuition fee increase. There is the assertion by Aubin (2012a), for example, that “the student strike against rising tuition is losing public support.” Meanwhile, an article by Branswell (2012) opens with the

line, “The longest student strike in Quebec history has dragged on for 11 weeks.” In contrast with “strikers” and “striking students,” generally attributing the strike to students in this way suggests, as mentioned above, that all those voting to join the strike—in fact, as it often appears in this discourse, all students—have participated equally and for the same duration in a single, long-running collective action against the tuition hike. The implication is that the many students are together united in this one strike, transformed from the mere implementation of a political tactic into a *movement*—although such a signifier is largely absent from this discourse—to be joined in on.

As for its cause or purpose, the signifier “strike” has only traces of a discursive articulation with such signifiers as “government,” “tuition,” and “access.” In addition to the quote by Aubin (2012a) above, the poll on which Branswell (2012) reports “wasn't to see whether people were for or against the strike, but mainly to look at the underlying issues of access and affordability in the tuition fee debate.” Further developing such articulations would highlight student concerns, while downplaying them makes it unclear why students are on strike and supports the narrative that they are irrational or acting without a legitimate reason, as will be discussed below.

**Strike versus boycott.** Discursive articulations are never permanent and always contested, and there are other clear symptoms that such is the case with the link between “strike” and “students.” First, some articles bring considerable attention to the plight of students *opposing* the strike. Seidman, for instance, describes those sporting green squares instead of red as “feel[ing] increasingly disaffected and unrepresented” by their leaders (2012a) and disappointed that they cannot attend class, victims of insults and intimidation from their striking peers (2012c). There is also MacPherson’s (2012) argument that only a minority of students are on “strike,” which he places in quotation marks in order to highlight its discursive contingency, suggesting that it belongs to a separate discourse and that he uses it only tentatively or even facetiously in his own.<sup>9</sup> Aubin (2012a) similarly contrasts “students,” who fancy themselves

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<sup>9</sup> The above-mentioned editorial “Fight over tuition hike is about more than principle” (2012), not included in the final sample for this study, refers to the events as “a so-called students' strike.”

immune from serious risk, with “*real strikers*, who might find the eventual contract disadvantageous or might even lose their jobs” (emphasis added).<sup>10</sup>

Aubin (2012a) is among those who employ the signifier “boycott” as an alternative to “strike,” frequently in correlation with “classes.” He writes about “[t]he rosy premise of the boycott of classes,” while Branswell (2012) reports that there are “about 170,000 university and CEGEP students in Quebec boycotting classes.” Moreover, an editorial echoes MacPherson’s claim that it is only a “minority of Quebec students participating in the boycott of classes” (“Parents,” 2012). Elsewhere, however, “boycott” is used as a synonym for “strike,” and the two may be found in the same articles and occasionally even in the same sentences. For example, Seidman reports, “As the number of boycotting students grows, so does the tension with those who are against the strike and worry about possibly losing their semester” (Seidman, 2012c).<sup>11</sup>

From the perspective of Fairclough’s (1995) critical discourse analysis, this incorporation of the seemingly incompatible signifiers “strike” and “boycott” into the same texts demonstrates a high degree of interdiscursivity; a socially progressive, labor rights discourse of collective action is associated with “strike” and a neoliberal, consumer rights discourse of individual choice is invoked by “boycott.” This echoes the attempt at compromise between neoliberal and moral conservative discourses in policy documents produced by Japan’s Ministry of Education, as described by Rear and Jones (2013). Such interdiscursivity, while it might represent a weakness in policy documents, could be interpreted as a strength in newspaper articles by those who consider it the journalist’s responsibility to include “both sides of the story” and be “objective.” On the other hand, from the discourse theoretical perspective of Laclau and Mouffe (1985), objectivity simply represents the sedimentation of hegemonic discursive practices, or their naturalization as “common sense” through the hiding of their contingency (Phillips and Jorgensen, 2002). From this point of view, however, it is in fact “strike” that has become the most sedimented as a nodal point in its articulation with “students” in the discourse of *The*

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<sup>10</sup> Aubin’s one-sided focus on the risks of striking, and disregard for the positive characteristics demonstrated by strikers as well as for the potential gains that may be won through a strike, suggest that he would equally hesitate to support “real strikers.”

<sup>11</sup> A February 15 article by Seidman (2012a) not included in this study goes so far as to use “strike” and “boycott” in the same headline: “Students boycott class to protest tuition hikes; Unlimited strike kicks off at UQAM, Laval.”

*Gazette*, incapable of being dislodged so easily from this position by the government's preferred signifier, "boycott."<sup>12</sup>

**Protests, demonstrations, and marches.** Along with the moment "strike," other compatible signifiers of collective action such as "marches" and "demonstrations" also become sedimented through their discursive articulation with the nodal point of identity "students." Particularly noteworthy is the signifier "protests," used most often in its plural form, as is its agent noun variant "protesters." For example, MacPherson (2012) laments the fact that, "with all the other—legal, democratic and nonviolent—means of expression at the students' disposal, the protests continue." Also, according to the headline of one column, "Protesters would be on stronger ground if they focused less on saving money and more on financial-aid programs" (Aubin, 2012a).

The strong relationship that "students" has with both "protests" and the significantly less frequent "demonstrations" is evidenced by the fact that, even after acknowledging later in the spring and after the passing of Bill 78 that not all of those in the street are actually students, *The Gazette* cannot help but fall back on a discursive articulation that has reduced the possibilities for meaning in such a way as to create an equivalence between them and students. Furthermore, as with "strikers" above, the signifiers "protesters" and "demonstrators" discursively transform the action of protesting into the focal point of the participants' identity. A glaring example is the editorial "Will the songs of summer drown out the protests?" (2012), which initially describes "masked demonstrators wearing the red square of solidarity with students protesting tuition hikes," but later states that "many of the demonstrators have said they are willing to sacrifice their own studies," implying that they are all students themselves. That same editorial goes on to lament that the "protesters" are not "stopping and asking themselves why Quebec workers should invest in their future when they themselves do not seem to value it very highly."

The signifier "protests," similarly to "strike," is occasionally paired with the noun adjunct "student" to form the term "student protests," which serves to attribute these events to only students, and all students. Branswell (2012), for example, insists that the tuition issue is "a hard

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<sup>12</sup> Of course, Quebec premier Jean Charest himself bragged in his autobiography, as well as in his biography by the current editor-in-chief of *La Presse*, that when he was a student, he led student "strikes"—not student "boycotts" (Robitaille, 2012).

subject to avoid with student protests a fixture on Montreal streets,” while MacPherson (2012) opines that “the red-square symbol of the student protests now appears to be part of the [Parti Québécois] logo.” However, also like the moment “strike,” the relationship of “protests” with respect to “students” does not go unchallenged, as attention is given to students *opposing* the action; Seidman (2012) reports, “Despite almost daily and public protests, some students just want to pursue their studies.” Nevertheless, it is safe to say that the relationship of “protests” with the nodal point of identity “students” as an action in which they participate remains cohesive enough to consider it a moment in this discourse—and in fact a nodal point in its own right, as will be discussed below.

Although the signifier “protests” is employed in much the same way as “strike,” and perhaps in many contexts as an alternative to it for those uncomfortable with it, there are subtle but important differences. For instance, while the use of the singular noun “strike” invokes continuity, the plural “protests” suggests a series of separate actions; to borrow the language of Simon and Iyengar (1993), “strike” is thematic while “protests,” like “marches” and “demonstrations,” is more episodic. Additionally, the latter three are strongly associated with the discourse of collective action and social justice, but lack the particular labor rights connotation of “strike.”

Another distinction between “strike” and “protests” is that the latter has a more substantial articulation—although not by much—with signifiers denoting its cause and purpose, such as “government” and “tuition.” According to MacPherson (2012), for example, “student leaders called for peaceful protest against the Charest government,” while an editorial refers to “the red square of solidarity with students protesting tuition hikes” (“Will the songs,” 2012).

**Democracy, the Parti Québécois, and the red square.** The signifier “vote,” which is employed as either a verb or a noun and may be identified as an interdiscursive crossover from democratic discourse, is occasionally collocated with the nodal point of identity “students,” generally in terms of them taking positions for or against “strike” in the general assemblies of their student associations. For instance, “At Concordia University on Wednesday, students voted in favour of a strike from March 15 to 22” (Seidman, 2012b). However, it would be a stretch to say that the articulation of “vote” with either “students” or “strike” is sedimented enough for it to be considered a moment in this discourse. Furthermore, the related signifier “democracy” and its

variant “democratic” are strongly associated with the elected government, over and against “students” and their “strike.” As cited above, MacPherson (2012) laments that “the protests continue” in spite of “all the other—legal, democratic and nonviolent—means of expression at the students' disposal.” The headline of that column makes it clear that Quebecers face a choice between “democracy” of the government and the “mob rule” he associates with students.<sup>13</sup> Even where Seidman (2012c) potentially links “students” to “democracy” in a more positive light, her efforts come across as half-hearted and ineffectual, as in her flippant explanation of their blockade of a building as being simply “a question of democracy and rights.”

“Students” is also discursively articulated with the Parti Québécois of Pauline Marois, the official opposition in Quebec’s National Assembly—a sovereigntist party that the average *Gazette* reader would regard unfavorably against the governing Liberals, who generally enjoy overwhelming electoral victories in Montreal’s anglophone suburbs. One editorial lumps the PQ in with students as “[a]nother group that should start behaving reasonably,” and accuses it of “shamelessly seeking political profit by backing the student demand to cancel the tuition increase and ostentatiously sporting the redsquare badge of the protest movement” (“Let reason,” 2012). Another calls the party leadership “the worst of the adult apologists for the student rampage,” also observing that it has “decked itself out in the red-square symbol of the boycotting forces” (“Parents,” 2012). Likewise, MacPherson (2012) notes that “the red-square symbol of the student protests now appears to be part of the party logo,” and assures his readers that “[t]he students have a voice in the National Assembly through the official opposition Parti Québécois [sic], which has practically become CLASSE's parliamentary arm, and Quebec solidaire [sic].”<sup>14</sup>

“Red square” is obviously also closely articulated with the signifiers “students,” “protests,” and, as described above, “Parti Québécois.” To provide another example, Seidman (2012a) explains that many of the students “boycotting classes [...] sport a red-felt pin in the shape of a square as a symbol of their battle against tuition fee hikes of \$325 a year for the next

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<sup>13</sup> MacPherson’s column features strikingly similar wording to the April 24 editorial “A choice between mob rule and democracy,” not included in the final sample of this study. Meanwhile, the May 3 editorial “Do the protesters care about real democracy?” consists of a full frontal assault on notions such as student self-governance and civil disobedience, suggesting that *real* democracy takes place at the ballot box.

<sup>14</sup> It is generally acknowledged that the FEUQ and FECQ are organizationally more closely affiliated to the PQ than is the CLASSE, which often critiques the democratic shortcomings of electoral politics.

five years.” Finally, an editorial describes “masked demonstrators wearing the red square of solidarity with students protesting tuition hikes” (“Will the songs,” 2012). Clearly, the symbol has negative connotations in the discourse of *The Gazette*, contrasted on occasion with the “[f]ar less visible [...] green squares” worn by some more reasonable students “to symbolize their position against the widespread strike” (Seidman, 2012b).

**Recap of articulations pertaining to student action.** The nodal point of identity “students” is discursively articulated with various signifiers representing collective action, the most important of which is the fellow nodal point “strike” and its variant “strikers.” This articulation is visibly contested, particularly through the introduction of the competing signifier “boycott,” although the two ultimately coexist as synonyms within the discourse—which neutralizes both the consumer rights implication of “boycott” and the labor rights of the more frequently-used “strike.”

In much the same way as “strike,” “students” is also linked with the signifier “protests” and its variant “protesters.” These relationships are so strong that the strike and the protests are generally attributed to all students, and all students to them—all students are strikers and protesters, and all strikers and protesters are students. Moreover, the use of the labels “strikers” and “protesters” makes striking and protesting the defining vocation and focal point of the identity of their participants. On the other hand, the use of “strikers” and “striking students” dissipates the apparent unity of students by introducing a contrast between those who are on strike and those who are not.

Despite the similarities in the articulation of “strike” and “protests,” the latter is more episodic than thematic, refers to multiple events rather than a single coordinated movement, and lacks any labor rights connotation. In addition, “protests” has a more significant articulation with a clearly-defined cause and purpose, while the strike may seem directionless. The related signifiers “demonstrations” and “marches” are also articulated with “students.”

The signifier “democracy” is linked to the nodal point “government” in contrast to “students.” The latter is instead linked to the maligned opposition “Parti Québécois,” which is either exploiting the student cause for political gain or represents their legitimate—though



foolhardy—voice in Quebec politics. In this discourse, students, protesters, and the Parti Québécois share the symbol of the red square.

## 5.2. Articulations Pertaining to the Criminalization and Infantilization of Students

Through the articulation of “students” and related signifiers with others presented as negative, students come to be vilified as violent, disruptive, and intimidating in the *Printemps érable* discourse of *The Gazette*. Additionally, “students” is linked in both subtle and more overt ways with the signifier “children” and associated with the further negative characteristics that come with it. (See Figure 2.) Through this process of criminalization and infantilization, students are thus discredited and made the subject of paternalistic reproach, although those “reasonable” enough to oppose the strike are portrayed as innocent victims in need of protection and support, justifying increasingly draconian measures.

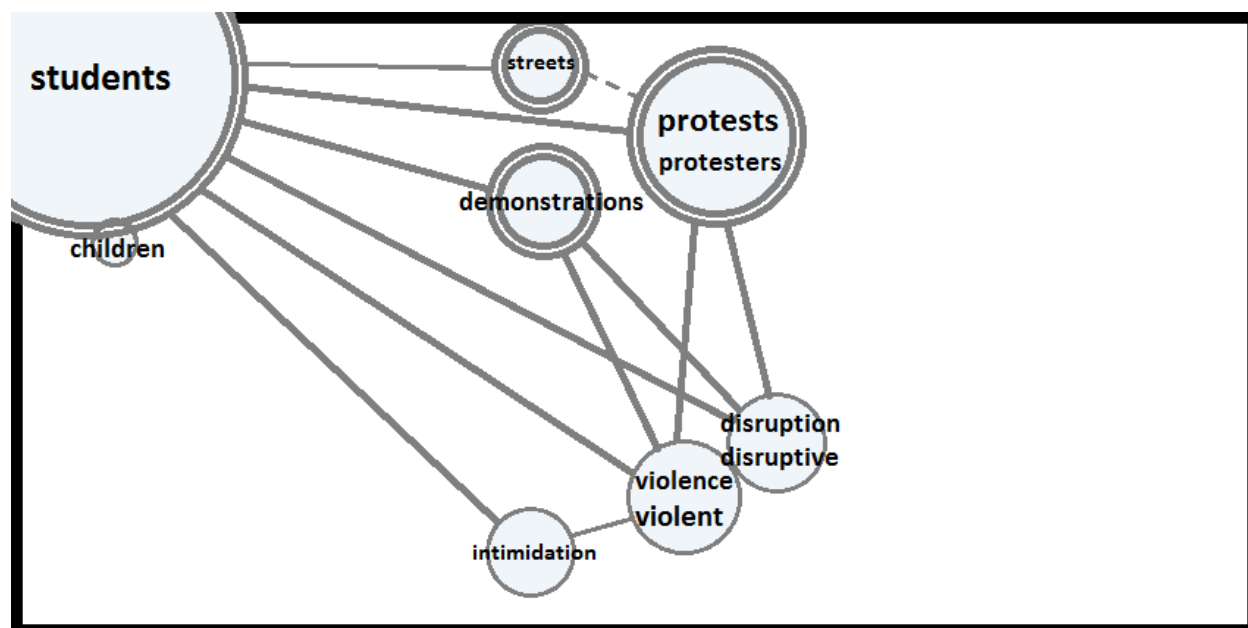


Figure 2: Map of articulations pertaining to the criminalization and infantilization of students in the discourse of *The Gazette*

**Violence, disruption, and intimidation.** The nodal point of identity “students,” along with the signifiers “protests” and “demonstrations” that are strongly articulated with it, are regularly described negatively as aggressive and destructive. They are discursively linked with the noun “violence” and its adjectival form “violent,” for which they are held responsible. For example, MacPherson (2012) suggests there is “violence and vandalism during [students’] frequent street

protests” and that, “[a]s long as the students continue their violence and disorder, the choice facing Quebec [is between] democracy and mob rule” He goes so far as to imply that protest itself is inherently violent in lamenting the fact that, “with all the other—legal, democratic and nonviolent—means of expression at the students' disposal, the protests continue.” By contrast, such accusations of violent behaviour are generally not levelled against police or government, who enjoy a monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force.

“Students,” “protests,” and “demonstrations” are also discursively articulated with “disruption” and “disruptive,” often employed in conjunction with “violence” or “violent.” Editorials, for instance, refer to “the violence and disruption perpetrated by the student protesters” (“Parents,” 2012) as well as “increasingly disruptive and violent demonstrations” (“Let reason,” 2012). Such articulations of “protests” and “demonstrations” transform these signifiers into nodal points in this discourse, giving them a more central place and a narrower meaning that is challenged through other articulations in other discourses. Furthermore, the collocation of “violence” and “disruption” suggests that any interruption of the humdrum of the daily routine—let alone a potential disturbance of the existing social order—is equal in severity to causing harm to people or, as Galtung defines violence, causing “*difference between the potential and the actual*, between what could have been and what is” (1969, emphasis in original). The implication is that these disruptions of everyday life, and not the tuition increase introduced by the state, the brute force of the police, or even the intervention of the courts, is limiting individuals—and their various collectivities—from full self-actualization.

The signifier “streets,” although it does not appear very frequently, is articulated with “students” in much the same way as “protests” and “demonstrations,” and has strong hints of links with most of the signifiers discussed above. On top of MacPherson’s (2012) reference above to “the violence and vandalism during their frequent street protests,” Branswell (2012) calls “student protests a fixture on Montreal streets” while an editorial alleges that “the conflict over tuition-fee increases that has increasingly disrupted life on the streets” (“Let reason,” 2012). “Streets” becomes a nodal point through its alternative articulation in the discourse of the CLASSE, but in this discourse the streets represent the public domain as designated for transit and for conducting day-to-day business; its misuse for protests and demonstrations constitutes an unacceptable violation and projects a poor image abroad.

In addition to its clear articulation with “violence” and “intimidation,” the nodal point of identity “students” is similarly articulated with “intimidation,” as in a second-hand report that “insults were hurled and intimidation used by striking students” (Seidman, 2012d). Furthermore, MacPherson (2012) asserts that “it’s not as if violent demonstrations, intimidation of other students, vandalism and sabotage are the only means to oppose the fee increases announced by the government.”

**Selfish children.** One editorial is oversaturated with the words “reason,” “reasonable,” and “reasonably,” used in contrast to “students” to highlight the folly of their ways (“Let reason,” 2012). More typically, along with being aggressive and destructive, “students” are variously portrayed as selfish, stubborn, ungrateful, and irresponsible (Aubin, 2012a; MacPherson, 2012; “Will the songs,” 2012).

Such unflattering terms are often associated with the immature and, although not sedimented particularly firmly, a clear equivalence has indeed been formed between “students” and “children.” The headline of one editorial declares, “Parents, teachers and politicians behaving badly” (2012),<sup>15</sup> although the body of the text reserves its sharpest condemnation for students, juxtaposed with the “adult apologists” and “supposed grown-ups who are enabling and encouraging [their] behaviour.” The editorial cites supposed third-party allegations “that the student attitude in this conflict is a manifestation of the so-called *enfant-roi* syndrome” and draws parallels between the “boycott” and “an almighty tantrum” by “cosseted children.” Another editorial (“Will the songs,” 2012) advises students to “[look] forward to the rest of their lives” and “focus on the future”—referring, of course, to a narrow, individualistic view of the future without regard for the welfare of less fortunate individuals or the society as a whole—although it would appear that the intended audience is not actually students but “adults” who share the newspaper’s ideology. “Adulthood comes crashing in sooner than anyone ever expects,” it continues condescendingly, perhaps reminiscently. “The thing is to be prepared, and nothing prepares a person like a solid education.”<sup>16</sup> This *infantilization*, as McGray (2014) calls

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<sup>15</sup> “Parents, teachers and politicians behaving badly” (2012) does not, of course, refer to those politicians responsible for the widely condemned “special law,” known as Bill 78 or Law 12, that was passed on the same day this editorial was published (May 18).

<sup>16</sup> Other articles that were ultimately not included in the final sample for this study would serve to further highlight the articulation of “students” with “children,” or perhaps the synonym “kids.” For instance, the editorial “Parents,

it, ignores that university students are generally already adults who often have paid employment, families, and other responsibilities; it erases the acquired knowledge and lived experiences of even the oldest and most mature among them and instead attributes to all of them the negative traits associated with childhood.

It is from this paternalistic perspective that students in the discourse of *The Gazette* have their bills paid by benevolent taxpayers and their right to attend classes defended by a government that knows what is best for them (MacDonald, 2012; “Let reason,” 2012). It follows that those opposed to the strike, when included in the conversation, are innocent victims of the aforementioned “violence” and “intimidation” of their rampaging peers, in need of protection and justifying increasingly drastic action from responsible “adults.” For example, there is one article’s focus on those at UQAM “forced out of classrooms by striking students despite the Education Department’s pronouncement that classes should continue for those who want them,” with the victims sympathetically being quoted as claiming they are “scared,” “bothered,” “misrepresented,” and the targets of “fear tactics” (Seidman, 2012b). CEGEPs and universities then attempt to “use legal recourses to secure access to schools for students who aren’t striking,” described as “disappointed” and “shaken up” (Seidman, 2012d). This ultimately leads to Bill 78, “a special law that would enforce access to schools for those who are being illegally blocked by boycotters” (“Parents,” 2012).

**Recap of articulations pertaining to the criminalization and infantilization of students.** “Students,” along with the associated signifiers “protests,” “demonstrations,” and “streets,” are articulated with “violence” and “disruption.” Students are thus portrayed as dangerous, and their protests and demonstrations turn the streets into a dangerous place, with any interruption of the daily routine being equated with harm done to people—ignoring the actual violence done by government and police. “Students” is similarly linked with “intimidation.”

Meanwhile, the link between “students” and “children” is largely implied, but occasionally overt; no matter their age, experience, or station in life, students are articulated as

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teachers and politicians behaving badly” reads very much like a column published six days prior, titled “Where are the adults in the fight over tuition?,” that argued students “at least have an excuse to act like kids because they are” (Freed, 2012). Meanwhile, Aubin (2012b) quips in another column that, “As one cop told me cheerfully as he surveyed a demo, ‘These kids will let me pay for my own kids’ education.’”

immature and unreasonable beings who, in spite of themselves, are fortunate to have benevolent taxpayers, the government, and *The Gazette* looking out for their best interests and telling them what to do. Those children who happen to be on their side of the conflict merit special protection, which is used to legitimize heavy-handed measures against their opponents—characterized, as described above, as aggressive and destructive.

### 5.3. Articulations Pertaining to Student Concerns

The nodal point of identity “students” is directly articulated with the moment “tuition,” with which it is also linked indirectly via the additional nodal points “protests” and, to a lesser extent, “strike,” as discussed above. “Tuition” is further associated with “fees,” with which it becomes synonymous, and “increases” depicted as fair and reasonable. Moreover, “students” is directly connected to “block,” which competes with “tuition” for articulation with “access,” revealing that *The Gazette’s Printemps érable* discourse is preoccupied with the physical and immediate access to classes at the expense of the more abstract and long-term right to education. Finally, the articulation of the signifier “pay” with “students” illustrates an individualist, consumerist, and quintessentially neoliberal approach to education. (See Figure 3.)

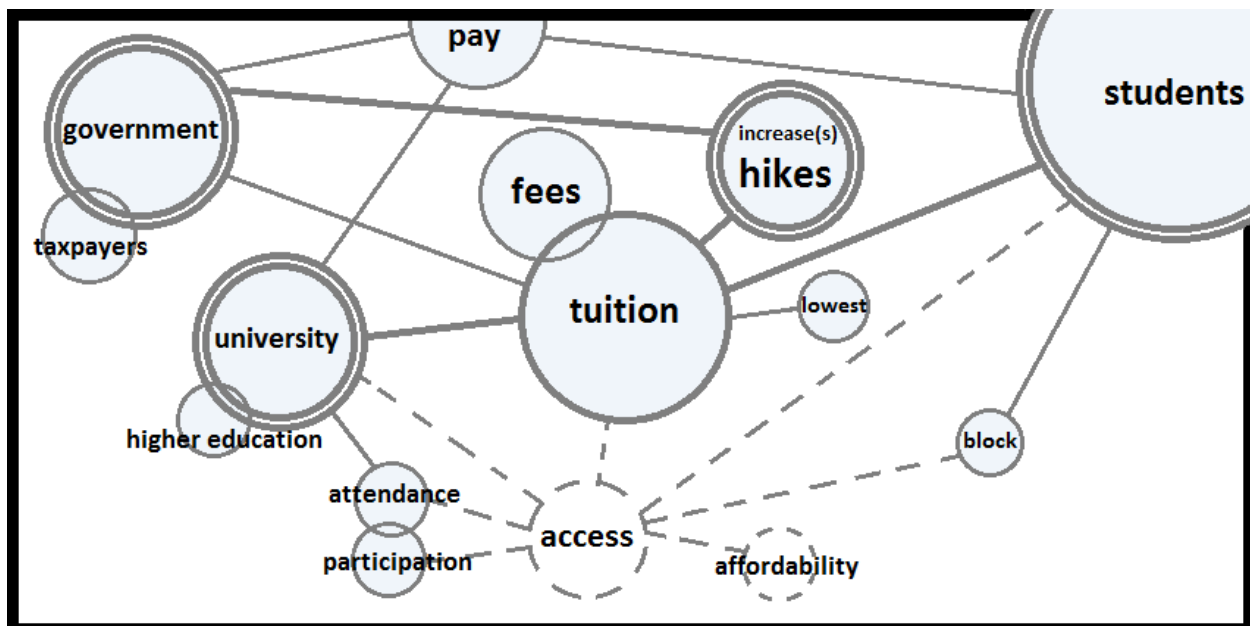


Figure 3: Map of articulations pertaining to student concerns in the discourse of *The Gazette*

**Tuition fees.** The signifier “tuition” represents an important moment in the *Printemps érable* discourse of *The Gazette*, articulated with a number of other signifiers including the nodal point of identity “students,” in relation to the collective action discussed above. Aubin (2012a), for instance, suggests that “the student strike against rising tuition is losing public support.” Used as a noun adjunct, “tuition” is also closely articulated with the plural noun “fees” through their frequent pairing in the term “tuition fees”—despite the fact that the discussion generally remains centered on one flat undergraduate university tuition fee for all Quebec residents. According to MacDonald (2012), “Nearly 175,000 students are currently boycotting classes [...] in protest against the Charest government's intention to increase undergraduate tuition fees for Quebec students by \$325 a year over the next five years.”

From the perspective of Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis, the inclusion of “fees” could be said to represent interdiscursivity; a signifier making the leap from an economic discourse into a predominantly educational one and carrying with it from that discourse a particular meaning. In fact, “fees” is so closely articulated with the nodal point “tuition” that it is also employed as a synonym for it. For instance, MacPherson (2012) refers to students’ “means to oppose the fee increases announced by the government.” However, to use the two signifiers interchangeably ignores the multiple fees other than tuition that are required of students and other individuals in late capitalist society, and even within the domain of post-secondary education—in CEGEP as well as university.

The meaning of “fees” is thus reduced through its relationship with “tuition,” and even further through the articulation of the two with “university” as a noun adjunct. This is illustrated by references to “an adjustment of the income-tax credit for paying university fees” (“Let reason,” 2012) and to “the government's plan to hike fees by \$325 a year for five years—bringing university tuition to \$3,793 from \$2,168” (Seidman, 2012c). It is clear that when bringing up “fees” in this discourse, it is not driver’s licence fees that are the object of discussion, nor tuition fees for private secondary schools, but specifically university tuition.

**Increases and hikes.** The moment “tuition,” which is actually interchangeable in this discourse with the associated moment “fees,” is also closely articulated, and serves as noun adjunct, with the nodal point “increase.” This signifier is used seemingly indiscriminately in both its singular and plural forms; even within one editorial, for instance, there are references to “the

student demand to cancel the tuition increase” as well as “the conflict over tuition-fee [sic] increases” (“Let reason,” 2012). Even more frequent is the use of the synonymous noun “hikes,” nearly always in its plural form, drawing attention to the fact that this rise in tuition fees is intended to be carried out not through one but through a series of increases—and perhaps inadvertently that it is part of a broader trend in Quebec and worldwide. For example, articles refer to “planned tuition hikes” (Branswell, 2012) and “student opposition to tuition fee hikes” (Seidman, 2012b).

“Tuition” and “fees” are additionally mentioned on the rare occasion with signifiers representing alternatives such as a reduced hike, a freeze, and even full abolition—the latter being portrayed as a particularly absurd and undesirable option by columnists MacDonald (2012) and MacPherson (2012)—although there is insufficient articulation to cement these elements into moments in this discourse. Instead, “tuition” is articulated with the adjective “lowest” in the sense that Quebec has “the lowest tuition rates in the country” (MacDonald, 2012), serving to justify the increase. MacDonald also uses the terms “cheap” and “rockbottom” to qualify Quebec’s university tuition, ignoring that many find the current amount a significant burden, and discursively eliminating possibilities for its reduction or elimination.

Fairclough describes nominalization as a grammatical feature whereby a noun stands in for a process, absolving the agent of responsibility and naturalizing the effect of this process (Phillips and Jorgensen, 2002, p. 83). It could be argued that such is the case with tuition fee “increases” and “hikes.” However, the nodal point “government,” referring to Jean Charest’s provincial Liberals, is explicitly articulated with “increase” as both a verb and a noun as the agent responsible for it, as in “the provincial government’s plans to increase tuition fees” (Branswell, 2012) and “the fee increases announced by the government” (MacPherson, 2012). In the discourse of *The Gazette*, this articulation is framed in such a way that the government should not be ashamed of such action, but should instead take pride in demonstrating leadership and responsibility in initiating the increase, described in one editorial as “necessary, reasonable and modest” as well as “eminently fair” (“Let reason,” 2012). Elsewhere, the government is praised for “[pulling] off ‘the best-designed tuition increase in Canadian history’” (Seidman, 2012c).

“Government,” and alternatively “taxpayers,” are also weakly articulated with “tuition” in the context of “subsidizing” or paying for the bulk of it. For example, an editorial argues that student protesters are “un-aware, or perhaps just not grateful, that their studies already cost Quebec taxpayers \$11,000 per student per year” (“Will the songs,” 2012). This articulation, while not entirely sedimented, suggests that the government is benevolent in funding students’ education with the contributions of the taxpaying citizens it represents—which does not include students.

**Access and accessibility.** There is an apparent discursive articulation between the signifiers “tuition” and “access.” According to one article, for instance, “Striking students say the government’s plan to hike fees [...] poses a serious threat to access to higher education” (Seidman, 2012c). This articulation is built on disproving any significant causal relationship between the two, and though only one of the articles included in this study introduces the signifier “accessibility” (Seidman, 2012c), “access” seems to be employed here in the same sense; the relativity of “accessibility” is replaced with the absolute nature of “access.” This implies that having the ability to do something necessarily entails that it is easy to do. Additionally, “access” appears to be limited in this articulation to financial concerns, and not to other factors that might reduce the ability of current or potential students to benefit fully from university in various ways.

“Access” is further problematized by the fact that it is measured in terms of “attendance” and “participation,” which are also used interchangeably in the discourse of *The Gazette*. The fact that people are attending or participating in university, taken to mean the same thing, indicates in this discourse that it is accessible in an absolute sense. The most obvious example of this is the article “Do tuition hikes really limit access?; Quebec has one of lowest participation rates in the country,” which, beyond hinting at the answer to its own question in the headline, states the following: “Looking at participation rates—that is, the percentage of young people attending university—Quebec, with the lowest tuition, has one of the lowest participation rates in the country” (Seidman, 2012c). This discourse reduces the meaning of full participation to mere attendance—butts in seats— except that “attendance” is directly articulated with “university” while “participation” is not. Furthermore, other factors that may affect “attendance” and “participation” in Quebec—historical, cultural, linguistic, socio-economic, or even simply the



idiosyncratic CEGEP system—are largely ignored, as are potentially more reliable measures of financial accessibility, in attempting to prove that increasing costs do not make it more difficult for people to go to university.

It should be noted in addition that the signifiers “university” and “higher education,” as fixed in their apparent articulation with “access,” are also used interchangeably, which serves to exclude CEGEPs, professional colleges, and other formative experiences from the definition of higher education. Such oversights give the impression that the discourse of *The Gazette* is largely out of touch with the modern Quebec context, situated instead more closely to, or within, the discourses of anglo-Canada or the United States.

“Affordability” is a signifier that fails to be sedimented into a moment in the discourse of *The Gazette*, not only because it is not used particularly frequently, but because its meaning is not made clear through discursive articulation. Seidman (2012b), demonstrating minimal boundary maintenance in citing the president of a think tank as an identified expert, suggests that affordability and accessibility “are not as linked as people may believe.” However, the article defines neither term and provides little explanation except that Sweden and Germany “do very well on affordability scores, but not necessarily on measures of accessibility,” while the inverse is true of the United States (Seidman, 2012c). Meanwhile, another article by Branswell (2012) incorporates the discourse of another identified expert and discusses survey results regarding “the possible impact of tuition hikes on access and affordability,” without differentiating the two. Thus “affordability” is confusingly contrasted with “accessibility” in one article and then lumped in with “access” in another.

**Blocking students’ access.** The potential link described above between the signifiers “access” and “tuition” is challenged by another possible articulation of “access” with the verb “block,” as in physically impeding entry. The competition between the signifiers “tuition” and “block” to establish conflicting articulations with “access” leaves both articulations unfinished; while the articulation of “access” with “tuition” would make sense in terms of paying to get into university, that of “access” with “block” potentially represents something distinct from financial concerns. For instance, an article features the headline, “Strikers accused of blocking class access” (Seidman, 2012b), while an editorial refers to “a special law that would enforce access to schools for those who are being illegally blocked by boycotters” (“Parents,” 2012).

What is the relationship between the signifier “access” and the nodal point of identity “students”? On the one hand, “access” in terms of financial accessibility is potentially articulated with “students” directly as well as through the nodal point “tuition.” However, the articulation of “access” with “students” appears to be based more on the latter as the object of concern rather than the subject; it is not so much students’ ability to access university that this discourse addresses as it is students’ *concerns about* the ability to access university. Put another way, this discourse is more preoccupied with students’ defence of accessibility than with defending students’ accessibility. There are several examples of this, including the quote mentioned above: “Striking students say the government’s plan to hike fees [...] poses a serious threat to access to higher education” (Seidman, 2012c). Another example, from an editorial, suggests it is up to “student leaders to persuade taxpaying Quebecers that this is an untenable burden that will seriously impede access to higher education” (“Let reason,” 2012). Furthermore, MacPherson (2012) accuses protesters of “targeting the working class whose access to post-secondary education the students claim to be defending.” Conversely, on the rare occasion where students’ concerns about accessibility are actually addressed, they are flippantly swept aside with such reckless assertions as “no student in Quebec is turned away because of need” (MacDonald, 2012).

On the other hand, the signifier “block” to which “access” is potentially linked is also linked directly to the nodal point of identity “students,” in terms of students both blocking and being blocked. For instance, Seidman reports in one article (2012c) of “at least 200 students who blocked all entrances to the CEGEP” and in another of “incidents when students were blocked from buildings, and police were called to intervene” (2012a). Where this articulation is concerned with students being “blocked,” it is primarily with them being physically impeded by other students from entering buildings or classes as mentioned above, and not with them being deprived of education in the same terms as “accessibility” or in any grander sense.

While one possible discursive articulation is built on disproving students’ claims about a causal relationship between tuition and accessibility, the solidification of the other potentially draws attention to confrontations between students and the fact that some are preventing others from entering buildings or classrooms. Although neither represents a firmly fixed link, the discourse of *The Gazette* is clearly more geared toward defending individual students’ right “to

go to the classes for which they have paid” (“Let reason,” 2012) than defending any abstract right to education, or addressing the plight of those individual students who struggle to pay or are forced to take on crushing debt.

**Paying for an education.** The nodal point of identity “students” is also discursively articulated with the verb “pay,” which is further articulated with such signifiers as “university” and “education”—the latter referring here to that which may be possessed by an individual and not to a societal good. For example, MacDonald (2012) argues that students in western Canada “pay twice as much to attend university,” while an editorial insists that, for those graduating, “[t]he question of whether Quebec is right or wrong to insist that students pay more of a share of the costs of their education is moot” (“Will the songs,” 2012).

As evidenced from the latter quote, there is also a discursive link from “pay” to the nodal point “government” and particularly the closely-related signifier “taxpayers”—with the latter of course incorporating the word “pay” and ultimately being defined solely by this act. More obvious examples include MacDonald’s (2012) reference to students “disrupting the lives of the very citizens and taxpayers who pay their bills” and Aubin’s (2012a) assertion that “[t]axpayers wouldn’t like the large bill for extending the semester.” The implication is that students should be, as one editorial says, “grateful” that benevolent government and taxpayers already contribute as much as they do to their education (“Will the songs,” 2012); while we may see echoes of the government discourse of having students “pay their fair share,” such an articulation does not materialize in the discourse of *The Gazette*.

No matter how much the cost of their classes may be subsidized, such articulations of the verb “pay” serve to make students tantamount to consumers, further cementing their role in the educational market of the neoliberal “knowledge economy” (“Will the songs,” 2012). This discourse equates the purchasing of classes with the consumption of knowledge, and a university degree indicates that students have consumed enough that *they* are prepared to be the ones paid, whether it is to produce knowledge to be consumed by others or to be themselves consumed as

human resources in the marketplace—they are prepared, to put it another way, for “[a]dulthood” (“Will the songs,” 2012).<sup>17</sup>

**Recap of articulations pertaining to student concerns.** “Students” is articulated with the signifier “tuition,” which is used in this discourse to refer specifically to undergraduate university tuition. The plural “fees” being used interchangeably with “tuition” obscures the assortment of other fees that must be paid both within education and in an increasing number of other domains. Conversely, tuition fees are closely linked to “increases” and “hikes,” whose plurality suggests that tuition fees are continuously rising. This rise is justified through the portrayal of tuition fees as the lowest in Canada, even “cheap” and “rockbottom,” in contrast with the absurd notion of lowering or eliminating such fees. In spite of the nominalization of “increases” and “hikes,” agency is attributed to “government” for this “responsible” measure.

A potential articulation is constructed around disproving student claims of a causal relationship between “tuition” and “access,” an absolute term used in lieu of the more relative “accessibility,” and principally in reference to financial concerns. The articulation of “access” is problematic in that it appears to be measured in terms of “attendance” and “participation,” which are taken to mean the same thing, and limits the definition of “higher education” to “university”—ignoring the CEGEP system that emerged from Quebec’s Quiet Revolution. Furthermore, the relationship between “access” and another potential moment, “affordability,” is not made clear. In the end, the sedimentation of “access” is also upset by the discourse’s preoccupation with students blocking others from accessing classes rather than students being blocked from an education, in any greater sense, by the government and its hikes.

“Students” is only linked with “university” and “education” through the verb “pay,” reducing students to consumers in a fundamentally neoliberal relationship. In fact, students are portrayed as lucky that “government” and “taxpayers” contribute as much as they do to the purchasing of their education—a product with solely individual benefit.

#### **5.4. Articulations Pertaining to Student Governance**

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<sup>17</sup> The editorial “Fight over tuition hike is about more than principle” (2012), which was not included in the final sample for this study, goes so far as to conclude that, “in the face of all this social, financial and fiscal uncertainty, the best thing a young woman or man can do is get an education, a university degree. Because that’s the passport to money—not to mention the principles that having money allows you to more easily afford.”

“Students” is not articulated directly with the nodal point “government,” but via other nodal points such as “leaders” and “associations,” which also have close links to “CLASSE” and “Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois.” These articulations demonstrate a lack of understanding of student governance and impose impossibly high demands upon students. It is unsurprising then that they fail to win the necessary favor of “Quebecers,” which, although its articulation is not solidified, is potentially distinguished from “students” as a separate group. (See Figure 4.)

**Student leaders.** The nodal point of identity “students” is strongly articulated in the discourse of *The Gazette* with the signifier “leaders,” used most often in its plural form, apparently referring to representatives of the three major province-wide student organizations included in “negotiations” or “talks” with “government”: the FECQ, FEUQ, and CLASSE. Through its discursive articulations with “students,” with “negotiations” or “talks,” and indirectly with “government,” the signifier “leaders” becomes a nodal point in this discourse. For example, one editorial states that “[PQ leader Pauline Marois] calls for resumption of negotiations with the student leaders” (“Parents,” 2012). Elsewhere, “student leaders” are responsible for making it clear that “the longest and largest student strike in Quebec's history can't be legislated to an end” (Seidman, 2012d).

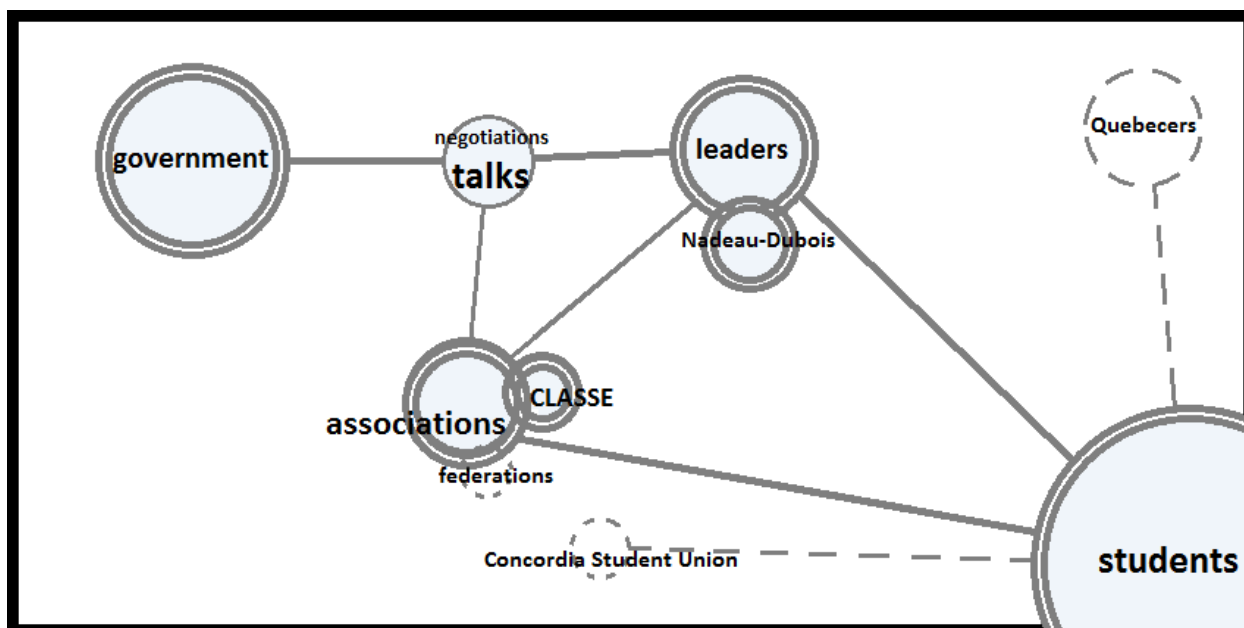


Figure 4: Map of articulations pertaining to student governance in the discourse of *The Gazette*

However, “student leaders” are also saddled with a host of other responsibilities that they fail to fulfill, including the following: representing students both for and against the strike (Seidman, 2012b); “[persuading] taxpaying Quebecers that [the tuition increase] is an untenable burden” (“Let reason,” 2012); “[explaining] how it is that in the rest of Canada university attendance is substantially higher” despite higher fees (“Let reason,” 2012); “[preventing] the violence and vandalism during their frequent street protests” (MacPherson, 2012); and even maintaining “control” over their cohorts (“Parents,” 2012). Such unrealistic expectations as enumerated above demonstrate a lack of understanding of leadership and of the functioning of the different organizations involved in the strike.

When the signifier “leader” is employed in the singular, it is most often to refer to Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois, who, while demonstrating significant leadership qualities, is not officially a leader at all, but one of two co-spokespersons of the *ad hoc* coalition known as the CLASSE. Nevertheless, he is identified as “[s]tudent leader Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois” (Seidman, 2012b), “a leader with the [CLASSE]” (Seidman, 2012d), or, alternatively, as “the spokesman for the hard-line CLASSE—and, apparently, for the entire student movement” (MacPherson, 2012). Such sensationalist representations of this one individual in his sedimentation as a nodal point in the discourse of *The Gazette* cast into shadow the roles of the presidents of the two federations, as well as that of the other co-spokesperson of the CLASSE, a woman by the name of Jeanne Reynolds. While this discourse demonstrates a fixation with identifying and focusing on a “leader” to represent the unified and homogenous mass that generally is “students,” the meaning of “leader” is ultimately not fixed particularly firmly; it is unclear what is meant by the term or by what criteria it is applied, although what is clear is that it is more likely to be applied to a man than to a woman.

**Student associations.** “Students” is also employed alongside signifiers representing specific collectivities, such as “federations” and “the Concordia Student Union,” within the united and homogenous mass. Of particular note is the nodal point “association,” which is only linked weakly to “leaders,” and is generally not employed in reference to associations at the level of individual academic departments but serves as a catch-all for various forms of representative bodies from the pan-institutional level up to the aforementioned three umbrella organizations included in “negotiations” or “talks” with “government.” For instance, an article reports that “the

university's student association said there was an agreement about not blocking buildings or using harassment” (Seidman, 2012d), while an editorial describes the CLASSE as “the largest and most strident of the student associations” (“Let reason,” 2012).<sup>18</sup> This fails to reflect the fact that few of these pan-institutional bodies, and none of the big three, refer to themselves as “associations”; the CLASSE is a coalition formed by the ASSÉ for the purpose of the strike while the FECQ and FEUQ are federations. All told, the discourse of *The Gazette* demonstrates little concern with the internal organization or structural differences of either the local or province-wide student organizations, beyond singling out the CLASSE as the most “radical and intransigent” among them (“Let reason,” 2012).

The fact that “leaders” is more strongly articulated with “students” than with “associations” suggests that each of those appointed a leader—particularly Nadeau-Dubois—represents not only their respective organization in this discourse but students as a whole. This, along with the other unreasonable expectations of them cited above, appears to set the “leaders” up for failure; their inability to live up to the impossible standards of leadership established in this discourse reflects poorly on the mass of students they are supposed to represent and further proves their undesirable, childlike characteristics.

**Students and Quebecers.** “Quebecers” has only traces of a discursive articulation with other signifiers, though its most promising connection is with the nodal point of identity “students.” It appears that the possible link between “Quebecers” and “students” is characterized primarily by the latter’s failure to win the favor of the former from the government, portrayed as a necessary prerequisite for legitimacy. More specifically, such an articulation would be based on students’ inability to convince this group that an increase in tuition fees is unjust and would unduly harm accessibility. Moreover, it appears that such an articulation might serve to demarcate “Quebecers” as a group separate from “students.” For example, an editorial deems it “hard for student leaders to persuade taxpaying Quebecers that this is an untenable burden that will seriously impede access to higher education” (“Let reason,” 2012), and Branswell’s (2012)

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<sup>18</sup> This is false: the CLASSE, while having the most members on strike at its peak (perhaps because it was formed specifically for that purpose), was not in fact the largest of the major student organizations. That title was held by the FEUQ.

identified expert ultimately judges that “the students have not successfully made their case to the majority of Quebecers.”

**Recap of articulations pertaining to student governance.** Representatives from three student organizations are deemed “student leaders” in this discourse, particularly Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois, one of the two co-spokespersons for the CLASSE. However, “leaders” is articulated more strongly with “students” than with their respective organizations, suggesting that each is responsible for representing the whole. “Leaders” is made a nodal point through its relationship with both “students” and “government” in terms of “negotiations,” although these individuals are also burdened with an impossible series of other responsibilities, demonstrative of this discourse’s ignorance of leadership and self-governance. Its use of “associations” as a generic term for all forms of student groups further illustrates the lack of understanding inherent in this discourse. Nevertheless, the failure of the “leaders” and “associations” to live up to its imposed standards serves to reaffirm the negative assumptions about students—potentially distinct from “Quebecers”—on which this discourse is based.

### 5.5. Summary of the discourse of *The Gazette*

The *Printemps érable* discourse of *The Gazette* places a particular emphasis on articulations relating to collective student action against the tuition increase, especially articulations with the nodal points “strike”—which prevails over “boycott”—and “protests.” In some ways, the “strike” and “protests” are attributed to all students, and all students to them, although such variants as “strikers” and “striking students” are employed to distinguish those who are on strike from those who are not. “Strike” is the dominant signifier, but only “protests” has any significant link with the issue of tuition hikes, which is significant in that it is plural, more episodic, and devoid of any interdiscursive association with labor rights.

A discursive feature unique to *The Gazette* is the criminalization of students and their collective action through their articulation with “violence,” “disruption,” and “intimidation.” Particularly disturbing is this discourse’s failure to distinguish between disruption—most of which was committed by students—and genuine violence—most of which was committed against them. Additionally, students are denied adulthood and maturity, dependent on the state and taxpayers to subsidize their education. Their criminality and immaturity justify strong,



paternalistic action by the government—and patronizing advice from *The Gazette*'s columnists and editorialists.

As for the issues underlying student action—which are not always obvious—the use of the plural “fees” as synonymous with “tuition” ignores the many other fees that must be paid, although their link with the plural “increases” and “hikes” highlights the fact that such costs are constantly rising. The discourse of *The Gazette* addresses student concerns about the connection between tuition fees and the accessibility of education, although rather flippantly, and appears more concerned with the relatively short-term accessibility of classrooms that students are blocking. Moreover, students’ only significant connection to “university” and “education” is as individual consumers purchasing classes and consuming knowledge in the educational marketplace.

Finally, the discourse of *The Gazette* demonstrates little understanding of “student leaders” and “student associations,” placing a disproportionate emphasis on Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois and the CLASSE and imposing a top-down model in addition to unrealistic expectations. Their failure to meet these expectations reflects poorly on the students they represent, reinforcing the negative conceptions of them that are fundamental to this discourse.

## Chapter 6: Analysis of the Discourse of *La Presse*

Like the *Printemps érable* discourse of *The Gazette*, that of *La Presse* is represented here by ten texts, including two editorials signed by editor-in-chief André Pratte. There are also three news articles: one credited solely to reporter Pascale Breton, one credited to both Breton and Tommy Chouinard, and one credited to Denis Lessard and Philippe Teisceira-Lessard. Additionally, there are five columns: two by Michèle Ouimet, one by Rima Elkouri, one by Yves Boisvert, and one by Vincent Marissal.

The two editorials by Pratte constitute the earliest texts from *La Presse* included in the final sample and establish his position against the student strike. The rest of the newspaper's staff, however, does not necessarily follow; while Boisvert and, in a more nuanced way, Marissal support a tuition increase, Ouimet and Elkouri are adamant opponents. This opposition leads to contention over the discursive articulation of various signifiers, potentially allowing fewer to become sedimented as moments compared to other discourses, such as that of *The Gazette*.

The signifier “*étudiants*” (students) appears more frequently than any other in the discourse of *La Presse* surrounding the *Printemps érable*, constituting a nodal point of identity or master signifier in this discourse, as its English counterpart does in the discourse of *The Gazette*. Being a nodal point *within* each discourse, “*étudiants*” functions as a floating signifier *between* them; that of *La Presse* delimits the meaning of “*étudiants*” through articulations that are similar in some ways and different in others compared to “student” in the discourse of *The Gazette*, described above.

“*Étudiants*” in the discourse of *La Presse* serves as both a noun and an adjective, although most commonly a plural noun, as in “*convaincre les étudiants de retourner en classe*” (convince the students to return to class) (Ouimet, 2012b). This suggests once again that students constitute a united and homogenous mass of people.

The French language, however, introduces an additional gender dynamic to discourse; there are feminine and masculine words, as well as words with both feminine and masculine forms, of which the masculine form is traditionally considered the default. The discourse of *La Presse* adheres to this rule with the noun “*étudiants*,” using the masculine and plural form of the

word to represent a group of people even though half of that group or more may consist of individuals who do not identify as male. Conversely, when the feminine singular form “*étudiante*” or feminine plural “*étudiantes*” are used, it is most often as an *adjective*. Furthermore, it is generally used to qualify a collective or an abstract concept like “*association*” (association), “*fédération*” (federation), “*crise*” (crisis), and “*grève*” (strike). The effect is that the flesh-and-blood people involved in the conflict—the visible part of the movement—are identified as masculine, while the invisible or intangible parts of the movement are associated with the feminine. This may be interpreted as a more or less subtle manifestation of patriarchy inherent in the French language and reproduced in the discourse of *La Presse*.

Another complication with the nodal point of identity “*étudiants*” in the French language is the common use of the separate term “*élèves*” (pupils) to refer to students who have not arrived at the university level, or “*cégépien*” to refer specifically to those at the CEGEP level. According to one article, for example, “*Les étudiants et élèves québécois fourbissent leurs armes*” (The students and pupils of Quebec are preparing for battle). Additionally, “*Plus de 84 000 cégépiens et étudiants sont actuellement en grève générale illimitée*” (More than 84,000 CEGEPers and students are currently on unlimited general strike) (Breton, 2012a). Compared with English, where there is a certain unity and egalitarianism among “students” distinguished only through the addition of noun premodifiers—for example, “university students” or “high school students”—such a distinction between “*étudiants*” and “*élèves*” in French confers a superior status to the former and further limits the potential for collective identity and action. However, for the most part, the discourse of *La Presse* appears to abandon this distinction, generally preferring instead refer to both CEGEP and university students as “*étudiants*.”

Beginning with “*étudiants*” as a nodal point of identity, we may identify three major themes along the same lines as those in *The Gazette*. First, I will explore how “*étudiants*” is linked with “*associations*” (associations) and “*leaders*” (leaders), representing student relationships. Second, I will observe the articulation of “*étudiants*” with signifiers representing student resistance, most significantly “*grève*” (strike). Third, and most importantly to this discourse, I will examine how “*étudiants*” is connected with signifiers denoting issues that motivate them to act, such as “*hausse*” (increase), “*prêts*” (loans), and “*endettement*” (indebtedness).

## 6.1. Articulations Pertaining to Student Governance

In the discourse of *La Presse* surrounding the *Printemps érable*, students are defined largely by their relationship with “associations” (associations) and “leaders” (leaders), although there is no significant link between the two themselves—even less so than in the discourse of *The Gazette*. “Associations,” which constitutes a nodal point, is further articulated with Quebec’s three largest student organizations: “FECQ,” “FEUQ,” and “CLASSE.” These student groups, and student leaders, are characterized in ways consistent with traditional hierarchical structures, drawing their legitimacy not from the “étudiants” they ostensibly represent but from their interactions with the nodal point “gouvernement.” Meanwhile, “étudiants” has no clear articulation with “travailleurs” (workers), although there is evidence to suggest that these are considered two separate groups in this discourse. (See Figure 5.)

*Associations étudiantes.* The signifier “associations” (associations) is strongly articulated with the nodal point of identity “étudiants.” Generally pluralized in the discourse of *La Presse*, it may be found on its own or, more frequently, as the head in the common phrase “associations étudiantes.” One article reports, for example, “*Les associations étudiantes ont rejeté en bloc hier la proposition de la ministre de l’Éducation*” (The student associations completely rejected the proposal of the minister of Education yesterday) (Breton & Chouinard,

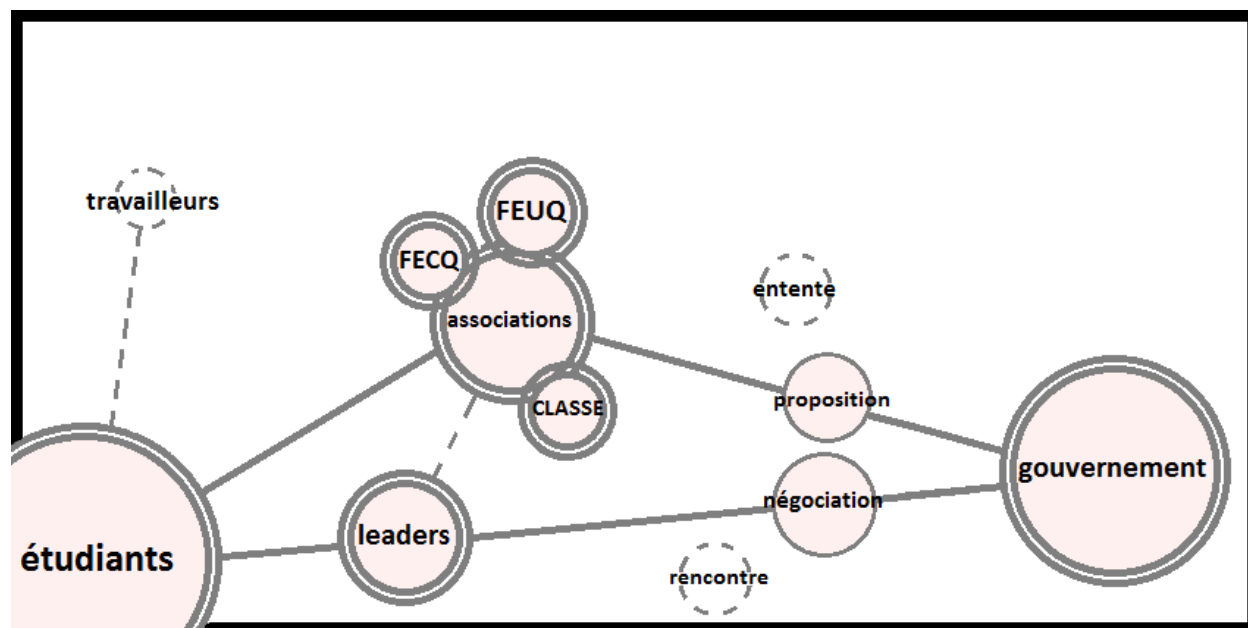


Figure 5: Map of articulations pertaining to student governance in the discourse of *La Presse*

2012). In her column published the same day, Ouimet (2012b) writes that the government knows time is running out and, with its most recent proposal, “*il a donné juste assez de corde aux associations étudiantes pour qu'elles se pendent*” (it has given the student associations just enough rope for them to hang themselves with). The pluralization of “*associations étudiantes*” is another feature serving to discursively unite students by ignoring differences between their representative organizations, as well as the fact that these organizations may not actually represent all students.

“*Associations étudiantes*” generally appears to refer not to smaller departmental-level or even pan-institutional representative bodies, but to the three province-wide umbrella organizations included in negotiations with the government—although none of these call themselves associations, as previously discussed. Furthermore, as may be observed in the above examples, “*associations*” is articulated with the nodal point “*gouvernement*,” and the signifier “*proposition*” (proposal) featured in those examples coalesces into an intermediary moment in the middle of this articulation.

“*Étudiants*” is indeed articulated directly, although less cohesively, with the FEUQ, the FECQ, and the CLASSE: the “*trois grandes associations étudiantes à l'origine du mouvement contre la hausse des droits de scolarité*” (three large student associations at the origin of the movement against the increase of tuition fees) (Breton & Chouinard, 2012). However, it appears that it is not in this role that they ultimately find a solid place in the discourse of *La Presse*, but in their place as the “*associations*” at the negotiating table with the government. For example, Lessard and Teisceira-Lessard (2012) report that the CLASSE approaches an upcoming round of negotiations with the new Minister of Education hoping for “*un rythme de discussion plus lent que celui qui prévalait avec Line Beauchamp*” (a rhythm of discussion slower than that which prevailed with Line Beauchamp).

**Leaders étudiants.** Another moment strongly articulated with the nodal point of identity “*étudiants*” is “*leaders*” (leaders), which in this discourse is featured almost exclusively in its plural form in the term “*leaders étudiants*.” Columnist Marissal (2012), for instance, refers to an agreement in principle “*entre le gouvernement Charest et les leaders étudiants*” (between the Charest government and the student leaders). Furthermore, following students’ rejection of that agreement, Lessard and Teisceira-Lessard (2012) report that the government negotiators

“*exigeront des trois leaders étudiants d’établir s’ils ont un mandat clair pour négocier avec le gouvernement*” (will require the three student leaders to establish whether they have a clear mandate to negotiate with the government).

The term “*leaders étudiants*” is taken to mean the representatives of the three large student organizations invited to the negotiating table, although there is no significant articulation between “*leaders*” and “*associations*.” Additionally, the frequent use of the plural “*leaders étudiants*” in this discourse does not serve to focus on any particular cult of personality, but does suggest that these individuals represent all students—even those who are not members of one of their organizations. Furthermore, while suggesting that all students are united, the term also implies an adherence to traditional hierarchical structures, with leaders having the authority to act on behalf of all students and deriving legitimacy not from their associations, but, along with them, from their relationship with “*gouvernement*.”<sup>19</sup> In a manner similar to “*proposition*” above, “*négociation*” (negotiation) serves as an intermediary moment in this articulation, while other signifiers such as “*rencontre*” (meeting) and “*entente*” (agreement) do not appear with enough regularity to settle in any definitive manner into moments.

***Étudiants et travailleurs.*** The relationship between “*étudiants*” and “*travailleurs*” (workers)—another masculine plural noun, used at the expense of the feminine “*travailleuses*”—remains unclear. The signifier is not used particularly frequently, and when it is, the assumption appears to be that this is a group separate from students that they may join after they graduate. Pratte (2012a), for instance, asserts that, “*une fois sur le marché du travail, les diplômés universitaires jouissent de salaires beaucoup plus élevés que les autres travailleurs*” (once in job market, university graduates enjoy much higher salaries than other workers), which implies not only that students are not already workers but that they also have no prior degree. Even Elkouri (2012), in her defense of students, argues that they are acting in the best interest of the entire society, “*y compris celui des braves travailleurs et de leurs enfants*” (including that of the brave workers and of their children).

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<sup>19</sup> At least one article in *La Presse*, not included in the final sample for this study, mistakenly identifies Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois as the president of the CLASSE (Chouinard, 2012).

In addition to the fact that the signifier “*travailleurs*” does not appear very often in this discourse, its sedimentation as a moment apart from “*étudiants*” is upset by Ouimet’s (2012a) suggestion that most students do, in fact, work: “*80% travaillent et étudient à temps plein*” (80% work and study full time). Shame on those, she says, who treat students “*d’enfants gâtés qui refusent de payer leur juste part, de futurs médecins qui vont rouler sur l’or et qui osent demander aux travailleurs de payer pour leur éducation*” (as spoiled children who refuse to pay their fair share, as future doctors who will ride on gold and who dare to ask workers to pay for their education). Nevertheless, even if students and workers are not mutually exclusive categories, it is students’ employment outside of their studies that constitutes work, and not their studies themselves.

**Recap of articulations pertaining to student governance.** The plural “*associations étudiantes*” refers in this discourse to the three largest student organizations, ignoring the fact that none of them call themselves associations, and is assumed to represent all students. “*Leaders étudiants*” is taken to collectively refer to the representatives of those three organizations, although there is no significant discursive link between “*leaders*” and “*associations*.” The two thus draw their legitimacy not from their links with students or each other, but from their collective relationship with “*gouvernement*.” While reinforcing student unity, this disregards differences between the “*leaders*” or the “*associations*” and gives each of them the authority to act on behalf of all of students. Additionally, while students are not entirely denied a potential status as workers, their studies themselves are not accepted as labor.

## 6.2. Articulations Pertaining to Student Action

“*Grève*” (strike) is by far the most substantial signifier articulated with the nodal point of identity “*étudiants*” in terms of collective resistance to an increase in tuition fees, and is also articulated, though only weakly, with “*associations*,” “*déclencher*” (to launch, trigger, or unleash), and “*voter*” (to vote). “*Mouvement*” (movement), which appears to be directly linked to “*étudiants*,” is actually used in multiple different contexts; ultimately it only has its meaning fixed through its articulation, like “*grève*,” with “*hausse*” (increase). “*Conflit*” (conflict), “*crise*” (crisis), and “*manifestation*” (demonstration) all constitute less significant moments with weak connections to “*étudiants*”; among them, only “*conflit*” is further articulated clearly with the

nodal point “*gouvernement*,” and this is done through the intermediary signifier “*régler*” (to resolve). (See Figure 6.)

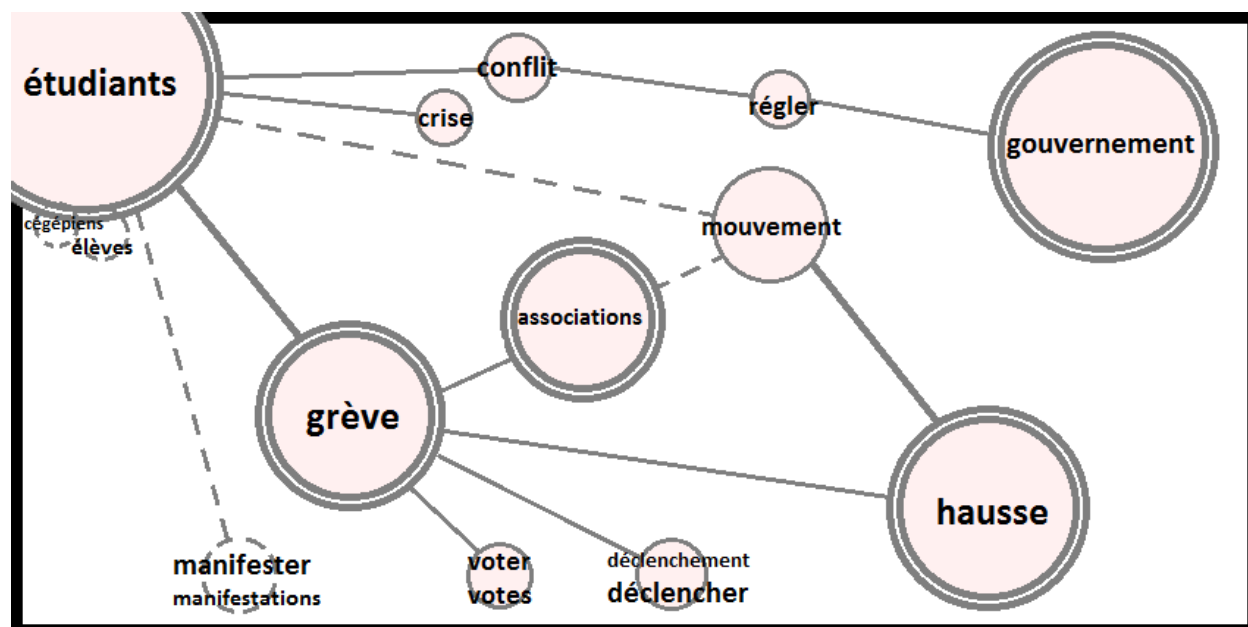


Figure 6: Map of articulations pertaining to student action in the discourse of *La Presse*

**Grève étudiante.** The nodal point of identity “*étudiants*” is strongly articulated with the nodal point “*grève*” (strike) in the discourse of *La Presse*, as “students” is with “strike” in that of *The Gazette*. “*Grève*” is employed in the singular, again indicating a unity of purpose and of action among the students involved. Furthermore, the pairing of the two signifiers “*grève*” and “*étudiante*” to form the phrase “*grève étudiante*,” used as a tagline above the headline of some articles to attract attention, attributes the tactic to all students collectively. However, the much more frequent use of the term “*étudiants en grève*” (students on strike) suggests a rift in the apparent unity of “*étudiants*” by making it clear that they are not all on strike, in the same way as the term “striking students” in the discourse of *The Gazette*, although more integral to the discourse of *La Presse*. Elkouri (2012), for instance, is troubled that “*les étudiants en grève sont traités par la ministre Line Beauchamp comme des égoïstes*” (striking students are treated by minister Line Beauchamp like egotists).

The articulation of “*grève*” with “*étudiants*” in the discourse of *La Presse* does not go unchallenged, as editor-in-chief Pratte (2012a) initially places “*grève*” in quotation marks



because, as he explains, “*les seuls qui sont privés de quoi que ce soit, ce sont les étudiants eux-mêmes*” (the only ones deprived of anything, it is the students themselves). Nevertheless, “*grève*” is employed without reservation in other texts—including other editorials by Pratte (2012b)—and can safely be considered a nodal point in this discourse. The signifier “*boycott*,” meanwhile, is nowhere to be found in any of the texts from *La Presse* included in the final sample for this study.<sup>20</sup>

The nodal point “*grève*,” in addition to being discursively articulated with “*étudiants*,” is weakly connected with the signifier “*associations*” (associations). For example, columnist Boisvert (2012) writes about “[*l*]es associations qui ont voté pour la grève” (the associations that voted for the strike), while an article by Breton (2012a) explains that “[*p*]lusieurs associations ont toutefois rejeté la grève générale illimitée” (several associations have however rejected the unlimited general strike). However, such usages are not particularly frequent, leaving “*grève*” associated more strongly with students as a whole than with their representative organizations.

“*Grève*” is linked relatively weakly with the verb “*déclencher*” (to launch, trigger, or unleash) and its nominal variant “*déclenchement*,” which appear only occasionally in the discourse of *La Presse*. For example, as Pratte (2012a) explains, “*Des milliers d’étudiants ont déclenché une ‘grève’*” (Thousands of students have launched a “strike”), while an article mentions “*turbulences sociales depuis le déclenchement de la grève étudiante, en février*” (social turbulence since the launch of the student strike, in February) (Lessard & Teisceira-Lessard, 2012). Similarly, “*grève*” is also weakly articulated with the verb “*voter*” (to vote) as well as the noun “*votes*,” generally plural. As one article reports, for instance, “*Les élèves du collège Édouard-Montpetit ont ainsi voté massivement en faveur de la grève générale illimitée*” (The students of Édouard-Montpetit college thus voted overwhelmingly in favor of the unlimited general strike) (Breton, 2012a). Meanwhile, a column suggests “*il y a une logique mathématique impeccable derrière les votes de grève*” (there is an impeccable mathematical logic behind the strike votes) (Boisvert, 2012).

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<sup>20</sup> Partick Lagacé (2012), in a column not included in the final sample for this study, apologizes with tongue in cheek for “not repeating the official word decreed by the State, ‘boycott.’”

The use of verbs such as “*déclencher*” and “*voter*” confers agency upon the students and, to a lesser degree, associations voting for and launching the strike, while nominalization, as in the case of “*déclenchement*” and “*votes*,” absolves them of responsibility and naturalizes these processes. On the other hand, the occasional employment of the verb “*tenir*” (hold) with the noun “*votes*” works to partially counteract this nominalization, returning some agency to those holding the votes; “*De nombreuses associations tiendront des votes de grève*” (Numerous associations will hold strike votes) (Breton, 2012a).

Finally, the nodal point “*grève*” is articulated somewhat with “*hausse*” (increase), as in the increase of tuition fees, which will be further discussed below. They are articulated in terms of the strike being a measure to stop the increase in tuition fees. For instance, the quote above by Pratte (2012a) about thousands of students launching a strike continues, “*pour protester contre la hausse des droits de scolarité universitaires annoncée par le gouvernement Charest*” (to protest against the increase of university tuition fees announced by the Charest government). Additionally, Ouimet (2012b) asserts that the increase is “*au coeur de la grève*” (at the heart of the strike).

***Mouvement étudiant.*** The nodal point of identity “*étudiants*,” in addition to “*grève*,” also appears to be directly articulated with the signifier “*mouvement*” (movement) in the discourse of *La Presse*. Linking “*étudiants*” with “*mouvement*,” a singular noun, again suggests cohesiveness among students, attributing resistance to all students and all students to resistance, emphasizing their shared purpose or goal; movement implies a clear *direction* in which they are pushing together.

On the other hand, the exact nature of the link between “*étudiants*” and “*mouvement*” remains unclear. Some articles, for instance, refer to a “*mouvement contre la hausse des droits de scolarité*” (movement against the increase of tuition fees) (Breton, 2012a; Breton & Chouinard, 2012), suggesting that the whole of resistance to tuition hikes constitutes a movement. Meanwhile, other articles appear to use the singular noun “*mouvement*” as a substitute for the plural “*associations*,” and “*mouvement étudiant*” as a substitute for “*associations étudiantes*”; “*Le mouvement étudiant reste toutefois bien prudent quant à l'issue de la rencontre*” (The student movement nevertheless remains very cautious about the outcome of the meeting) (Lessard & Teiscera-Lessard). This implies that the whole student movement, and not just the

three largest student organizations, is seated at the negotiating table with the government. Additionally, each “*association*” may be identified as a separate “*mouvement*,” as Elkouri (2012) states that the increase was “*qualifiée hier par les mouvements étudiants de ‘nouvelle taxe à la classe moyenne’*” (described yesterday by the student movements as a ‘new tax on the middle class’).<sup>21</sup> The relationship between the two signifiers is thus not firmly established, although in both of the latter cases the conflation of “*mouvement*” with “*association*” may confer increased importance to the latter, ignoring its functioning as an organization and elevating it to the status of representative of that which it espouses; it could be argued that an association represents its members, while a movement represents values and ideals.

While the signifier “*mouvement*” may not have a clear articulation with either “*étudiants*” or “*associations*,” it does have a clear one with “*hausse*,” and it is this articulation that secures its place as a discursive moment in terms of general opposition to the increase in tuition fees. For example, in addition to the above-mentioned references to the “*mouvement contre la hausse des droits de scolarité*,” Pratte (2012a) admits that “*la hausse annoncée est substantielle*” (the announced increase is substantial), but still argues “*ce mouvement est sans fondement*” (this movement is unfounded).

***Crise, conflit, et manifestations.*** There are weak articulations between the nodal point of identity “*étudiants*” and the infrequently used signifiers “*conflit*” (conflict) and “*crise*” (crisis). The latter two invoke tension, discord, and confrontation, and their use in the phrases “*conflit étudiant*” and “*crise étudiante*” attributes responsibility for them to students, although it is unclear who the students are in conflict with, or if the conflict is even among themselves. However, “*conflit*” is also linked with the nodal point “*gouvernement*” (government), possibly attributing to that agent some of the responsibility for causing the conflict—but also all of the responsibility for resolving it. Nonetheless, the verb “*régler*” (to resolve) as an intermediary signifier between “*conflit*” and “*gouvernement*” refers to a settlement accepted by all parties at the negotiating table rather than any unilateral action—such as draconian anti-protest legislation—on the part of the government. One article, for example, reports that “*le*

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<sup>21</sup> There are, in fact, individual student associations using the word “*mouvement*” in their names, such as the Mouvement des étudiants en service social de l'Université Laval (Movement of social work students of Laval University). However, this phenomenon seems relatively rare.

*gouvernement lance une initiative de ‘la dernière chance’ pour tenter de régler le conflit*” (the government is launching a ‘last chance’ effort to try to resolve the conflict) (Lessard & Teisceira-Lessard, 2012). Meanwhile, Marissal (2012) suggests that resolving the student conflict is not the government’s only concern: “*Le conflit étudiant est peut-être (l’entourage du premier ministre insistait hier sur le ‘peut-être’) réglé, mais les histoires de corruption restent*” (The student conflict may be [with the premier’s entourage insisting yesterday on the ‘may be’] resolved, but talk of corruption remains).

“*Étudiants*” has no significant link with the verb “*manifester*” (to demonstrate) or with the related noun “*manifestations*” (demonstration). Students are thus not strongly associated with the ongoing demonstrations, nor the demonstrations with students. In fact, the demonstrations are not linked, for the most part, with any particular agent. This appears to be a prime example of Fairclough’s notion of nominalization, described above, through which an act is represented not by a verb but by a noun, which has no clear agent and makes the act appear natural and even unavoidable, as though having taken on a life of its own. One article, for instance, reports that several associations rejected unlimited general strikes, “*optant plutôt pour des grèves d’une journée, au moment des grandes manifestations*” (opting instead for one-day strikes, to coincide with the large demonstrations) (Breton, 2012a). In this context, it is not the associations that are organizing the demonstrations, but simply planning their own activities around these seemingly inevitable events. Furthermore, a later article states that “*les manifestations de casseroles continuent en guise de protestation contre la loi d’exception*” (the pots and pans demonstrations continue in protest against the special law) (Lessard & Teisceira-Lessard, 2012). Who has organized these demonstrations, and who is participating, remain unclear—as does their cause, at least compared to “*grève*” or “*movement*.”

**Recap of articulations pertaining to student action.** The nodal point “*grève*” is more strongly articulated with “*étudiants*” than with “*associations*,” and linked somewhat with the issue of the tuition hike. The term “*grève étudiante*” evokes a singular effort attributed to all students, although this is belied by the alternative formation “*étudiants en grève*.” The use of the verbs “*déclencher*” and “*voter*” give students and their associations agency while the nouns “*déclenchement*” and “*votes*” act to remove some of it.

Neither “*mouvement*” nor “*manifestations*” have any clear relationship with “*étudiants*” or any specific agent, making them appear naturalized, spontaneous, and self-managing. “*Manifestations*,” which does not appear particularly often in this discourse, remains an undefined element as it has no serious links to any other signifiers at all, while “*mouvement*” has a possible connection to “*associations*” and is clearly in opposition to “*hausse*.”

“*Conflit*” and “*crise*” constitute minor moments in this discourse but are noteworthy in that causal responsibility for both is attributed solely to students, while treatment responsibility for “*conflit*” is attributed to “*gouvernement*.” The task of resolving the student conflict falls squarely in the government’s court, although resolution in this case implies adroit diplomacy more than heavy-handedness.

### 6.3. Articulations Pertaining to Student Concerns

The nodal point of identity “*étudiants*” is articulated with the nodal point “*hausse*” (increase or hike), which is further articulated with “*droits*” (rights, dues, or fees) and “*scolarité*” (schooling), as in the common phrase “*hausse des droits de scolarité*.” Each signifier in this chain will be examined more closely, along with their links to other signifiers, such as “75%” and “*cinq ans*” (five years)—representing the amount and duration of the planned tuition increase. Through the connection between “*étudiants*” and “*parents*” (parents), students are again infantilized based on financial need. “*Prêts*” (loans) and “*bourses*” (bursaries) are also articulated with “*étudiants*,” as they are with “*gouvernement*” via the moments “*bonification*” (enhancement) and “*régime*” (plan or system). Furthermore, “*dette*” (debt) is directly linked with “*étudiants*” and “*prêts*.” (See Figure 7.)

***Hausse et augmentation.*** “*Étudiants*” is articulated with “*hausse*” (increase or hike), generally employed as a singular noun in contrast with *The Gazette*’s use of “*increases*” and “*hikes*” in the plural. While students may oppose “*hausse*” through their strike, its direct link with “*étudiants*” is based more on its effect on students than on student opposition to it. For example, Elkouri (2012) suggests that students of modest means might be discouraged from attending university by “*une hausse aussi brutale*” (such a brutal increase).

The signifier “*augmentation*” (augmentation) is used as a synonym for “*hausse*,” though it appears less frequently, and is not directly articulated with “*étudiants*”—which serves to make

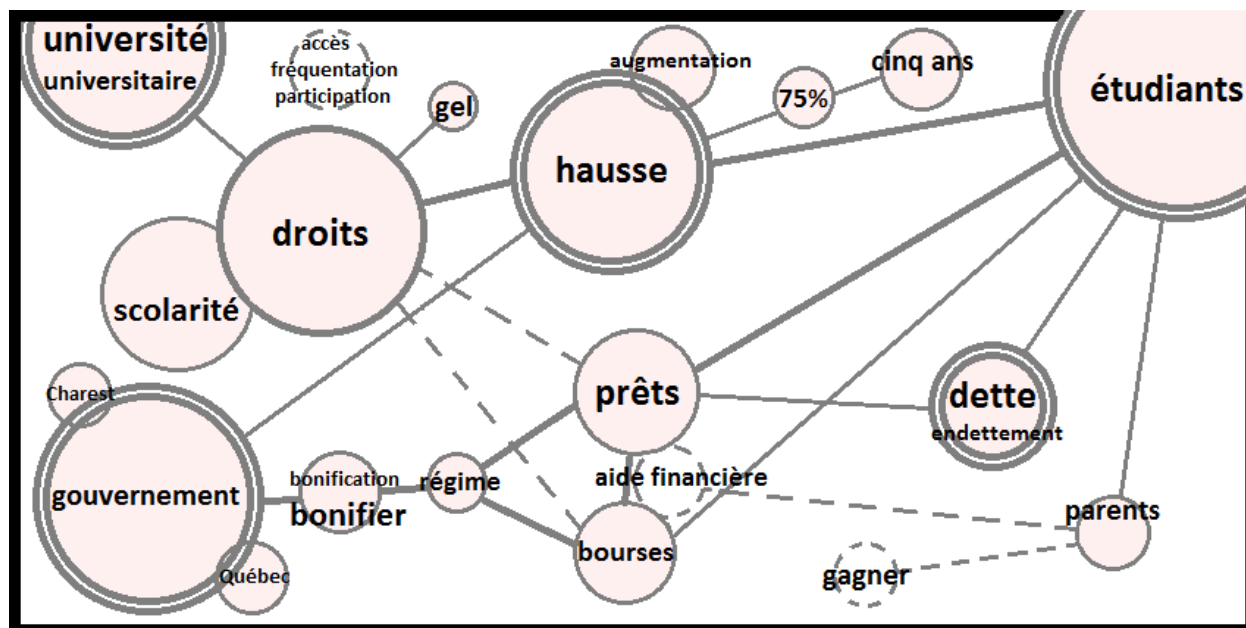


Figure 7: Map of articulations pertaining to student concerns in the discourse of *La Presse*

the increase seem harmless or abstract, not having any concrete effect on real people. For example, editor-in-chief Pratte (2012a) assures readers that, after the application of tax credits, “*l’augmentation nette sera de 1150\$ sur cinq ans, soit seulement 230\$ par an*” (the net augmentation will be \$1150 over five years, or only \$230 per year).

Both “*hausse*” and “*augmentation*” are examples of how nominalization naturalizes the process of increasing tuition fees, using nouns rather than verbs and largely absolving the government of responsibility, although “*gouvernement*”—here closely linked with premier “Charest” and interchangeable with “Québec,” as in the provincial capital—is somewhat linked discursively with these signifiers as the agent responsible. Marissal (2012), for instance, writes about “*la hausse décrétée par le gouvernement Charest*” (the increase decreed by the Charest government) while Pratte (2012b) cites the notion that as many as 7000 students could be discouraged from attending university by “*l’augmentation des droits annoncée par le gouvernement Charest*” (the augmentation of fees announced by the Charest government).

“*Hausse*” and “*augmentation*” are further articulated with the plural noun “*droits*” (rights, dues, or fees), among the most frequently-used signifiers in the *Printemps érable* discourse of *La Presse*. “*Droits*” is, in turn, closely articulated with “*scolarité*” (schooling), as in the key phrase “*hausse des droits de scolarité*.” Ouimet (2012), for instance, writes that “*le gouvernement*

*maintient la hausse des droits de scolarité*” (the government is maintaining its increase of tuition fees).

Neither “*droits*” nor “*scolarité*” have any significant articulation with “*étudiants*” except through the moment “*hausse*,” which is so closely articulated with “*droits*” and “*scolarité*” that its use alone, as in several of the examples featured in the paragraphs above, implies the other two moments; in the *Printemps érable* discourse of *La Presse*, when an increase is being discussed, it is typically an increase of tuition fees.

***Droits et frais.*** Although the phrase “*hausse des droits de scolarité*” could simply be translated to English as “tuition fee hike,” this articulation in *La Presse* is particularly noteworthy for its inclusion of “*droits*” instead of “*frais*” (fees) and the ways in which it defines the meaning of this signifier—pluralized like its English counterpart “fees” in the discourse of *The Gazette*, even though discussion is centred around Quebec’s undergraduate students who all pay the same standardized tuition fee. It could be argued that the articulation of “*droits*” is another example of Fairclough’s notion of interdiscursivity; while “fees” in *The Gazette* represents the introduction of a signifier from financial discourse into an educational one, “*droits*” in *La Presse* instead represents a justice-based discourse.

But what kind of justice are we talking about? “*Droits*” as a moment in this discourse is closely tied to the concept of schooling, and is articulated in such a way as to represent fees, but brings with it an alternative meaning as rights; “*payer les droits de scolarité*” thus implies that the tuition fees paid by each student are for the individual right to obtain schooling.<sup>22</sup> This right, the cost of which is consistently being increased, eclipses any inalienable or charter-protected rights to education or to free expression—each of which is mentioned only once in the sample texts selected for this study (Elkouri, 2012; Breton, 2012a).

Another potential articulation with “*droits*” in this discourse focuses on individual students’ rights to “*prêts*” (loans) and “*bourses*” (bursaries)—and even those rights are limited. While Breton and Chouinard (2012) report that “*plus de 50 000 étudiants auront droit à des*

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<sup>22</sup> The *Office québécois de la langue française* (2002) recommends the use of the term “*droits de scolarité*” over “*frais de scolarité*,” claiming that the amount to be paid only constitute “*frais*” from the perspective of the individual paying them. This explanation comes across as rather contrived and short-sighted.

*prêts additionnels*” (more than 50,000 students will have the right to additional loans), Elkouri (2012) refers to “*la minorité d'étudiants pauvres qui ont droit à des bourses*” (the minority of poor students who have a right to bursaries). In fact, Breton and Chouinard add that, under the government’s proposal, the number of bursaries would remain unchanged. A solidification of the articulation between “*droits*,” “*prêts*,” and “*bourses*” would thus emphasize individual rights to loans and bursaries—in reality, mostly loans—to help cover the cost of the right to obtain schooling, in lieu of any broader, universal right to education.

Nevertheless, the articulation of “*droits*” with “*prêts*” and “*bourses*” in this discourse is not significant enough to constitute any solid articulation; instead, “*droits*” has such a solid relationship with “*scolarité*” that, on the rare occasion it is used alone, the latter is assumed. For instance, it is understood that Ouimet (2012a) is referring to tuition fees when she argues, “*Seuls le Québec et Terre-Neuve ont des droits égaux pour tous*” (Only Quebec and Newfoundland have equal rights for all). Conversely, in all the ten texts from *La Presse* included in this study, “*scolarité*” is not employed once except in the phrase “*droits de scolarité*.”

“*Droits de scolarité*” is thus articulated in this discourse as “tuition fees,” although it also carries with it an interdiscursive meaning as “the right to schooling,” comparable to the right to attend classes in the discourse of *The Gazette*. This comparison is reinforced in the reporting of a university spokesperson’s affirmation that “*les étudiants qui veulent avoir leurs cours ont aussi le droit de les suivre*” (students who want to have their classes also have the right to take them) (Breton, 2012a). Schooling constitutes a poor substitute for a genuine education; “*scolarité*” is elsewhere traditionally associated with the schooling of young children rather than with mature adults’ pursuit of post-secondary education, which suggests the kind of infantilization observed in *The Gazette*.<sup>23</sup>

***Hausse des droits de scolarité.*** The nodal point “*hausse*,” in addition to being articulated with “*droits*,” is also linked in this discourse to “75%,” which represents the amount of the tuition fee increase. The signifier “75%” is further linked, in turn, with “*cinq ans*” (five years),

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<sup>23</sup> The *Larousse* online dictionary (n.d.) defines “*scolarité*” as “*État d'un enfant qui suit un cycle d'études dans un établissement scolaire*” (State of a child who follows a course of study in a scholastic institution). Similarly, *Merriam-Webster* (n.d.) provides “custody, guardianship” as its first definition for “tuition,” although identified as archaic, and “the act or profession of teaching” as its second.



signifying the time frame over which the increase is to take place. Take, for instance, Elkouri's (2012) reference to "*une hausse brutale de 75% des droits de scolarité en cinq ans*" (a brutal 75% increase in tuition fees in five years). Although the discourse could emphasize instead the dollar amount of the increase, this articulation serves to highlight clearly how dramatic it is in proportion to the current amount, particularly to those like Pratte (2012a) who might downplay the dollar amount and Boisvert (2012) who might not perceive it to be significant enough to merit student action.

Meanwhile, the moment "*droits*," aside from being articulated with "*hausse*," is also linked with "*gel*" (freeze) as having been the reality through much of Quebec's post-Quiet Revolution history. Ouimet (2012), for example, explains that "*les droits ont été gelés pendant de longues années, mais depuis 1989, ils explosent*" (the fees were frozen for many years, but since 1989, they have exploded). Additionally, Marissal (2012) expresses his astonishment that the "*leaders étudiants*" have abandoned "*leur demande de gel des droits de scolarité*" (their demand for a freeze of tuition fees). The implication is that a future freeze is not out of the question for Quebec. However, other options such as reducing or eliminating tuition fees are not mentioned in any of the texts from *La Presse* included in this study, and thus seemingly left off the table completely by this discourse.

"Droits" is also linked weakly to the noun "*université*" (university) and the related adjective "*universitaire*," since in this discourse it is only for the right to university schooling that students must pay. As Ouimet (2012a) explains, "*À l'Université de Toronto, par exemple, les droits varient de 8000\$ à 41 000\$ par année*" (At the University of Toronto, for example, fees vary from \$8,000 to \$41,000 per year). The signifiers "*accès*" (access), "*fréquentation*" (attendance), and "*participation*" (participation) also appear occasionally but fail to materialize into moments in this discourse.

***Étudiants et leurs parents.*** The nodal point of identity "*étudiants*" is linked to the plural noun "*parents*" (parents), sedimented as a moment in the discourse of *La Presse* despite not appearing especially often. Ouimet (2012b) points out, for example, "*Environ 45% des étudiants ont des parents qui n'ont jamais mis les pieds à l'université*" (About 45% of students have parents who have never set foot inside a university). Moreover, under the government's proposal,

“*Si les parents d'un étudiant gagnent 60 000\$ par année, le prêt passe de 2440\$ à 7190\$*” (If the parents of a student earn \$60,000 per year, the loan goes from \$2,440 to \$7,190).

This relationship between students and their parents is based primarily on students' financial dependence, as is indicated by the potential further articulation of “*parents*” with the signifier “*prêts*” (loans) or the broader term “*aide financière*” (financial aid), although the latter does not appear frequently enough to cement a place as a moment in this discourse. This financial aid may come either from parents themselves or from the government, depending on how much the parents make. For instance, Ouimet (2012a) argues that 40% of students “*ne reçoivent aucune aide financière de leurs parents*” (receive no financial aid from their parents). Additionally, an article by Breton and Chouinard (2012) reports, “*Les étudiants dont les parents ne gagnent pas plus de 100 000\$ auront droit à un prêt qui permettra ‘généralement’ de couvrir les droits de scolarité et le coût du matériel scolaire*” (Students whose parents earn no more than \$100,000 will have the right to a loan that will ‘generally’ cover tuition fees and the cost of school materials). “*Gagner*” (to earn, to win) is another signifier with traces of a possible articulation with “*parents*,” as how much parents earn would be the measure by which they are assessed in this discourse.

It is implied that, based on financial need, students are children in this relationship. Indeed, in arguing that students are not the “*enfants gâtés*” (spoiled children) their opponents claim them to be, it is the “*gâtés*” part that Ouimet (2012a) challenges, and not “*enfants*.” Although she is attempting to defend students from the kind of malicious attacks and disparaging remarks observed in *The Gazette*, the effect is ultimately much the same: students are infantilized with no regard for their age, experience, or station—including the fact that many students are parents themselves.<sup>24</sup>

***Bonification du régime de prêts et bourses.*** While the signifier “*aide financière*” does not appear particularly frequently and has no significant articulation with the nodal point of identity “*étudiants*,” the aforementioned signifier “*prêts*,” and to a lesser extent “*bourses*,” are

<sup>24</sup> An article not included in the final sample of this study, “*Des parents inquiets*” (Breton, 2012b), describe the parents of students as being worried—not about the safety of their striking offspring, but about the effect of the tuition hike on themselves, “*car ils savent que ce sont eux qui devront absorber une large part de la hausse des droits de scolarité*” (because they know it is they who will have to absorb a large part of the increase in tuition fees).

articulated directly with “*étudiants*” in addition to being linked with each other. They are both generally employed in the plural, suggesting that they are multiple but individual, and from a critical discourse analysis perspective it could be argued that they are interdiscursive carryovers from financial discourse that have become settled into the educational one of *La Presse*. For example, Breton and Chouinard (2012) report the following: “*Québec estime que plus de 50 000 étudiants auront droit à des prêts additionnels. Les bourses, elles, restent inchangées.*” (Quebec estimates that more than 50,000 students will have the right to additional loans. Bursaries, they remain unchanged.)

The moments “*prêts*” and “*bourses*” are further articulated with “*gouvernement*” just as strongly as they are with “*étudiants*,” if not more so. Elkouri (2012) writes, for instance, “*Le gouvernement dit que le régime de prêts et bourses pourra continuer à garantir l’accessibilité aux études*” (The government says that the loans and bursaries scheme will be able to continue to guarantee the accessibility of studies). In terms of transitivity, this articulation emphasizes the agency of the government in controlling loans and bursaries—in contrast with the discourse’s distancing of the government from the increase in tuition fees through the use of nominalization.

The government’s discursive relationship with loans and bursaries is mediated somewhat by the noun “*bonification*” (enhancement) as well as the less common verb “*bonifier*,” other signifiers that could be said to have made an interdiscursive transition from financial discourse. There is also a clear etymological connection to “*bonus*,” implying that the loans and bursaries are prizes or gifts that are awarded voluntarily in addition to what is required and signaling the benevolence of the government. For example, according to Breton and Chouinard (2012), “*Le gouvernement Charest a annoncé des bonifications au régime de prêts juste avant le congé pascal*” (The Charest government announced enhancements to the loans scheme just before the Easter holiday). Additionally, they claim that “*Québec avait déjà annoncé une bonification de 118 millions des prêts et bourses d’ici à 2017-2018*” (Quebec had already announced an enhancement of 118 million in loans and bursaries between now and 2017-2018).

“*Régime*” (plan or system) is another intermediary moment in the government’s discursive articulation with “*prêts*” and “*bourses*.” Marissal (2012), for instance, credits the government with “*avoir bonifié le régime des prêts et bourses*” (having enhanced the loans and bursaries scheme). Again, from a Faircloughian perspective, “*régime*” is a word commonly

associated with government, and its interdiscursive introduction into an educational discourse thus serves to strengthen government's benevolent role with respect to fellow transplants "*prêts*" and "*bourses*"—to the exclusion of another common definition of "*régime*" in the French language, that of a restricted diet, that would entail a dramatic change in the nature of the entire articulation.

***Dette et endettement.*** In addition to the above articulations, "*prêts*" is linked with "*dette*" (debt) and the related noun "*endettement*" (indebtedness), although relatively weakly, generally referring to individual rather than collective or public debt. For example, Ouimet (2012b) argues that the government "*accentue [...] l'endettement en gonflant les prêts sans bonifier les bourses*" (is accentuating indebtedness by inflating loans without enhancing bursaries). Ouimet (2012a) further spells it out for her readers in another column: "*[p]lus de prêts = plus de dettes*" (more loans = more debts)—a dubious gift from the government.

"*Dette*" and "*endettement*" are also linked directly to "*étudiants*," the individuals taking on the debt. Even Pratte (2012a), who favors the tuition fee increase, acknowledges, "*Les étudiants qui sont seulement admissibles à un prêt termineront leurs études avec une dette d'études plus élevée*" (Students who are only admissible for a loan will finish their studies with a higher student debt). However, Pratte is not particularly critical of this, accepting it as part of what McGray (2014) terms "new debt politics" and reassured that "*leur situation ne sera pas différente de celle de tous les autres Québécois qui, eux aussi, face à une conjoncture changeante, doivent faire régulièrement des choix difficiles*" (their situation will be not unlike that of all the other Quebecers who, faced with a changing economic climate, must regularly make difficult choices) (2012b).

**Recap of articulations pertaining to student concerns.** The singular "*hausse*" is articulated with "*étudiants*" in terms of its negative effect on them. The nominalization of its synonym "*augmentation*" is even more pronounced since it is not directly linked to an object, although both are linked clearly to the agent "*gouvernement*." They are also associated with the amount "*75%*" and the duration "*cinq ans*."

"*Droits*" is employed in the sense of the English word "fees," although it comes with an interdiscursive meaning as "rights," as in paying for the right to schooling or being given the

right to additional loans—both poor substitutes for an inherent right to education, which is not articulated in this discourse. “*Droits*” is also articulated with “*gel*,” which discursively keeps open the possibility of a tuition freeze, but excludes a reduction or abolition.

Students are again articulated as children, defined in terms of their relationship with their parents, which in this discourse is based solely on financial need. Consequently, parents are assessed by how much money they make, which presumably indicates how much financial support they can provide. For those students also dependent on the state, the “*bonification*” of loans and bursaries represents a gift, except that loans are also associated with individual debt and hardship.

#### **6.4. Summary of the Discourse of *La Presse***

The nodal point of identity “*étudiants*” is articulated with “*associations*” and “*leaders*,” generally addressed collectively with little distinction between them. Each is granted legitimacy through its interaction with the government and the authority to speak for all students. Meanwhile, “*grève*” is more strongly linked directly to students than to their associations, and fairly clearly articulated with their concern over the tuition increase. “*Mouvement*” is even more clearly articulated in opposition to the increase, but neither it nor “*manifestations*” have any solid discursive links to “*étudiants*” or any other agent, giving them the appearance of being spontaneous and organic. In contrast, the “*conflit*” is attributed to students, although responsibility for resolving it is placed on the government.

Similarly, the government is assigned responsibility for the seventy-five percent increase of tuition fees over five years, which is articulated as negatively affecting students. However, rights to education or to strike are not features of this discourse; instead the signifier “*droits*” is generally employed as in the phrase “*droits de scolarité*,” which evokes a right to schooling that must be paid for, or occasionally it is used in terms of the right to loans. The government is further articulated as generously enhancing its loans and bursaries program, although understood that it is actually only enhancing its loans program, and thus enhancing student debt—which bothers some authors more than others.

In addition to their financial dependence on government, students are similarly dependent on their parents, and this dependence is the defining feature of their relationship. Though it may

not be malicious, this articulation again positions students as children, even if they are parents themselves.

## Chapter 7: Analysis of the Discourse of the FECQ and FEUQ

Since most of the press releases produced by the FECQ and the FEUQ during the period under study were produced jointly by the two organizations, seven of these were included in the final sample, as well as one press release by the FEUQ alone, one by the FECQ alone, and one by the FECQ in conjunction with legal clinic Juripop. In Faircloughian terms, these ten communiqués feature a very low level of boundary maintenance between their primary and secondary discourses, the latter generally attributed to the presidents of the two federations. Furthermore, considering that the press releases are all ostensibly penned by the same members of the organizations' small communication teams rather than by a large staff of writers with competing viewpoints and opinions, one might expect signifiers to become sedimented more frequently into a variety of solid articulations—although this is not the case here. Instead, the lack of differing opinions appears to result in fewer discursive articulations.

The signifier “*étudiants*” (students) again serves as both a nodal point of identity within the *Printemps érable* discourse of the FECQ and the FEUQ—appearing more frequently than any other signifier—and as a floating signifier between the four discourses under study. The default masculine form is generally found in the plural, “*étudiants*,” and serves as a noun representing a cohesive mass of students that includes both male and non-male individuals; for example, in the line “*les étudiants continueront leurs actions*” (students will continue their actions) (FECQ & FEUQ, 2012a). Meanwhile, the feminine singular “*étudiante*” and feminine plural “*étudiantes*” serve principally as adjectives to qualify “*fédération*” (federation) or, alternatively, “*association*” (association). As in the discourse of *La Presse*, this adherence to the conventions of the French language and reproduction of its inherent gender inequality serves to portray the people affected by the tuition fee increase and fighting to oppose it as masculine, and their collective—impersonal and abstract—as feminine.

In fact, the distinction between the feminine and the masculine in this discourse is so stark that “*étudiante*” must be considered a moment separate from, although largely overlapping, the nodal point of identity “*étudiants*.” The feminine cannot be regarded simply as a stand-in for the masculine, nor as its subsidiary, but as a separate signifier in its own right. Its articulations endow it with additional meaning separate from and on top of that which it shares with

“*étudiants*,” although this discourse only articulates “*étudiante*” as a descriptor and not in such a way as to be identified with; it does not represent an identity in and of itself but is reduced in this discourse to an intermediary signifier between other moments and the identity of “*étudiants*.” Even a feminine noun like “*manifestation*” (demonstration), which denotes a form of highly-visible public action, is sooner linked with the masculine noun “*étudiants*” than with the feminine adjective “*étudiante*.”

The singular noun “*jeunesse*” (youth) and its variant, the plural noun “*jeunes*,” also feature as a moment in this discourse. Although not employed particularly often, it appears that it is used interchangeably with “*étudiants*.” For instance, it is alleged that the government “*endette lourdement la jeunesse avec sa hausse*” (is heavily indebting the youth with its increase) (FEUQ, 2012). Another press release (FECQ, 2012a) cites FECQ president Léo Bureau-Blouin: “*Lors de son élection, Charest promettait d’être le gouvernement de tous les Québécois et à ce que je sache, les étudiants sont des aussi des Québécois. Les jeunes ont le droit d’être entendus.*” (Upon his election, Charest promised to be the government of all Quebecers and as far as I know, students are also Quebecers. Young people have the right to be heard.) Furthermore, the FEUQ (2012) describes itself as “*le plus important groupe jeunesse au Québec*” (the largest youth group in Quebec). This conflating of students with young people is problematic not only in excluding older students through its assumption that all students are young people, but also in its assumption that all young people attend university.

With the masculine plural noun “*étudiants*” as the central signifier of the FECQ and FEUQ’s discourse surrounding the *Printemps érable*, I will look at three major themes. First, I will address how student relationships are represented through the articulation of “*étudiants*” with such signifiers as “*fédération*” (federation), “FECQ,” “FEUQ,” “*associations*” (associations), and “*gouvernement*” (government)—this being the only discourse to directly link “*étudiants*” with “*gouvernement*.” Second, I will examine the concerns motivating students to act through the articulation of “*étudiants*” with “*hausse*” (increase), “*endettement*” (indebtedness), and “*famille*” (family). Third, I will explore the relatively sparse discursive articulations representing student action itself: links from “*étudiants*” to “*grève*” (strike) and to “*manifestester*” (to protest).



## 7.1. Articulations Pertaining to Student Governance

“*Étudiants*” is articulated with the signifier “*fédération*” (federation) through “*étudiante*,” and with the individual federations themselves via “*représenter*” (to represent)—as in the FECQ and FEUQ representing students. The nodal point “*associations*” (associations) is linked directly to “*étudiante*,” but with neither “*étudiants*,” “*fédération*,” “FECQ,” or “FEUQ.” “*Gouvernement*” (government) is directly articulated with “*étudiants*” through its unfair treatment of the latter, and by their vocal criticism of this treatment, the names of Léo Bureau-Blouin and Martine Desjardins themselves become moments in this discourse, as well as making “*président*” and “*présidente*” (president) intermediary moments between their organizations and “*gouvernement*.” (See Figure 8.)

***Fédération étudiante.*** The nodal point of identity “*étudiants*,” through the feminine singular adjective “*étudiante*,” is strongly articulated in this discourse with “*fédération*” (federation), as in the names of the organizations Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec (FECQ) and Fédération étudiante universitaire du Québec (FEUQ). “*Fédération*” works interdiscursively, bringing with it from political discourse its meaning not as a simple association but a more complex alliance between separate, semi-autonomous bodies; a delicate compromise between unity and independence. For example, the FECQ (2012a, 2012b) describes itself in the

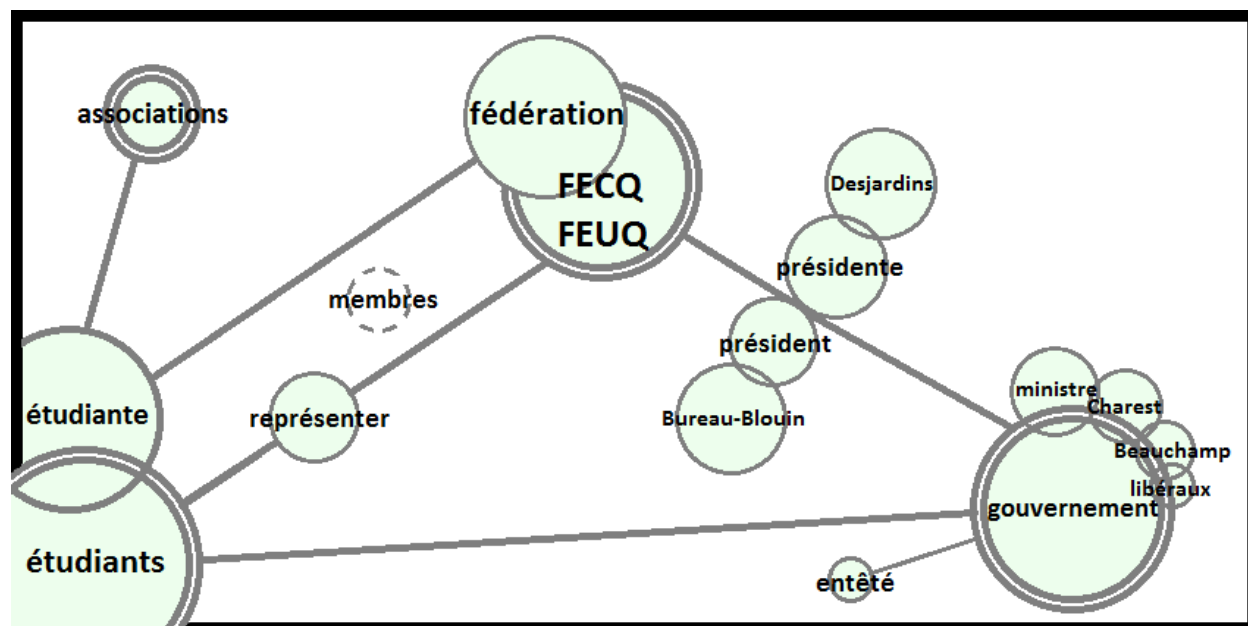


Figure 8: Map of articulations pertaining to student governance in the discourse of the FECQ and FEUQ

blurb concluding its own press releases as a federation representing “*plus de 80 000 étudiants réunis dans 23 associations étudiantes*” (more than 80,000 students gathered in 23 student associations). Similarly, the FEUQ (2012) claims it is “[c]omposée de 15 associations membres et forte de plus de 125 000 membres” (composed of 15 member associations and more than 125,000 members strong). The understanding, in the discourse of the FEUQ at least, is that these separate member “*associations*”—which actually themselves include a variety of different forms—have chosen to work together in spite of their differences, which can bring strength to the alliance while retaining the potential to cause it to break apart.

The feminine noun “*fédération*” is paired with “*étudiante*” to form the phrase “*fédération étudiante*,” generally in the singular, which would suggest that such an organization has a monopoly on the representation of all students, at least within its respective domain as defined by the additional adjectives “*collégiale*” (college) and “*universitaire*” (university). This suggestion is furthered by the FEUQ’s (2012) claim that “*Depuis plus de 20 ans, la FEUQ représente les étudiantes et les étudiants universitaires du Québec*” (For more than 20 years, the FEUQ has represented the university students of Quebec)<sup>25</sup> despite the fact that its 125,000 members do not actually include all university students. Doubt is nevertheless cast on the monopoly of the federations on the rare occasion when the CLASSE is mentioned, as when the federations “*demandent à la ministre de laisser le temps à la CLASSE de se positionner sur la question de la violence et de l’intimidation*” (ask the minister to allow the CLASSE time to take a position on the question of violence and intimidation) (FECQ & FEUQ, 2012f).

Although the existence of two separate student federations may serve to discursively detract from student unity, this effect is largely mitigated by the fact that, in addition to jointly producing most of their press releases, they are typically cited together. Each of these joint press releases concludes, “*La Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec (FECQ) et la Fédération étudiante universitaire du Québec (FEUQ) représentent ensemble plus de 200 000 étudiants au Québec*” (The FECQ and the FEUQ together represent more than 200,000 students in Quebec). Furthermore, “*fédération étudiante*” is also pluralized in reference to the two groups together; for

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<sup>25</sup> This statement is featured in the concluding blurb of press releases produced by the FEUQ alone, and includes both the feminine “*étudiantes*” and masculine “*étudiants*” as nouns in describing its membership—in fact prioritizing the feminine by placing it first. The inclusion of both the feminine and the masculine is an anomaly in this discourse, as it is in the French language.

example, “*Selon les fédérations étudiantes, le gouvernement doit cesser cette mascarade à l’instant et se rendre à la raison*” (According to the student federations, the government must end this masquerade immediately and listen to reason) (FECQ & FEUQ, 2012d).

**La FECQ et la FEUQ.** “FECQ” and “FEUQ” may be considered nodal points partially independent of “*fédération*” and closely linked with each other in this discourse. Furthermore, these signifiers are articulated directly with the masculine plural noun “*étudiants*,” the latter denoting those who are represented by the two organizations, expressed in such a way that it is made clear that it is not all students. For instance, one press release features the headline, “*Le caucus du PLQ visité par les étudiants de la FECQ et de la FEUQ!*” (The caucus of the Quebec Liberal Party visited by the students of the FECQ and the FEUQ!) (FECQ & FEUQ, 2012a), while another refers to “*des dizaines de milliers d’étudiants membres de la FECQ et la FEUQ*” (tens of thousands of student members of the FECQ and the FEUQ) (FECQ & FEUQ, 2012b). A third (FECQ & FEUQ, 2012c) states the following: “*Des étudiants de la Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec (FECQ) et de la Fédération étudiante universitaire du Québec (FEUQ) se rassemblent devant le ministère de l’Éducation à Montréal*” (Students from the FECQ and the FEUQ gather in front of the Ministry of Education in Montreal). Although the signifier “*fédération*” is directly linked with the feminine adjective “*étudiante*” in that last example, the names of the organizations themselves are articulated with the masculine noun “*étudiant*.”

The signifier “*membres*” (members), which constitutes a potential moment in this discourse, is used to refer both to student members and to member associations but is not clearly secured into any particular articulation and remains an element. However, the verb “*représenter*” (to represent) becomes a moment by mediating the relationship of “*étudiants*,” the nodal point of identity, with “FECQ” and “FEUQ.” The FECQ and FEUQ represent students in the sense of both speaking for them and defending their interests. For example, as mentioned above, each of the press releases produced jointly by the FECQ and the FEUQ concludes that the two “*représentent ensemble plus de 200 000 étudiants au Québec*” (together represent more than 200,000 students in Quebec). It is through this articulation that the two organizations acquire their legitimacy in this discourse, and not through their relationship with government as in the discourses of *The Gazette* and *La Presse*.

The moment “FECQ” is strongly articulated with the masculine singular noun “*président*” (president) while “FEUQ” is articulated with its feminine counterpart “*présidente*.” From a Faircloughian perspective, the two may be considered further examples of signifiers making an interdiscursive leap, although it is not apparent whether this leap is from political or business discourse; the role of the presidents within their respective organizations, beyond making declarations on their behalf, is not made clear, nor is the process by which they are selected. Furthermore, while “*président*” and “*présidente*” may be presumed to share much of the same meaning as the chief executive of an organization, they are partially differentiated from each other through their respective articulations in much the same way as “*étudiant*” and “*étudiante*”: the masculine “*président*” is linked with Léo Bureau-Blouin and the feminine “*présidente*” with Martine Desjardins.<sup>26</sup>

***Associations étudiantes.*** Along with “*fédération*,” the signifier “*associations*” is also linked directly with the adjective “*étudiante*” in the discourse of the FECQ and the FEUQ. “*Associations*” is generally pluralized, and regularly paired with “*étudiante*” to form the phrase “*associations étudiantes*.” For example, one press release declares, “*Les associations étudiantes pourront poursuivre leurs moyens de pression*” (Student associations will be able to continue their pressure tactics) (FECQ, 2012b), while another claims that an announcement by ministers “*a de quoi laisser de marbre les associations étudiantes québécoises*” (leaves Quebec’s student associations unimpressed) (FECQ & FEUQ, 2012d).

The phrase “*associations étudiantes*” presumably refers to the various forms of member organizations under the umbrella of the FECQ and the FEUQ at the level of individual institutions, although their relationship is not made evident discursively. Even the claim made in press releases produced separately by the FECQ (2012a, 2012b) that it “*représente plus de 80 000 étudiants réunis dans 23 associations étudiantes*” (represents more than 80,000 students gathered in 23 student associations) fails to make it clear that the students are members because their “*associations étudiantes*” are. Nevertheless, despite students being represented by multiple different “*associations*” introducing the potential for discord among them, the fact that there is

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<sup>26</sup> There is little mention in this discourse of Éliane Laberge, who took over for Bureau-Blouin as president of the FECQ at the conclusion of his mandate toward the end of the period under study. Bureau-Blouin, of course, infamously went on to run as a candidate for the Parti Québécois in the provincial elections in the fall.

no distinction made between these organizations in this discourse, and that they are generally referred to collectively, again reaffirms an apparent unity among students through the unity of their representative bodies.

*Étudiants et gouvernement.* The nodal point of identity “*étudiants*” is directly articulated with “*gouvernement*,” another nodal point which is especially prominent in the discourse of the FECQ and the FEUQ. While there is also mention of student action against the government, the foremost feature of this relationship is the government’s unjust treatment of students as justification for such action: demanding more and more of students, impoverishing them, depriving them of opportunities, even robbing them, and refusing to listen or negotiate. In other words, the government is primarily the active agent in this articulation, and students, although they may be introduced grammatically as subjects, are forced into a reactionary role. For instance, a press release quotes Martine Desjardins as saying, “*Nous sommes devant un gouvernement têtu et borné qui ne veut qu'une chose: appauvrir les étudiants et leur famille [sic]*” (We are facing a headstrong and narrow-minded government that wants but one thing: to impoverish students and their family) (FECQ & FEUQ, 2012a). In another, she exclaims, “*C'est révoltant de penser que le gouvernement Charest demande aux étudiants de contribuer davantage à ce système alors qu'il fuit de partout!*” (It is revolting to think that the Charest government is asking students to contribute more to this system while it is leaking from everywhere!) (FEUQ, 2012).

The signifier “*gouvernement*” is discursively clustered with a number of related signifiers including “*ministre*” (minister), “*Charest*,” “*Beauchamp*,” and “*libéral*” (Liberal).<sup>27</sup> These may be used interchangeably or in various combinations. For example, there is the press release that suggests “*les étudiants continueront leurs actions sur les députés libéraux*” (the students will continue their actions on Liberal deputies” (FECQ & FEUQ, 2012a). Another reports that students “*profitent de l'anniversaire de la ministre de l'Éducation, Line Beauchamp, pour lui rappeler que la hausse des frais de scolarité de 1625 \$ ne passe pas*” (take advantage of the birthday of the Minister of Education, Line Beauchamp, to remind her that the \$1,625 increase in tuition fees will not pass) (FECQ & FEUQ, 2012b). Finally, Martine Desjardins alleges that

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<sup>27</sup> Michelle Courchesne, who replaced Beauchamp as Minister of Education toward the end of the period under study, is not strongly represented in this discourse.

“*Jean Charest s'attaque aux étudiants augmentant dangereusement leur endettement*” (Jean Charest deals with students by dangerously augmenting their indebtedness) (FECQ & FEUQ, 2012h).<sup>28</sup>

As it is often Bureau-Blouin or Desjardins who are portrayed as denouncing the government or calling for action against it in their capacities as presidents, it is this—and not their involvement in negotiations, as is the case with “leaders” in the discourses of *The Gazette* and *La Presse*—that comes to define the discursive articulation that “*président*” and “*présidente*” form with “*gouvernement*” and its cluster of associated signifiers. Furthermore, partly because of its links with “*président*,” “*présidente*,” and fellow nodal point of identity “*étudiants*,” which all represent parties critical of it in this discourse, “*gouvernement*” becomes further articulated with the adjective “*entêté*” (headstrong, stubborn). “*Entêté*” also takes the forms of the adjective “*tétu*,” the noun “*entêtement*,” and the verb “*s’entêter*.”<sup>29</sup> For instance, Bureau-Blouin, in his role as president of the FECQ, is quoted as saying, “*On a affaire à un gouvernement entêté qui prend des décisions sans considérer les conséquences de ses actes*” (We are dealing with a headstrong government that takes decisions without considering the consequences of its actions) (FECQ & FEUQ, 2012b). Additionally, according to another press release, “*Les étudiants déplorent d'ailleurs l'entêtement du gouvernement*” (Students also deplore the stubbornness of the government) (FECQ & FEUQ, 2012c).

**Recap of articulations pertaining to student governance.** The FECQ and FEUQ constitute “*fédérations*” of various forms of smaller “*associations étudiantes*” whose members have opted to work collectively, and the two federations equally cooperate. “*Fédération*” is articulated with the feminine singular adjective “*étudiante*” while the names “FECQ” and “FEUQ” are articulated with the masculine plural noun “*étudiants*.” The use of “*fédération étudiante*” implies that the group represents all students, although such formations as “*étudiants de la FECQ et de la FEUQ*” make clear that it does not.

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<sup>28</sup> Despite the temptation to translate the French “*s’attaque*” into the English “attack,” it is used here as a pronominal verb with a reflexive pronoun, more accurately translated as “addresses” or “deals with.” The federations do not go quite as far with their rhetoric as does the CLASSE.

<sup>29</sup> It appears that this signifier is only included in the discourse toward the beginning of the period under study; keeping in mind that ten press releases from the FECQ and the FEUQ were included in the sample, it makes its final appearance in the form of “*entêtement*” in the one dated March 6.

The federations obtain legitimacy through their role in representing students rather than through their relationship with the government as in other discourses, although they are also linked to “*gouvernement*” by way of “*président*” and “*présidente*,” who denounce it as stubborn. The government is additionally articulated directly with students in terms of its mistreatment of them, which forces them to react.

## 7.2. Articulations Pertaining to Student Concerns

“*Étudiants*” is articulated with “*hausse*” (increase), which is further articulated not with “*droits*” (rights, dues, or fees) but with “*frais*” (fees), which is, in turn, further linked to “*scolarité*” (schooling). The nodal point “*hausse*” is also articulated with “*gouvernement*,” and both of them with “*endettement*” (indebtedness), as this discourse implies that the government is responsible for indebting students and uses the tuition increase as tool to do so. Furthermore, “*endettement*” is connected to “*famille*” (family), generally employed in the singular, suggesting that all students are members of one family that is indebted by the government. The role of students in this family is, of course, that of “*enfants*” (children)—serving to further infantilize even the most mature and responsibility-laden students. (See Figure 9.)

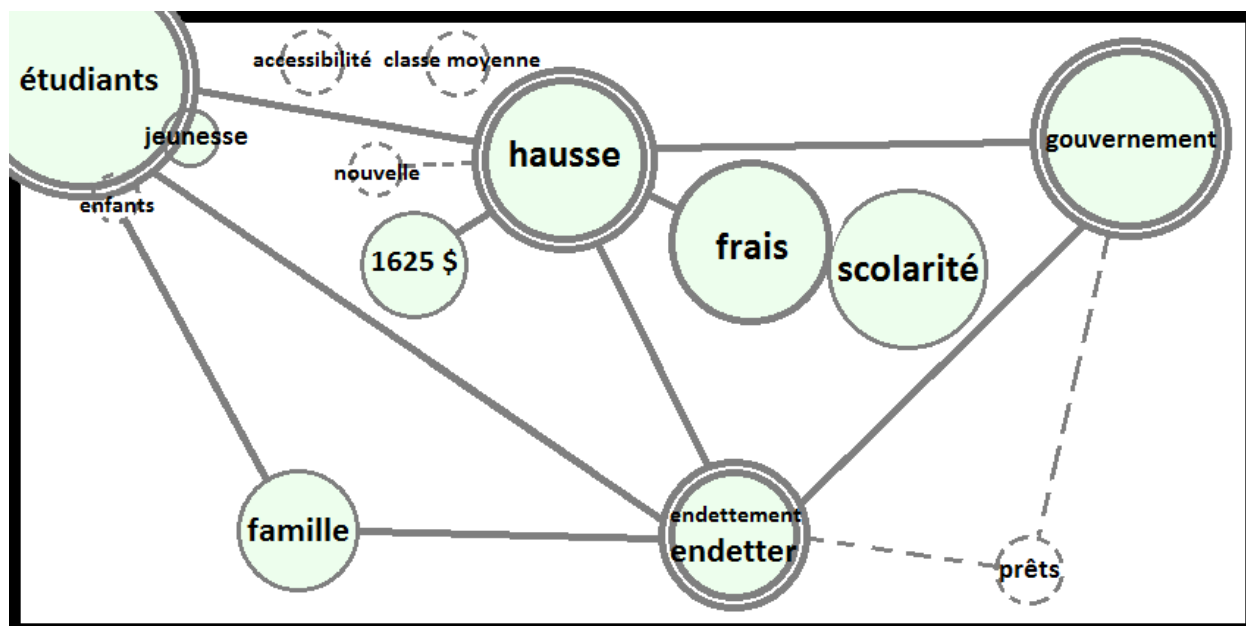


Figure 9: Map of articulations pertaining to student concerns in the discourse of the FECQ and FEUQ

*Hausse des frais de scolarité.* As in the discourse of *La Presse*, the nodal point of identity “*étudiants*” is articulated with the nodal point “*hausse*,” again in the singular; it represents an injustice against them that they cannot accept and from which they must defend themselves. “*Hausse*” is very closely articulated with “*frais*”—in contrast to “*droits*” in the discourse of *La Presse*—which is, in turn, very closely linked to “*scolarité*.”<sup>30</sup> In fact, the three moments are linked so tightly that they appear almost exclusively together in the phrase “*hausse des frais de scolarité*.” A press release, for example, declares that “*les étudiants et leurs familles ne peuvent assumer une nouvelle hausse des frais de scolarité*” (students and their families cannot take on a new increase in tuition fees) (FECQ & FEUQ, 2012c). Another refers to “*les quelque 170 000 étudiants toujours en grève qui clament haut et fort chaque jour de leur opposition à la hausse des frais de scolarité*” (the 170,000 or so students still on strike who every day proclaim loud and clear their opposition to the increase of tuition fees) (FECQ & FEUQ, 2012f). In addition, a third cites Desjardins’ assertion that “*les étudiants ne reculeront pas face à la hausse de 1625 \$ des frais de scolarité exigée par le gouvernement Charest*” (the students will not back down faced with the \$1625 increase in tuition fees demanded by the Charest government) (FEUQ, 2012).

Although the nominalization of “*hausse*” may serve to somewhat absolve those responsible of agency, the signifier is also discursively articulated with the nodal point “*gouvernement*,” leaving little doubt regarding who is to blame. This relationship is illustrated by the last example above, as well as by other declarations by Desjardins; for instance, “*Le gouvernement doit prendre ses responsabilités et reculer sur le nœud du problème: la hausse des frais de scolarité*” (The government must accept its responsibilities and back down on the crux of the problem: the increase of tuition fees) (FECQ & FEUQ, 2012d).

The above statement by Desjardins about “*la hausse de 1625 \$ des frais de scolarité*” also highlights the close discursive link between “*hausse*” and “1625 \$,” which represents the total dollar amount of the government’s planned increase. This link contrasts the one with “75%” in the discourse of *La Presse*. For example, a press release (FECQ & FEUQ, 2012c) claims that

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<sup>30</sup> Only one of the press releases included in the final sample (FECQ & FEUQ, 2012f) uses the signifier “*droits*” when referring to tuition fees, and does so only once, preferring the use of “*frais*.” This is one of the later texts included in the sample.



“*la hausse des frais de scolarité de 1625 \$ aura de graves impacts sur l’accessibilité financière aux études*” (the \$1,625 increase of tuition fees will have grave impacts on the financial accessibility of studies), while another (FECQ & FEUQ, 2012b) declares that “*la hausse des frais de scolarité de 1625 \$ ne passe pas*” (the \$1,625 increase of tuition fees will not pass). Several press releases also introduce a web address that includes the amount of the increase ([www.1625canepassepas.ca](http://www.1625canepassepas.ca)).<sup>31</sup>

Presented as a lump sum rather than a series of smaller annual increases or an abstract percentage, \$1,625 constitutes a significant amount of money to many of those members of the FECQ and the FEUQ who would be required to pay. However, the refusal of the federations specifically of an increase of \$1,625, and not of all increases or of the principle of increases, suggests a willingness to accept a reduced amount. On the same note, the notion of freezing tuition fees is mentioned only once in the federation press releases included in this study (FECQ & FEUQ, 2012g), while the possibility of decreasing or eliminating these fees appear to be excluded from this discourse altogether.

The adjective “*nouvelle*” (new) appears in this discourse in a potential articulation with “*hausse*,” as in “*les étudiants et leurs familles ne peuvent assumer une nouvelle hausse des frais de scolarité*” (students and their families cannot take on a new increase of tuition fees) (FECQ & FEUQ, 2012c). “*Nouvelle*” does not appear regularly enough in relation with “*hausse*” to become secured as a moment in this discourse, although the characterization of the tuition increase as new would be interesting in that it would highlight the fact that this is just the latest in a long series of increases students have had to face.

The signifiers “*accessibilité*” (accessibility) and “*classe moyenne*” (middle class) also make appearances in this discourse, although not with the frequency or consistency required to form clear articulations with any other signifiers, thus also remaining undefined elements. However, the sedimentation of “*classe moyenne*” in particular into a moment might suggest that this discourse is more concerned with maintaining bourgeois privilege and social mobility than with alleviating injustice and oppression for the poor and the disadvantaged.

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<sup>31</sup> The figure 1625 would also be incorporated into the name of the Fondation 1625, a right-wing group with ties to the federal Conservative Party formed at that time, favoring the tuition increase and supporting court injunctions against the striking students.

**Endettement des étudiants.** Another signifier strongly articulated with the nodal point of identity “*étudiants*” is the noun “*endettement*” (indebtedness), which is also represented by the verb “*endetter*” (to indebt). According to a press release, for instance, “*Les étudiants n'auront d'autres choix que d'augmenter leur propre endettement*” (Students will have no choice but to increase their own indebtedness) (FECQ & FEUQ, 2012a). Another states, “*Les étudiants déplorent qu'on leur demande de s'endetter encore plus*” (Students deplore that they are being asked to indebt themselves even further) (FECQ & FEUQ, 2012b).

In addition to being articulated closely with “*étudiants*,” the nodal point “*endettement*” is also linked with “*hausse*” as well as with “*gouvernement*.” These links make it clear that the government is harming students with its tuition fee increase by saddling them with additional debt. For example, a press release claims that “*le gouvernement s'entête toujours à augmenter davantage l'endettement de la relève du Québec avec sa hausse de 1625 \$ des frais de scolarité*” (the government still insists on further increasing the indebtedness of Quebec’s future with its \$1,625 increase of tuition fees) (FEUQ, 2012). However, despite another one referring to the government’s plan to increase student loans as “[l]e plan d’endettement étudiant” (the plan for student indebtedness) (FECQ & FEUQ, 2012h), there is no significant articulation in this discourse, as there is in that of *La Presse*, between “*endettement*” and “*prêts*”—the latter remaining an undefined element here.

**Étudiants et leur famille.** The nodal point of identity “*étudiants*” is also discursively linked with the signifier “*famille*” (family). As Bureau-Blouin alleges, “*Le gouvernement semble oublier que les étudiants font partie d'une famille*” (The government seems to have forgotten that students are part of a family) (FECQ & FEUQ, 2012b). Curiously, “*famille*” is only occasionally pluralized, giving the impression that all students are members of one family. For example, Desjardins accuses the government of “*appauvrir les étudiants et leur famille*” (impoverishing students and their family) (FECQ & FEUQ, 2012a). This reference to a single family is perhaps further evidence of student or broader societal unity, but it also ignores the diversity of family forms and situations, as well as the fact that some students may not self-identify as part of any particular family.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> References to “the family” also potentially open the door to unintended comparisons to the mafia—a welcome opportunity for opponents of the strike.

“*Famille*” is not articulated directly with the moment “*hausse*,” but with “*endettement*.” For instance, one press release argues “*c’est un plan d’endettement des familles et de la jeunesse que le gouvernement impose actuellement*” (it is a plan to indebt families and youth that the government is currently imposing) (FECQ & FEUQ, 2012c). The implication is that, while the government directly harms students with a tuition fee increase and indebtedness, a family is only harmed by the indebtedness. Put another way, as long as a family is not required to take on further debt, it is assumed—incorrectly, of course—that it faces no ill effects from the tuition increase imposed on its members.

What exactly is students’ role in this family? The discourse of the federations seems to suggest that students are, once again, children. A press release, using “families” in the plural, refers to those that students “come from,” as in “*les étudiants provenant de familles gagnants moins de 45 000 \$*” (students coming from families earning less than \$45,000) (FECQ & FEUQ, 2012h). In fact, another communiqué even uses the signifier “*enfants*” (children) three times to refer to students; with a new tuition fee increase, “*les familles, déjà aux prises avec un endettement très élevé, ne pourront soutenir adéquatement leurs enfants*” (families, already grappling with very high indebtedness, will not be able to adequately support their children) (FECQ & FEUQ, 2012a). All of this is in addition to the previously-mentioned conflation of “*étudiants*” with “*jeunesse*” (youth).

In the discourse of the FECQ and the FEUQ, family is defined by financial dependence, and the infantilization of students, mostly subtle, is based as in the discourse of *La Presse* on the fact that they are the ones who are dependent—as opposed to infantilization based on the kind of negative character traits attributed to them in *The Gazette*’s discourse.<sup>33</sup> In other words, it is implied again that students are children because they depend on family for financial assistance. This limited conception of family and conflation of “*étudiants*” with “*enfants*” ignores that most students are in fact adults, that many support themselves, and that they may play various roles in a variety of family structures, which may not be focused solely on material concerns.

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<sup>33</sup> The *Gazette* editorial “Parents, teachers and politicians behaving badly” (2012) gleefully picks up on comments made elsewhere by Bureau-Blouin to support its own contemptuous infantilization of students: “He equated the premier to a bad father who calls in the police to resolve family conflicts—the suggestion being that law-breaking offspring should merely get a gentle talking to and accommodation of their behaviour, rather than be taught the more useful lesson that there are consequences to breaking the law.”

Additionally, with all the talk of family, the word “*parent*” does not appear even once in the ten student federation texts included in this study.

**Recap of articulations pertaining to student concerns.** “*La hausse des frais de scolarité*”—the signifier “*frais*” replacing the “*droits*” of *La Presse*—represents in this discourse an injustice by the government against the students, from which they must defend themselves. In addition to the harm done to students by the increase, the associated indebtedness negatively affects both them and their “*famille*”—usually in the singular—with students again representing children in this family based on their presumed financial dependence as well as their aforementioned conflation with “*jeunesse*.” This discourse thus rejects the tuition increase, specified as a \$1,625 increase, although it does not rule out all increases, demonstrating an openness to a smaller amount.

### 7.3. Articulations Pertaining to Student Action

In the discourse of the FECQ and the FEUQ, “*étudiants*” is linked primarily to two nodal points representing collective action: “*grève*” (strike) and “*manifestester*” (to protest). The lack of any further discursive articulation in this domain, whether to other action signifiers or to “*gouvernement*,” suggests that the two student federations, although they do organize protest events, do not put much stock into any particular course of collective action as a means to stop the tuition increase or otherwise effect change. (See Figure 10.)

***Étudiants en grève.*** The nodal point of identity “*étudiants*” is discursively articulated with the signifier “*grève*.” Again, “*grève*” in the singular highlights the solidarity of all those participating in such action, regardless of technicalities. For example, one press release reports that “*des dizaines de milliers d’étudiants membres de la FECQ et la FEUQ seront consultés au courant des prochaines semaines sur le déclenchement d’une grève générale*” (tens of thousands of student members of the FECQ and the FEUQ will be consulted during the coming weeks on the launch of a general strike) (FECQ & FEUQ, 2012b). Meanwhile, the blurb at the end of another claims that the FECQ and FEUQ together represent “*plus de 100 000 étudiants qui sont*

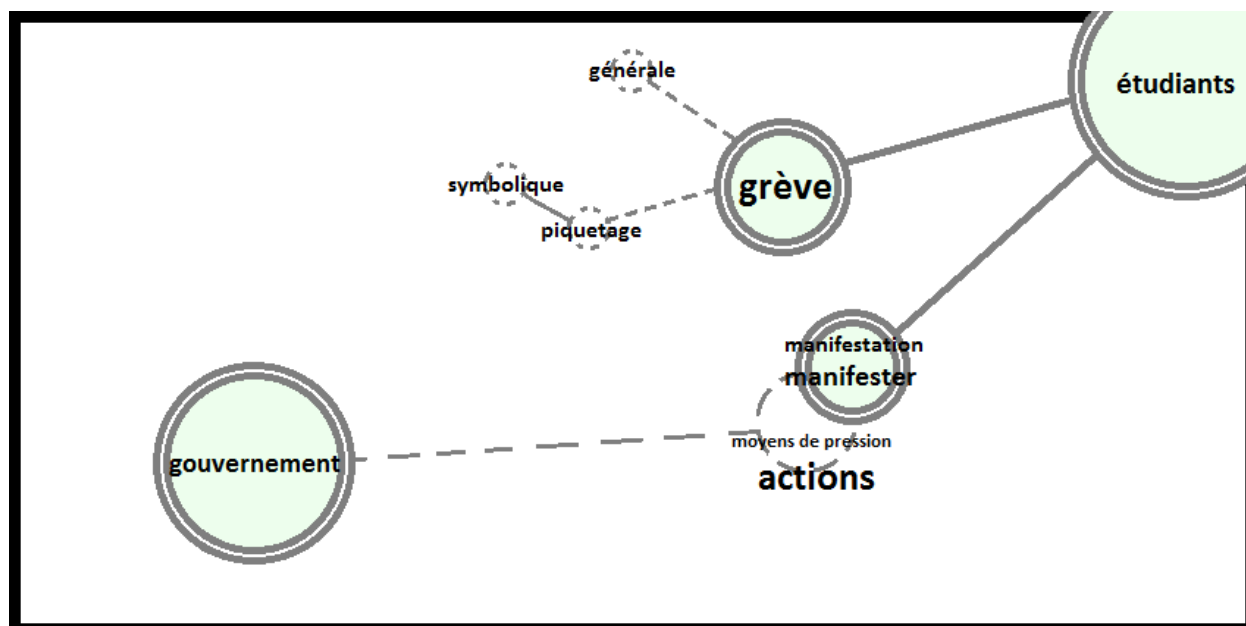


Figure 10: Map of articulations pertaining to student action in the discourse of the FECQ and FEUQ

*en grève aujourd'hui*” (more than 100,000 students who are on strike today) (FECQ & FEUQ, 2012d).<sup>34</sup>

Furthermore, this articulation of “*grève*” with “*étudiants*,” instead of its possible pairing with the feminine adjective “*étudiante*,” emphasizes the active quality of students as being the agents of the strike; it is not *a student strike* but *the students’ strike*. In fact, the strike *belongs* to students, as is evidenced by the use of the possessive pronoun “their” in the FECQ’s (2012b) response to a judge’s ruling: “*La FECQ salue le jugement du juge Godbout qui permet aux étudiants de l’Université Laval de poursuivre leur grève et leur piquetage symbolique*” (The FECQ welcomes the ruling of Judge Godbout which permits the students of Laval University to continue their strike and their symbolic picketing).

Through such references to “their” strike, however, the FECQ and the FEUQ distance themselves both from the strike and from the students they supposedly represent. In addition, discussion of “*les étudiants qui sont en grève*” (those students who are on strike) rather than “*une*

<sup>34</sup> The term “boycott” is used only once in the press releases of the FECQ and the FEUQ included in this study, in fact in the earliest of them, produced on February 9 (FECQ & FEUQ, 2012a). An April 13 press release not included makes it clear that the students’ strike is actually “[*bien loin d’être un simple boycott*” (pretty far from being a simple boycott) and addresses their right to strike (FECQ & FEUQ, 2012e).

*grève étudiante*” (a student strike) signals to those who are not on strike, revealing a potential divide among their members.

“*Grève*” is joined occasionally with the adjective “*générale*” (general), forming the phrase “*grève générale*” (general strike), although this pairing is not used consistently enough to constitute any significant discursive articulation. The same is true of “*grève*” with the noun “*piquetage*” (picketing) and the adjective “*symbolique*” (symbolic), as in the above-mentioned response to Judge Godbout’s ruling (FECQ, 2012b), which may nevertheless cast doubt on the earnestness of the strike. The FECQ concurs with the judge that classes must not be blocked, favoring soft pickets over hard ones, and Bureau-Blouin appears to diminish the act of picketing itself from an implementation of collective decisions made democratically in a legitimate forum to a simple exercise of “*liberté d’expression*” (freedom of expression). In that particular press release, at least, the strike is effectively reduced to students’ individual “*droit de ne pas se présenter à leurs cours*” (right not to attend their classes).

**Manifester.** “*Étudiants*” is also linked with the verb “*manifester*” (to demonstrate) and its nominal variant “*manifestation*” (demonstration). For instance, “*Les étudiants ont manifesté devant le bureau de circonscription de la ministre à Montréal-Nord*” (The students demonstrated in front of the minister’s riding office in Montreal-Nord) (FECQ & FEUQ, 2012b). Additionally, in the FECQ press release addressing Judge Godbout’s ruling (2012b), Bureau-Blouin declares “*que les étudiants peuvent manifester, mais qu’ils ne doivent pas bloquer la libre circulation des personnes*” (that students can demonstrate, but that they must not block the free circulation of persons). Demonstrating in this manner—without causing disruption or inconveniencing anyone—is thus promoted as the acceptable way in which to strike and to provoke change.

Responding to Judge Godbout’s ruling, Bureau-Blouin continues, “*On invite donc les étudiants à rester solidaires des votes de grève qui ont été décidé et à poursuivre la pression sur les libéraux*” (We therefore invite students to remain in solidarity with the strike votes that were taken and to continue the pressure on the Liberals) (FECQ, 2012b). “*Moyens de pression*” (pressure tactics) and “*actions*” (actions) are indeed other signifiers that appear in this discourse, potentially representing a larger set of strategies inclusive of demonstrations that the members of the federations may employ against the government. However, these signifiers appear less frequently than “*manifester*” and “*manifestation*,” and remain vague and undefined through any

discursive articulation; there is thus no clear link between “*manifeste*” and any broader strategy, or between “*manifeste*” and “*gouvernement*.”

**Recap of articulations pertaining to student action.** The lack of articulations in this aspect of the student federations’ discourse potentially speaks volumes, although I will limit myself here to a few brief sentences. The singularity of the signifier “*grève*” again indicates solidarity in action, and students are articulated as having collective ownership of the strike. However, its articulation by the federations as “*their strike*” distances them from this action and their members engaged in it. The strike is not clearly associated with opposition to the tuition increase or with any other purpose or aims, and though there is some mention of a possible general strike, there are also hints that the federations do not take it seriously as a political tactic, referring to symbolism, freedom of expression, and the particularly vacuous “right not to attend classes”—which merely echoes other discourses’ assertions of the “right to attend classes for which they have paid.”

Similarly, students are articulated with “*manifeste*” but instructed that the proper way to do it is not to bother or inconvenience anyone. It is additionally brought up in the context of vague “*actions*” and “*moyens de pression*” with no clear plan and no intended impact on the tuition increase or the government.

#### **7.4. Summary of the Discourse of the FECQ and FEUQ**

In this discourse, the feminine singular “*étudiante*” is treated for analytical purposes as a signifier apart from the nodal point of identity “*étudiants*” due to noticeable differences in how the two are articulated: the feminine is generally linked to the passive and abstract, the masculine to the active and concrete. The FECQ and the FEUQ are federations that include student associations from various institutions, acquiring discursive legitimacy through their representation of students. In defending them, the presidents of the federations define the government as stubborn.

Students are articulated directly with government, although this relationship is defined principally by the government’s abuse of students, specifically through the increase in tuition fees—articulated here as “*frais*” rather than “*droits*.” On top of the tuition increase, the government harms both students and their family with the associated debt, although loans do not

figure significantly into this discourse. In students' family—articulated strangely in the singular—they again constitute children based on their presumed financial dependence, as in other discourses. This is exacerbated by references to students as youth.

Signifiers representing collective action are not articulated in this discourse as serious avenues for political gain, being essentially shunned by the student federations, largely consigned to symbolic status, and not clearly connected with any particular purpose. In fact, signifiers such as “*grève*” and “*manifeste*,” which represent nodal points due to their contested meanings in other discourses, have no significant articulations here other than to students. Instead, students wanting to take action against the government's tuition increase have little to do but support the FECQ and FEUQ, even though it is unclear how they interact with the government and how they intend to stop the hike. Furthermore, while the federations specifically reject the \$1,625 increase of tuition fees, the door is discursively left open to a lesser amount.



## Chapter 8: Analysis of the Discourse of the CLASSE

The ten CLASSE press releases included in the final sample for this study identify Renaud Poirier St-Pierre as the press attaché and cite its two co-spokespersons, Jeanne Reynolds and Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois, with little boundary maintenance in much the same way as the presidents of the FECQ and the FEUQ are cited in the press releases of those organizations.

The masculine plural noun “*étudiants*” serves as a nodal point of identity again in the discourse of the CLASSE, although here it does so alongside its feminine plural variant “*étudiantes*”; the two are regularly paired together as “*étudiants et étudiantes*,” as in “*les revendications des étudiants et des étudiantes*” (the demands of students) (CLASSE, 2012a). In contrast with the other French-language discourses examined—and particularly that of the FECQ and FEUQ—this incorporation of “*étudiants*” and “*étudiantes*” into a single signifier brings the feminine to the forefront and gives it agency equal to that of the masculine, although it could be criticized for making the text bulkier. Another possible criticism of “*étudiants et étudiantes*” is that it interferes with efforts to discursively create the kind of unity that is possible with one noun; although they are cited together as a single entity, “*étudiants et étudiantes*” serves as a reminder that there are actually two separate groups to be considered, and the fact that the masculine is generally cited first—as is the tradition in the French language—bestows it with superior status. Furthermore, “*étudiants et étudiantes*” continues to reproduce an archaic gender binary, limiting the potential of this identity to interpellate individuals who do not conform to the conventional male/female divide.

With the nodal point of identity “*étudiants et étudiantes*” as my starting point, three major themes may be observed in the discourse of the CLASSE surrounding the *Printemps érable*, similar to those observed in the other discourses above. First, I will look at student relationships in terms of the link “*étudiants et étudiantes*” has with “*associations*” (associations) and, indirectly, with the signifier “CLASSE” itself. Second, I will examine students’ collective action through the articulation of “*étudiants et étudiantes*” with such signifiers as “*grève*” (strike) and “*rue*” (street), and the further articulation of “CLASSE” with “*mobilisation*” (mobilization) and “*manifestation*” (demonstration). Finally, I will explore the articulation of “*étudiants et étudiantes*,” “CLASSE,” “*gouvernement*” (government) and “*grève*” with “*hausse*” (increase) as

representing the core issue of the conflict, in addition to the articulation of other signifiers including “*revendications*” (demands) and “*classe moyenne*” (middle class).

### 8.1. Articulations Pertaining to Student Governance

The name of the CLASSE articulates the nodal point of identity “*étudiants et étudiantes*” with “*coalition*” (coalition), “*large*” (broad), “*association*” (association), “*solidarité*” (solidarity), and “*syndicale*” (syndical). “CLASSE” as a signifier itself is not linked directly with “*étudiants et étudiantes*” but with “*membres*” (members) and with “*co-porte-parole*” (co-spokesperson), which both have further articulations that provide insight into the coalition. By contrast, “*associations*” in the plural is linked directly with “*étudiants et étudiantes*,” and the discourse of the CLASSE gives the impression that it includes all such student organizations. It is unclear whether “*population*” (population) represents an entity apart from, inclusive of, or equivalent to “*étudiants et étudiantes*,” although “*citoyens et citoyennes*” (citizens) are evidently not students in this discourse. (See Figure 11.)

**La CLASSE.** The nodal point of identity “*étudiants et étudiantes*,” in the form of the feminine singular adjective “*étudiante*,” is incorporated into the name of the CLASSE in a discursive chain whose complexity reflects that of the structure of the organization. At the core

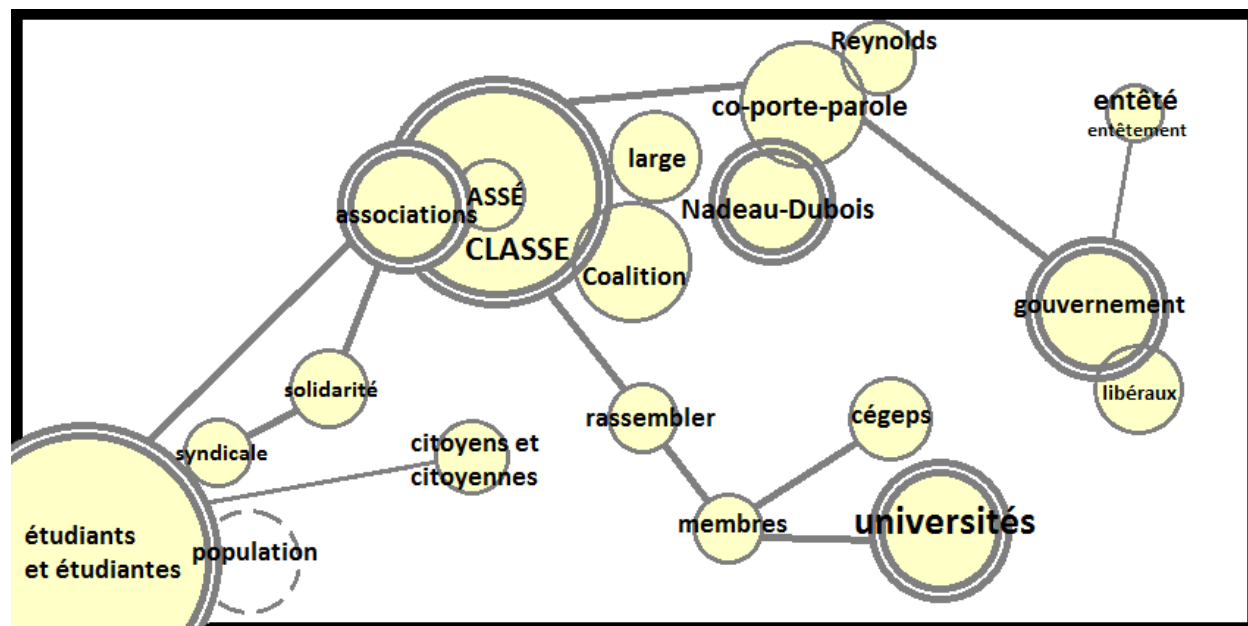


Figure 11: Map of articulations pertaining to student governance in the discourse of the CLASSE

of the signifier “CLASSE” is “ASSÉ,” an acronym for “*Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante*” (Association for a Syndical Student Solidarity). “ASSÉ” is the result of the articulation of “*association*” with the noun “*solidarité*” (solidarity), the adjective “*syndicale*” (syndical), and “*étudiante*”—solidarity and syndical both being interdiscursive carryovers from the discourse of labor unions. In addition to itself being a form of association, the ASSÉ serves as an umbrella group uniting smaller “*associations*” from the level of individual institutions, much like the FECQ and FEUQ discussed above. The CLASSE, which is the “*Coalition large*” formed around the existing ASSÉ, brings to the chain the additional signifiers “*coalition*” (coalition)—which has interdiscursive political connotations—and “*large*” (broad), signalling a desire to work more closely with a range of other groups which are not members of the ASSÉ. “*Coalition*” is also used interchangeably with “CLASSE.”

The background information provided at the end of many of the CLASSE’s press releases helps to illuminate the situation. In addition to indicating the present number of members, most conclude with the following statement: “*Fondée par l’ASSÉ en décembre dernier dans le contexte de la hausse des frais de scolarité, la Coalition large de l’ASSÉ (CLASSE) est une coalition nationale d’associations étudiantes représentant actuellement la majorité des grévistes*” (Founded by the ASSÉ last December in the context of the increase in tuition fees, the CLASSE is a national coalition of student associations currently representing the majority of strikers). Alternatively, one press release explains that the CLASSE is a coalition of student associations “*mettant la grève au cœur de ses moyens*” (putting the strike at the heart of its ways and means) (CLASSE, 2012).

“CLASSE” as a signifier does not appear to be associated with the nodal point of identity “*étudiants et étudiantes*” through any direct articulation. However, via the intermediary signifier “*rassembler*” (to bring together), “CLASSE” is articulated with “*membres*,” which is further articulated with “*cégeps*” (CEGEPs) and “*universités*” (universities). As mentioned above, many of the CLASSE’s press releases conclude by indicating its current number of members: one produced on February 23 (CLASSE, 2012a) declares, “*Elle rassemble présentement plus de 70 000 membres dans les cégeps et universités du Québec*” (It presently brings together more than 70,000 members in Quebec’s CEGEPs and universities), while another, dated April 13 (CLASSE, 2012h), puts this number at over 100,000. In contrast with the signifier “*représenter*,”

which is featured in the discourse of the federations and will be further discussed below, “*rassembler*” suggests cooperation and strength in numbers rather than a desire to fill in for someone else or speak on their behalf—perhaps hinting at its advocacy of horizontal direct democracy over the vertical representative form.

The tension between direct democracy and the need for representatives is further evidenced by the articulation of “CLASSE” with the noun “*co-porte-parole*” (co-spokesperson) rather than with “*président*” or “*présidente*” (president). “*Co-porte-parole*” is further linked with “Jeanne Reynolds” and “Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois,” the latter being attributed greater importance through its more frequent usage in the discourse of the CLASSE. The primacy of the male co-spokesperson over his female counterpart is another example of male dominance in this discourse, and may help to explain why it is his name and not hers that becomes a nodal point of identity through its competing articulation in the discourse of *The Gazette*.

***Associations étudiantes.*** As opposed to “CLASSE,” the signifier “*associations*”—pluralized when not used as part of the name of the coalition—is articulated directly with the nodal point of identity “*étudiants et étudiantes.*” For example, there is the above-mentioned description of the CLASSE as “*une coalition nationale d’associations étudiantes*” (a national coalition of student associations), found at the end of most of its press releases. In addition, one announces that “*plusieurs associations étudiantes en grève feront des lignes de piquetage devant leur institution [sic]*” (several student associations on strike will do picket lines in front of their institution) (CLASSE, 2012d). This articulation normalizes the relationship of students with their associations, taking for granted the legitimacy of these associations and assuming that all students are effectively represented.

“*Associations étudiantes*” appears once again to serve as a catch-all term for all manner of student organizations, and there is little indication in the discourse of the CLASSE that the coalition does not in fact include all such organizations—whether due to arrogance or to a desire to be inclusive and extend an open invitation to other groups. Jeanne Reynolds, the lesser-known co-spokesperson of the CLASSE, only subtly hints that her coalition does not actually include all student associations when she says “*il y a fort à parier que les associations étudiantes de la CLASSE décideront de durcir le ton*” (it is a safe bet that the student associations of the CLASSE will decide to get tough) (CLASSE, 2012d).

***Citoyens, citoyennes, et population.*** The nodal point of identity “*étudiants et étudiantes*” appears to be discursively articulated with, and in fact overlapping, the signifier “*population*” (population), whose singularity reduces it from a diverse collection of people with differing histories, perspectives, ideals, and aspirations to a monolithic entity—and one that sides with the CLASSE. For instance, Reynolds is quoted in one press release (CLASSE, 2012a) as saying that “*l’augmentation des frais de scolarité est une attaque non seulement aux étudiants et aux étudiantes, mais à l’ensemble de la population*” (the augmentation of tuition fees is an attack not only on students, but on the whole of the population). Furthermore, in another (CLASSE, 2012d), she argues that “*les étudiants et les étudiantes se mobiliseront avec la population*” (students will be mobilized with the population).

While care is generally taken to indicate that students are part of the population and that their interests are here aligned with those of the whole, articulating them in this way still serves to demarcate students as a kind of special-interest group. Furthermore, there are some occasions as in the above where “*étudiants et étudiantes*” appear entirely separate from “*population*” and others where there seems to be a straight substitution of one for the other—which may give the impression that the CLASSE rather presumptuously speaks on behalf of the people of Quebec. For example, Nadeau-Dubois refers to student demands ignored by the government as “*les demandes de la population*” (the demands of the population), and announces that “*la population du Québec doit se lever pour contrer cette injustice*” (the population of Quebec must rise up against this injustice) (CLASSE, 2012c). As a result of such inconsistencies, it cannot be said that “*population*” is defined well enough to secure a place as a moment in this discourse.

The signifier “*citoyens et citoyennes*” (citizens), presumably referring to individual units of “*population*” although not directly linked, instead has a relatively unsecured articulation with the nodal point of identity “*étudiants et étudiantes*.” In one press release, Reynolds declares that “*des centaines de citoyens et de citoyennes sont avec nous dans les rues*” (hundreds of citizens are with us in the streets) (CLASSE, 2012a). Meanwhile, another states that “*la CLASSE appelle l’ensemble des citoyens et des citoyennes à descendre dans la rue avec les étudiants et les étudiantes dans les prochaines semaines*” (the CLASSE calls for all citizens to come down into the street with the students in the coming weeks) (CLASSE, 2012c). Through such calls for

citizens to join students in the street, it is made clear that these are two separate groups; while students are possibly part of the population, they are not citizens, and citizens not students.

**Recap of articulations pertaining to student governance.** The CLASSE constitutes the broad coalition formed around the ASSÉ (Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante) for the student strike. However, “CLASSE” as a signifier is not linked with the nodal point of identity “*étudiants et étudiantes*” but with the moment “*membres*” via the intermediary “*rassembler*.” It includes various forms of smaller “*associations étudiantes*” to which it leaves the task of directly representing students—perhaps giving the impression, like the FECQ and FEUQ, that this includes all students. Unlike the federations, though, the CLASSE demonstrates an affinity for direct democracy in its representation not by a president but by two co-spokespersons, although its male co-spokesperson receives considerably more attention, even within this discourse, than its female one.

In this discourse, “*population*” is reduced to a singular monolithic entity, and though it is generally clear that it includes students it is occasionally suggested that it is either separate from, or synonymous with, students. On the same note, the CLASSE sometimes appears determined to speak on behalf of the entire population of Quebec. However, in calling on “*citoyens et citoyennes*” to join the students, it is made apparent that students are not citizens.

## 8.2. Articulations Pertaining to Student Action

“*Étudiants et étudiantes*” is linked with “*grève*” (strike), while its variant “*grévistes*” (strikers) is articulated with “CLASSE” via “*représenter*” (to represent), as in the CLASSE representing strikers. “*Mouvement*” (movement) has potential articulations with both “*étudiants et étudiantes*” and “*grève*” that remain unsedimented. “*Mobilisation*” (mobilisation) is articulated with the CLASSE, which calls for but does not actively engage in it, and has traces of potential articulations with a variety of other signifiers representing actors. The CLASSE is more actively involved in each “*manifestation*” (demonstration) and, along with “*étudiants et étudiantes*” is directly linked to the signifier “*rue*” (street), which represents a public stage for collective action. (See Figure 12.)

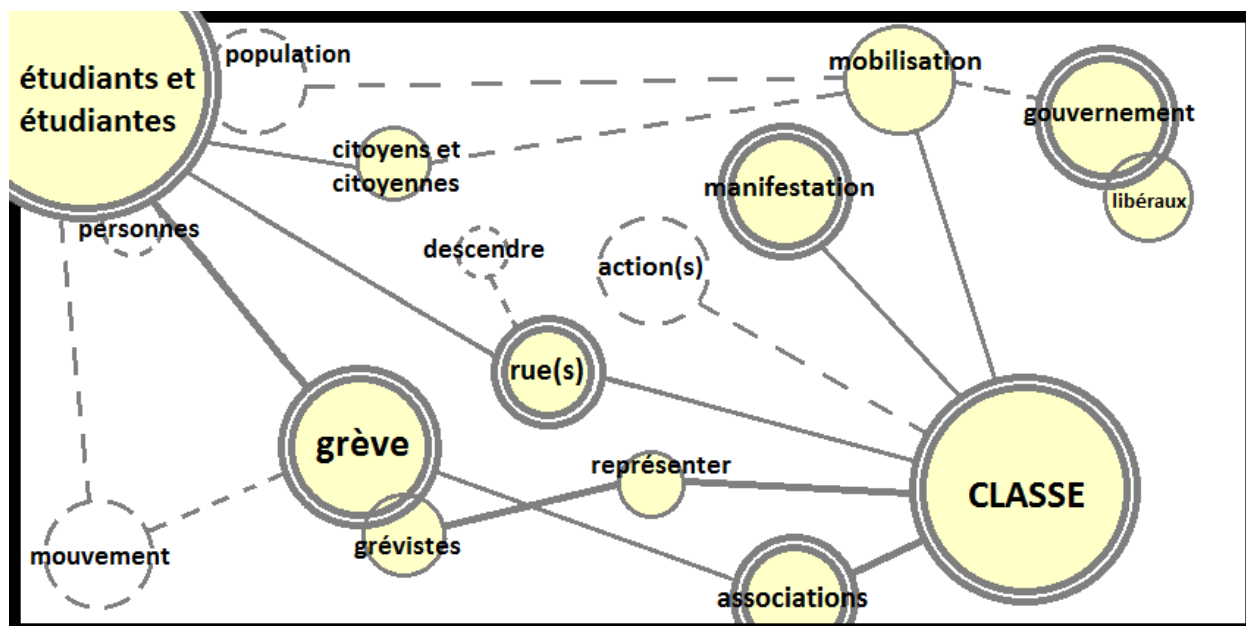


Figure 12: Map of articulations pertaining to student action in the discourse of the CLASSE

*Grève étudiante.* The nodal point of identity “*étudiants et étudiantes*” is strongly articulated with “*grève*” (strike), as expressed in the latter’s pairing with the adjective “*étudiante*” to form the expression “*grève étudiante*,” as featured in the headline of many CLASSE press releases, such as “*Grève étudiante: la CLASSE annonce une journée de mobilisation historique*” (Student strike: the CLASSE announces a historic day of mobilization) (2012d). Although the less frequent formation “*étudiants et étudiantes en grève*” (students on strike) serves to signal those students who are *not* on strike, “*grève étudiante*” attributes possession of the single strike to all students, again reaffirming their unity. On the other hand, reinforcing the potential link between “*grève*” and “*personnes*” (people), as in “*le nombre de personnes en grève générale illimitée vient d’atteindre 48 000 personnes [sic]*” (the number of people on unlimited general strike has just reached 48,000 people) (CLASSE, 2012a), would serve to discursively open up the strike to non-students, as well as make clear that students are, in fact, a subset of regular people.

Meanwhile, there is only a weak articulation between “*grève*” and “*associations*,” the member organizations where the strike is actually voted on and maintained. A press release reports, for instance, that “*plusieurs associations étudiantes en grève feront des lignes de piquetage devant leur institution [sic]*” (several student associations on strike will do picket lines

in front of their institution) (CLASSE, 2012d). Another states that “*les associations étudiantes de la CLASSE réunies en fin de semaine en Congrès ont déterminé la suite du plan d'action de la grève*” (the student associations of the CLASSE assembled at the weekend Congress determined the next steps of the action plan for the strike) (CLASSE, 2012e). This appears to suggest that the CLASSE includes all of the associations on strike, although not all of the associations of the CLASSE are on strike; another press release reveals that it will “*soumettra l'offre reçue plus tôt aujourd'hui aux Assemblées générales des associations étudiantes actuellement en grève au Québec*” (submit the offer received earlier today to the General Assemblies of the associations presently on strike in Quebec) (CLASSE, 2012i).

“*Grévistes*” (strikers), a noun formed from “*grève*” and generally found in the plural in this discourse, is linked to the signifier “CLASSE” through the intermediary moment “*représenter*.” For example, the blurb that concludes many of the press releases indicates that “*la Coalition large de l'ASSÉ (CLASSE) est une coalition nationale d'associations étudiantes représentant actuellement la majorité des grévistes*” (the CLASSE is a national coalition of student associations currently representing the majority of strikers). This firmly establishes the CLASSE’s relationship as a representative of those on strike, although not the only one.

***Mouvement étudiant.*** Another signifier potentially articulated with the nodal point of identity “*étudiants et étudiantes*” is “*mouvement*” (movement), especially through the use of the term “*mouvement étudiant*,” although its meaning is not quite fixed. For example, one press release claims that the March 22 demonstration will be “*la plus grande journée de mobilisation de l'histoire du mouvement étudiant québécois*” (the largest day of mobilization in the history of the Quebec student movement) (CLASSE, 2012d), suggesting that “*mouvement étudiant*” stands for a continuous struggle for progress with a long tradition. On the other hand, in another press release, Nadeau-Dubois asks “*Que faudra-t-il dire pour que cette ministre réalise enfin qu'elle doit s'asseoir pour négocier avec le mouvement étudiant?*” (What must be said for this minister to finally realize that she must sit down to negotiate with the student movement?) (CLASSE, 2012h). The latter implies that “*mouvement étudiant*” simply refers to the student representatives at the negotiating table with the government, or perhaps signals an attempt to bestow upon those individuals the additional influence and gravitas associated with a legacy of struggle.



There is also a potential but unsedimented discursive articulation between “*mouvement*” and “*grève*,” as in “*le mouvement de grève étudiante regroupe toujours plus de 190 000 personnes*” (the student strike movement still includes more than 190,000 people) (CLASSE, 2012g). The solidification of “*mouvement de grève*” in the discourse of the CLASSE would serve to define the movement by its principal tactic—and perhaps obscure its cause.<sup>35</sup>

***Mobilisation et manifestation.*** The signifier “*mobilisation*” (mobilization), a singular noun, is articulated weakly with “CLASSE”; the latter calls on others to mobilize, or to initiate a series of concerted actions around a specific cause. However, it is not the CLASSE itself that is mobilizing, and the nominalization of the verb “*mobiliser*” (to mobilize) serves to further dissociate the coalition from agency. For example, one of the CLASSE’s press releases features the headline, “*Grève étudiante: la CLASSE appelle à une mobilisation générale contre le gouvernement libéral*” (Student strike: the CLASSE calls for a general mobilization against the Liberal government) (2012e).

Who is the CLASSE calling on to mobilize, and for what purpose? The signifier “*mobilisation*” has only hints of a discursive articulation with “*étudiants et étudiantes*,” “*citoyens et citoyennes*,” and “*population*,” suggesting a vague call by the coalition to any and all potential allies. “*Mobilization*” also has a potential but unsedimented link with the nodal point “*gouvernement*” and the synonymous signifier “*libéraux*,” which would serve as the intended target of mobilizing, although there is no articulation suggesting the goal. In one press release, for instance, Nadeau-Dubois says, “*Face au mépris des libéraux pour les demandes de la population, nous lançons un appel à la mobilisation citoyenne*” (Faced with the Liberals’ contempt for the demands of the population, we call for a citizens’ mobilization) (CLASSE, 2012c)—“*nous*” referring to the CLASSE, although citizens are the ones asked to mobilize against the government. In another, Reynolds declares that “*les étudiants et les étudiantes se mobiliseront avec la population afin de mettre toute la pression possible sur le gouvernement*

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<sup>35</sup> Additionally, “*mouvement*” is paired with “*social*” (social) to form the phrase “*mouvement social*” in two of the press releases included in this study. In one dated March 26, following the massive demonstration in Montreal, it is stated that “*le mouvement étudiant doit devenir un mouvement social*” (the student movement must become a social movement) (CLASSE, 2012e). However, in another just three days later, the government is described as already having triggered “*ce mouvement social sans précédent*” (this unprecedented social movement) with its tuition increase (CLASSE, 2012f).

*libéral*” (students will mobilize with the population in order to put all the pressure possible on the Liberal government) (CLASSE, 2012d).

The signifier “*manifestation*” (demonstration) is articulated weakly with “CLASSE” in much the same way as “*mobilisation*.” It too represents an instance of nominalization, although the CLASSE does appear to assume somewhat more agency with regards to “*manifestation*,” which is more episodic in nature than “*mobilisation*.” A press release announces, for example, “*Le cortège intitulé ‘La Grande Migration’ rejoindra la prochaine manifestation de la CLASSE*” (The procession entitled “The Great Migration” will join the CLASSE’s next demonstration) (CLASSE, 2012a). In another, Nadeau-Dubois declares, “*Nous convions évidemment les citoyens et les citoyennes à la grande manifestation de jeudi*” (We obviously invite citizens to the large demonstration on Thursday) (CLASSE, 2012c).

***Action de perturbation et plan d’action.*** The signifier “*action*” (action), potentially articulated in much the same way as both “*mobilisation*” and “*manifestation*,” appears in both the singular and the plural. “*Action*” is separate from “*manifestation*,” although it similarly serves to represent an episodic protest event coordinated by the CLASSE, as Nadeau-Dubois claims that “*plusieurs actions et manifestations auront lieu afin de mettre une pression sans précédent sur le gouvernement libéral*” (several actions and demonstrations will take place in order to put unprecedented pressure on the Liberal government) (CLASSE, 2012e). In addition to referring specifically to an “*action de perturbation*” (disruptive action) organized by the CLASSE, that same press release combines “*manifestation*” and “*action*” to produce the portmanteau “*manif-action*.”

However, “*action*” remains unsedimented as a moment since it is also employed in the singular with the signifier “*plan*” (plan) to form the phrase “*plan d’action*” (action plan). The action plan ostensibly lays out the strategy to be pursued by the CLASSE, as determined by its member associations in a weekend meeting. For example, a press release indicates that “*la CLASSE prévoit un congrès de deux jours, durant lequel les associations étudiantes membres de la Coalition pourront déterminer la suite du plan d’action*” (the CLASSE foresees a two-day congress, during which the student associations that are members of the Coalition will be able to determine the next steps of the action plan) (CLASSE, 2012d).

*La rue.* Another signifier with a relatively tenuous link to “CLASSE” is “*rue*” (street), which is also connected to “*étudiants et étudiantes*.” It is found in both its singular and plural forms, with traces of a discursive articulation with the verb “*descendre*” (to descend), as in the expression “*descendre dans la rue*” or “*descendre dans les rues*.” For instance, a press release states that “*la CLASSE appelle l'ensemble des citoyens et des citoyennes à descendre dans la rue avec les étudiants et les étudiantes*” (the CLASSE calls on all citizens to take to the street with the students) (CLASSE, 2012c). According to another, “*Des milliers d'étudiants et d'étudiantes en grève sont descendus dans les rues aujourd'hui*” (Thousands of striking students took to the streets today) (CLASSE, 2012a).

The CLASSE and the students are both active in descending into the street, and the CLASSE in particular invites others to join them. It becomes a nodal point through the competing meaning assigned to it in the discourse of *The Gazette*, but in that of the CLASSE, the street represents public space in the heart of the action, a potential meeting-place for likeminded people who want to take action against unjust government measures; not violent or dangerous but out in the open and visible to all. Furthermore, in addition to literally descending to a lower place from raised positions in homes and workplaces, the act of “*descendre*” or going down may represent a return to, and a satisfaction of, those fundamental needs that make us human—in this case, the need to unite with others for a common cause—in contrast with its use in such terms as “*descending into chaos*” or “*into madness*.”<sup>36</sup>

**Recap of articulations pertaining to student action.** This discourse’s emphasis on “*grève étudiante*” rather than “*étudiants et étudiantes en grève*” reinforces solidarity and attributes the strike to all students. Although the “*associations*” linked with the CLASSE are only weakly articulated with “*grève*,” it is done in such a way as to suggest that the coalition includes all the associations on strike. Its declaration that it actually represents the majority of strikers cements its position as a leading force in the uprising, but not the only one.

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<sup>36</sup> In other press releases by the CLASSE, it is said that students “*prennent*” (take) or “*envahissent*” (invade) the streets, suggesting control of a space which normally does not belong to them. “*Descendre*,” however, is particularly interesting for its possible parallels with Nietzsche’s conception of *Untergang* (down-going) (2003, pp. 43-45).

The CLASSE issues broad calls to its various allies to mobilize, although not engaging directly in mobilizing itself; its target is ostensibly the government but its purpose is unclear. Its discourse assigns it greater agency in more episodic “*manifestation*,” whose articulation in the singular focuses on each individual such event, as well as a more significant role in descending into the street with students—the street here representing a site of communion in stark contrast with the violence and intimidation in the discourse of *The Gazette*. Meanwhile, the signifier “*mouvement*” has only traces of a discursive articulation with “*étudiants et étudiantes*” as well as “*grève*,” but remains an undefined element.

### 8.3. Articulations Pertaining to Student Concerns

In the discourse of the CLASSE surrounding the *Printemps érable*, as in that of the FECQ and FEUQ, “*étudiants et étudiantes*” is linked with “*hausse*” (increase), which is further linked with “*frais*” (fees) and “*scolarité*” (schooling). “*Hausse*” represents a threat to “*étudiants et étudiantes*,” and “*gouvernement*” (government) is the agent responsible. Students thus defend themselves, and potentially the rest of the population, from “*hausse*” and present the government with unspecified “*revendications*” (demands) related to the increase. “*CLASSE*” is also articulated in opposition to “*hausse*,” as is “*grève*” (strike), although the link between “*hausse*” and “*grève*” is not made as clear as it could be. Meanwhile, “*classe moyenne*” (middle class), un sedimented in the discourse of the federations, is here positioned as being harmed by the government and defended by the CLASSE. (See Figure 13.)

***Hausse des frais de scolarité.*** Along the same lines as the student federations, the discourse of the CLASSE has the nodal point of identity “*étudiants et étudiantes*” strongly articulated with a chain of signifiers including “*hausse*,” “*frais*,” and “*scolarité*,” as demonstrated particularly in the oft-employed phrase “*hausse des frais de scolarité*.” For example, it is claimed that “*la hausse des frais de scolarité actuellement proposée ne génèrera que 265 millions de dollars par année pour les universités québécoises*” (the increase of tuition fees currently proposed will generate only \$265 million per year for Quebec universities) (CLASSE, 2012b). Additionally, much like the discourse of *La Presse*, that of the CLASSE features the less frequent signifier “*augmentation*”—along with the related verb “*augmenter*” (to augment)—used as a substitute for “*hausse*,” as in “*les effets néfastes d’une augmentation des frais de scolarité*” (the harmful effects of an augmentation of tuition fees) (CLASSE, 2012f).

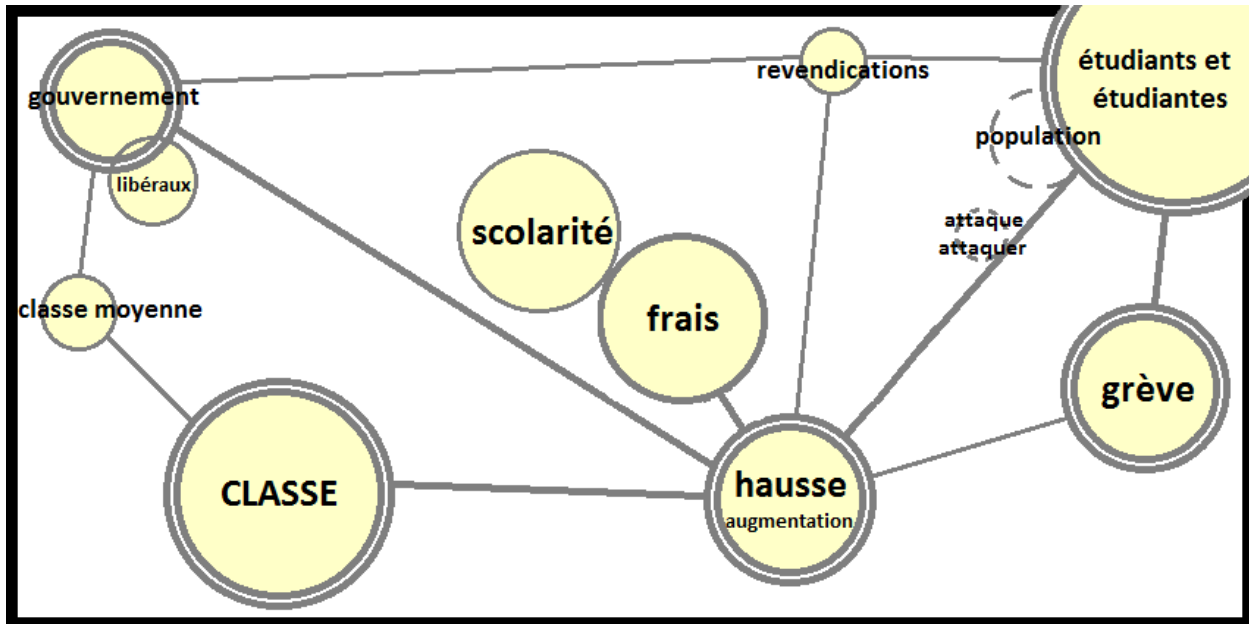


Figure 13: Map of articulations pertaining to student concerns in the discourse of the CLASSE

The signifier “*hausse*” is articulated with “*étudiants et étudiantes*” in the context of posing a threat to them. It is also linked with “*gouvernement*” and the interchangeable signifier “*libéraux*,” which represent the agent posing the threat. For example, one press release reports that “*les étudiants et étudiantes ont à maintes reprises expliqué au gouvernement que la hausse des frais de scolarité est une mesure néfaste*” (students have explained to the government countless times that the increase in tuition fees is a harmful measure) (CLASSE, 2012f). In another, Nadeau-Dubois accuses, “*‘Dans leur dernier budget, les libéraux imposaient unilatéralement une hausse des frais de scolarité de 75 % aux étudiants et aux étudiantes’*” (In their last budget, the Liberals unilaterally imposed a 75% increase of tuition fees on students) (CLASSE, 2012b).

Elsewhere, Reynolds alleges that the increase constitutes a full-fledged assault, and not only against students, although she does not directly identify “*gouvernement*” as the agent responsible. For instance, she describes a demonstration as an effort to make the government understand that “*l’augmentation des frais de scolarité est une attaque non seulement aux étudiants et aux étudiantes, mais à l’ensemble de la population*” (the augmentation of tuition fees is an attack not only on students, but on the whole of the population) (CLASSE, 2012a). Furthermore, she argues that the increase of tuition fees “*fait partie d’une vague sans précédent*

*de tarification et de privatisation des services publics qui attaque l'ensemble de la population*” (is part of an unprecedented wave of fee increases and privatization of public services that attacks the whole of the population) (CLASSE, 2012g). The latter quote reveals an awareness that, despite the very close link between “*frais*” and “*scolarité*,” tuition does not constitute the only fees that students and others are required to pay in a neoliberal economy. The noun “*attaque*” (attack) and the verb “*attaquer*” (to attack), however, do not appear with enough regularity to cement a place as moments in this discourse.

**Opposition à la hausse.** “*Étudiants et étudiantes*” is linked with the signifier “*hausse*” not only representing victims of it, but also those acting against it. According to a press release, for instance, “*Des milliers d'étudiants et d'étudiantes en grève sont descendus dans les rues aujourd'hui afin de dénoncer une fois de plus la hausse des frais de scolarité annoncée par le gouvernement libéral*” (Thousands of striking students descended into the streets today to denounce one more time the increase in tuition fees announced by the Liberal government) (CLASSE, 2012a).

The moment “*revendications*” (demands) is linked with “*hausse*” and holds together a weak articulation between “*étudiants et étudiantes*” and “*gouvernement*,” as students direct their demands against the increase of tuition fees directly at the government. A press release states, for example, that the government’s budget “*ignore complètement les revendications des étudiants et des étudiantes contre la hausse des frais de scolarité*” (completely ignores the student demands against the increase of tuition fees) (CLASSE, 2012c). Although “*revendications*” is plural, it is unclear what additional demands students are issuing beyond the cancelling of the tuition hike.

Also linked with the signifier “*hausse*” in terms of opposition to it is the CLASSE, which, as we have seen above, was in fact formed for the specific purpose of fighting the tuition hike. One press release features the headline “*Grève étudiante: la CLASSE annonce des alternatives budgétaires à la hausse des frais de scolarité*” (Student strike: the CLASSE announces budgetary alternatives to the increase in tuition fees) (2012b), and most quote CLASSE spokespeople denouncing the measure, clearly positioning the coalition against it.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> The final CLASSE press release included in the sample for this study (CLASSE, 2012j) provides a web address urging people to block the increase ([www.bloquonslahausse.com](http://www.bloquonslahausse.com)).

The signifier “*hausse*” is further articulated with “*grève*,” although only faintly. The most obvious example, of course, is the headline “*Grève étudiante: la CLASSE rappelle à la ministre Beauchamp que la grève porte sur la hausse des frais de scolarité*” (Student strike: the CLASSE reminds Minister Beauchamp that the strike is about the increase in tuition fees) (2012f). The very fact that such a headline is necessary despite the pervasiveness of both “*hausse*” and “*grève*” throughout the discourse serves perhaps as evidence that the link between the hike and the strike is not made clear enough elsewhere. In fact, a later press release calling for popular mobilization specifies that the strike is about much more than just tuition fees, with Nadeau-Dubois identifying the core issues of the movement as being “*accessibilité à l'éducation, démocratie directe, féminisme, écologie*” (accessibility of education, direct democracy, feminism, ecology) (CLASSE, 2012j).

Surprisingly, neither “*gel*” nor “*gratuité*” appear as moments here, with only one mention of the latter in the ten press releases from the coalition included in the sample for this study. According to Nadeau-Dubois, the reinstatement of the capital tax on financial institutions would produce \$800 million per year, while “*une étude récente chiffrait le coût net de la gratuité scolaire entre 176 M \$ et 405 M \$ annuellement*” (a recent study totaled the net cost of free schooling between \$176 million and \$405 million annually) (CLASSE, 2012b).

The signifier “*classe moyenne*” (middle class) appears in the discourse of the CLASSE, as it does in that of the FECQ and FEUQ, but here is secured as a moment through its slightly more evident articulation with “*gouvernement*” and “*CLASSE*.” This link portrays the government as unfairly burdening the middle class, and the CLASSE as its defender. For instance, a press release states that the CLASSE “*propose une réforme de la fiscalité, afin de donner un répit à la classe moyenne*” (proposes fiscal reform, in order to give respite to the middle class) (CLASSE, 2012b).

**Recap of articulations pertaining to student concerns.** The increase in tuition fees is articulated as a threat, and possibly even a full-scale attack, by the government on students, one that potentially harms the entire population. In addition to being positioned as victims, students are also linked to the increase as opposing it, issuing demands related to the increase directly to the government, although it is unclear what exactly is referred to by the plural “*revendications*.” Also articulated in opposition to the increase are the CLASSE and, less strongly, “*grève*”; it is

not made as evident as it could be specifically what the strike is about. There is no significant articulation suggesting a freeze, a reduction, or an abolishment of tuition fees, but in addition to potentially speaking on behalf of the entire population of Quebec, the CLASSE fancies itself the defender of its middle class against unfair treatment by the government.

#### **8.4. Summary of the Discourse of the CLASSE**

The CLASSE is a coalition of student associations that came together for the purposes of the strike. Its discourse contains features suggesting a commitment to principles of direct, participatory democracy, such as co-spokespersons rather than an executive, and articulates itself as seeking to “bring together” rather than “represent” its members. On the other hand, Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois is accorded superiority over fellow co-spokesperson Jeanne Reynolds and at times it appears that the CLASSE aims to represent not only all students but the entire population of Quebec. While “*la population*” is at times made to seem a single indivisible entity, it is understood for the most part that it is a group of which students constitute a sub-section, although students are clearly distinguished from “*citoyens et citoyennes*.”

The discourse of the CLASSE emphasizes precisely that which the discourse of the FECQ and FEUQ neglects: collective student action, and especially a strike against the tuition increase. By contrast, the coalition’s other proposed actions are relatively lacking in vision, as it issues vague calls for mobilization against the government but does not appear to engage in mobilization itself, instead participating in episodic demonstrations that are not articulated with a clear purpose.

Students are articulated as victims of the government’s tuition increase, engaging in the strike and issuing demands directly to the Liberal Party as means to defend themselves and possibly even the whole population from its hazardous effects. The CLASSE is also articulated as an opponent of the tuition increase and an advocate of Quebec’s middle class, which it deems unduly impacted by the hike.



## Chapter 9: Data Interpretation

Taking a step back and looking at the four discourses surrounding the *Printemps érable* from a wider perspective, we may develop an overview based on some of the distinguishing characteristics of each. That of *The Gazette*, for instance, features the most articulations, despite the large number of different writers who could potentially upset such links by connecting signifiers in new ways. These articulations include less-than-flattering links between students—who are portrayed not as taxpaying Quebecers, but as children—and such terms as “violence” and “intimidation.” *The Gazette*’s discourse places an emphasis on student actions while also addressing underlying concerns such as accessibility, albeit rather dismissively, and without necessarily making clear the connection between the two. It demonstrates little awareness of, or concern for, the nature of student governance, instead playing up a leadership fetish and imposing upon students a familiar but ill-fitting top-down model in which legitimacy is derived not from the base but from a relationship with the government. Students’ failure to conform to this model then further feeds into the negative assumptions about them upon which this discourse is based.

Meanwhile, the discourse of *La Presse* surrounding the *Printemps érable* focuses on student concerns with the tuition increase, loans, bursaries, and personal debt—although there is no clear connection made between the increase and loans, but between loans and debt, and even this link may be attributed primarily to one or two authors. Students’ financial dependence on their parents and on government again marks them as children, although this discourse differs from the others included in this study in its use of the signifier “*droits*” to denote fees as well as for being the only one to articulate these fees with any change other than an increase. In *La Presse*, students’ most direct means to act against the increase is to vote to unleash a strike, while their most direct means to engage with the government is through the three largest student organizations and especially those individuals designated their leaders; the imposition of this simplistic hierarchical approach again bestows on these few the right to speak for all students. Nevertheless, the onus is ultimately on the government to resolve the student conflict.

In the discourse of the FECQ and FEUQ, few discursive articulations are formed around means of collective action, and there are hints of distancing from such action and of the

assumption that it is largely symbolic. Instead, the federations and their presidents acquire their legitimacy by representing students before a stubborn government, although for the most part it is unclear precisely what their demands are and what methods they employ in their attempt to see them met. Students' only recourse against the government is to support the federations; students have a direct articulation with government but this relationship is primarily one-way, with government as the agent acting unfairly against students. More specifically, this discourse suggests that the government uses the tuition increase to indebt them and their families—or family, as it is generally employed in the singular. In this family, students once again represent children based on a presumed financial dependence.

Finally, the CLASSE's discourse, much like that of *The Gazette*, emphasizes students' collective action in forcing the government to respond to their demands, vague as they are. The strike is a student strike, although the coalition seeks to create a broader effort by coordinating demonstrations, inviting the population at large to join them in the street, and urging other actors to mobilize. In some aspects of its discourse, the CLASSE's commitment to participatory democracy is evident, as it acknowledges the primacy of its member associations, features a pair of co-spokespersons instead of a president, and speaks of “bringing together” rather than “representing” its members. Elsewhere, however, it appears that the CLASSE aspires to position itself not only as representative of the majority of strikers but of the entire population.

In the section that follows, I will compare and contrast the four discourses summarized above in terms of various ways in which they articulate the nodal point of identity “students”: which subjects it excludes, its capacity to unite and divide subjects, the different roles it assigns these subjects, the rights it affords its subjects, and its corresponding vision of education. Ultimately, I will compare and contrast these discourses in terms of their functions within the broader political and economic discourses of liberal democracy and neoliberal capitalism—discourses that may be described as hegemonic.

### **9.1. Definition by Exclusion: Establishing the Boundaries of Student Identity**

Perhaps the best way to begin discussing what students are in the four discourses under study is by discussing what they are not. In the discourse of *The Gazette*, to begin with, students are not participants in a democracy, distinguished explicitly from taxpayers and potentially even

from Quebecers more generally. The discourse of *La Presse* does not contest these distinctions, and further excludes parents and potentially workers from its definition of students. Furthermore, according to the CLASSE, students are not citizens, and their role within the population at large is left unclear.

There are other groups, however, excluded more subtly from these discourses' conceptions of students. For example, in articulating students with the tuition increase in terms of its amount and its effects, it becomes clear that these discourses are all referring specifically to undergraduate university students. This excludes a wide range of other people who could be considered students, from high school and CEGEP students, to autodidacts and independent scholars, to those engaged in magisteriate, doctoral, and post-doctoral studies, which serves to normalize undergraduate study as the epitome of education. Moreover, articulating students in this way excludes those enrolled in Quebec institutions who do not qualify as Quebec residents, since students from other parts of Canada and the world face significantly higher tuition fees and would possibly suffer different—perhaps more severe—consequences from such an increase.

Additionally, as discussed in the analysis, the use of the masculine plural noun “*étudiants*” to represent students in the French-language discourses serves to exclude those who do not identify as male. This effect is particularly severe in the discourse of the FECQ and FEUQ, in which “*étudiants*” is identified so strongly with individual actors and the feminine singular “*étudiante*” with collectivities and concepts that the two are best treated for analytical purposes as separate signifiers. The CLASSE attempts to address this dilemma by including both the masculine and feminine in the signifier “*étudiants et étudiantes*,” although such a phrase is rhetorically bulky and does not have the unifying effect of a single representative term. “*Étudiants et étudiantes*” also continues to place the masculine in a dominant position ahead of the feminine and, furthermore, reproduces an outdated gender binary that more and more people are coming to reject. Other possible alternatives would be to use gender-neutral terms such as “*nos membres*” (our members) and “*la population étudiante*” (the student population) as recommended by the Université d’Ottawa (n.d.), although the latter would raise the above-mentioned concerns about “population” representing a monolithic entity rather than a union of individuals. Perhaps the best route would be to reject the dictates of the Office québécois de la langue française (n.d.) and go with such forms as “*étudiant(e)s*,” “*étudiant-e-s*,” and

“*étudiantEs*,” although an even more radical feminist option would be to invert patriarchal grammatical convention and simply employ “*étudiantes*” to refer to a mixed-gender group of students.

## 9.2. Uniting and Dividing: the Strike and the Student Associations

Aside from the consistent pluralizing of students, all four of the discourses under study feature various articulations that evoke a unified collective rather than an assortment of individuals, which flies in the face of the neoliberal project of individualization. For instance, the primacy of the singular signifier “strike” to refer to student action—particularly over “boycott”—represents an acknowledgement that it is one large coordinated and sustained effort, regardless of the technicalities of how students go on strike, how long they remain on strike, and how the strike is enforced at each individual institution—if at all. However, the use of the formation “*étudiants en grève*,” more common in the discourses of *La Presse* and the student federations than in that of the CLASSE, belies the apparent oneness of students and indicates that they are not all on strike. *The Gazette*’s use of “strikers” and “striking students” similarly points to those students who are not actively striking, for whatever reason, and several of its articles play up the confrontation between the two groups. There is little acknowledgement that students not actively striking are not necessarily opposed to the effort themselves; they may include students not represented by a functioning association as well as those whose associations have not voted, have voted against the strike, or have voted in favor of the strike even though they personally cannot or do not want to actively participate in various strike activities.

Another discursive feature that paradoxically highlights both cohesion and discord among students is their relationship with various forms of representative organizations. On the one hand, terms such as “association” and “federation” carry with them from other discourses connotations of cooperation and solidarity. That of *La Presse* ignores differences between the FECQ, FEUQ, and CLASSE, labelling them all “*associations étudiantes*” and articulating them as together representing all students. Meanwhile, the CLASSE uses the same term to designate its member organizations, implying that the coalition includes all associations and that these associations include all students; on the other hand, the FECQ and FEUQ articulate “*fédération*” in such a way as to suggest that they, in fact, jointly represent all students. In the end, it becomes evident that having various bodies at various different levels representing—and competing to

represent—students as well as other bodies introduces the potential for conflict, particularly as the members of some are on strike while the members of others are not.

On the topic of students' representative organizations, it should be noted that in each of the discourses, these organizations are articulated not as being made up of students but as being somewhat apart from them, and it is generally students—not their organizations—that are on strike. This is particularly true of the discourse of the FECQ and FEUQ, in which they visibly remove themselves from students and “their strike.” Instead, the discourse of the federations assigns them responsibility for representing students from a safe distance, while that of the CLASSE leaves the task of representation to its member associations, itself opting to *bring together* students and only directly represent those who are on strike.

### **9.3. Performing the Role of Student: at Home, at School, and in the Street**

Although more episodic events such as protests and demonstrations do not figure significantly in the discourse of *La Presse*, they are directly articulated with students in the discourses of *The Gazette* and the student federations—so strongly in the case of *The Gazette* that the role of student becomes confused with that of protester, besides being further associated with violence, disruption, and intimidation. The latter thus equates students with trouble-makers, rabble-rousers, and aggressive radicals—and not in a flattering sense. In the discourse of the CLASSE, demonstrations instead have a positive connotation but are instead attributed primarily to the coalition, while in that of *La Presse* they are not attributed to any particular agent and are made to seem natural and unavoidable.

Additionally, students are assigned the role of children in the discourses of *The Gazette*, *La Presse* and the federations, which reduce their relationships with their parents and family—and, failing that, the state—to their condition of financial dependence. Of course, banks, resource extraction companies, and other large corporations depend far more heavily on government handouts and tax breaks without facing the same kind of infantilization. Only *The Gazette* further infantilizes students based on their refusal to accept the authority of the government and the supposed realities of new debt politics, presuming that these realities should have been impressed upon them by responsible adults. This infantilization is reinforced by the inclusion in all four of

the discourses studied here of signifiers such as “tuition” and “*scolarité*,” originally used in older discourses in reference to young children.

One role not fulfilled by students in any of the discourses under study, as mentioned above, is that of worker. Although the term “strike” is strongly articulated with students in each of these discourses, this articulation appears to strip it of its clear interdiscursive connection with the struggle for labor rights and acknowledge students’ capacity for collective action without accepting them as workers, whether in the literal sense of those who work or in terms of Marxist class analysis. Beyond ignoring that many students have paid employment in addition to their studies, this constitutes a failure to recognize their unpaid intellectual labor and reflects a universal neglect of the shared concerns of those from the bottom rung of property relations in favor of those from the “middle class.”

As for their relationship with their universities, in none of the discourses do students appear to play any active role in their functioning. Students are generally articulated with their universities through the paying of tuition fees in the discourses of *The Gazette* and *La Presse*, and through their student organizations in those of the federations and the CLASSE. The articulation involving tuition fees supports a consumerist model of education, with students as individual user-payers purchasing education for themselves, while the articulation involving student organizations adds an element of democratic representation—two visions that are not entirely contradictory but would end up clashing in the debates over individual versus collective rights that took place during the course of the strike.

Although there is some discussion of studies and research in the discourses of *The Gazette*, *La Presse*, and the federations, they are generally not articulated as activities done by students but treated as abstract concepts, as part of the university mission or—especially in the case of the federations—as evidence produced by third parties and used to justify their positions on the tuition increase. Furthermore, although university management—or mismanagement—is a major theme of the FECQ and FEUQ, “*gestion*” is not associated with students in their discourse; in other words, the federations want to see the universities better run but offer no part in this to those who pay to attend.

#### **9.4. Poor Substitutes: Student Rights to Education and to Strike, or the Lack Thereof**

The right to education is mentioned only twice in the texts included in this study, in articles from *La Presse* and *The Gazette*. While Elkouri (2012) credits students with acting in the best interest of all of society by defending this right, Seidman's (2012b) identified expert merely grants that "some students believe higher education is a right," expressed in passing as a fringe belief—ignoring the Quiet Revolution promise of free education as well as the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966).<sup>38</sup>

"*Droits*" is featured as a moment in the discourse of *La Presse* in the sense of tuition fees, although "*droits de scolarité*" also carries with it an additional sense in terms of the right to schooling, as discussed in the analysis. This right to schooling is not universal but based on an individual user-payer model, and the cost of this right is continually increasing, even though schooling does not represent the kind of mature, higher-order thinking that education does. Similarly, *The Gazette* implies that individual students have a right to pay for classes, and to attend those classes, articulating students with education through the act of paying. In order to encourage individuals to make this purchase—or perhaps in order to capitalize off it—it is suggested in *La Presse* that the government is also increasing their right to loans, which naturally carry interest, although this articulation is not sedimented in this discourse. It is made clear, nevertheless, that a right to loans is equivalent to a right to debt.

Meanwhile, the signifier "strike" is denied its sense of labor rights in being used to designate student action, as described above. In any case, the right to strike is not clearly articulated in any of the discourses under study. Instead, one article from *La Presse* has a university spokesperson affirming students' right to expression (Breton, 2012a), which is echoed by FECQ (2012b) president Bureau-Blouin in his reception of Judge Godbout's decision. Additionally, Bureau-Blouin impotently asserts students' "right not to attend their classes,"

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<sup>38</sup> Article 26, paragraph 1 of the UDHR states, "Everyone has the right to education," and though it only requires it to be free at the elementary level, it goes on to say that "higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit." Meanwhile, article 13, paragraph 1 of the CESCR recognizes "the right of everyone to education," and further states in paragraph 2(c), "Higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education." Canada is, of course, party to both of these agreements.

which is actually a simple corollary to the aforementioned individual right to attend classes and a meek substitute for the collective right to strike.

All of these discourses demonstrate a selective enforcement of the traditional liberal concept of rights, upholding some as inalienable while discarding others. Furthermore, rights are apparently granted by benevolent powers rather than claimed and won as history has shown they must be. A possible exception to this is the CLASSE, which does explicitly refer at least once to students' right to strike (CLASSE, 2012h), but otherwise seems to take for granted in its articulations students' rights to strike, to protest, and to take to the street.

### **9.5. A Neglected Nodal Point: the Purpose, Administration, and Funding of Education**

The signifier “education,” despite figuring more or less prominently in each of the discourses under study, is in none of them articulated directly with students. In *The Gazette*, education is weakly linked with the concept of accessibility, here referred to as “access,” as well as with the notion of quality; perpetually upping the ante and inflating individual debt is justified with dubious claims that it will not harm accessibility, and is in fact necessary to maintain quality, although neither notion is clearly defined. However, education is most often associated with cost, in terms of how fortunate students are that government or “taxpayers” pay the large majority of it. “The cost of that education is worth it,” bloviates one editorial (“Will the songs,” 2012), apparently only referring to that part of the cost being charged to the individual and the benefit to that individual. Like the articulation of the signifier “pay” as discussed in the above analysis of *The Gazette*'s discourse, this reproduces a neoliberal vision of education in which it is simply purchased and consumed by student-clients; a vision that ignores the benefits that individuals and collectivities with a genuine education bring to the society at large, not to mention to potential employers. Instead, the purpose of this mass commodified education is the preparation of the individual for “adulthood,” which is a euphemism for a free-for-all market in which one either produces resources or is consumed as one.

In the discourses of *La Presse*, the federations, and the CLASSE, the only consistent articulation of education is with the Minister or the Ministry of Education, an articulation that highlights the hierarchical, bureaucratic management of institutionalized learning. This political framework is not necessarily incompatible with the economic one described above, so long as



the minister is only a technocrat *managing* or *administering* the education system, conforming to the widely-accepted general principles of the more dominant economic paradigm. The CLASSE, however, does make some comments critical of how education is financed, referring in one press release to both the tuition increase and university financing as “*la question de fond*” (the underlying issue) (CLASSE, 2012f). “*Il existe des moyens plus justes de financer l’éducation et les services publics*” (There are fairer ways to finance education and public services), Nadeau-Dubois says in another press release (CLASSE, 2012c), while a third calls on companies “*de faire leur juste part dans le financement de l’éducation*” (to do their fair share in the financing of education) (CLASSE, 2012b).

### **9.6. Reproduction Versus Contestation: Hegemonic Political and Economic Discourses**

The four discourses analyzed in this study may ultimately be said to function within the context of broader, hegemonic discourses that dominate societies; in some ways reproducing these discourses and in some ways challenging them. For example, *The Gazette* reproduces the emphasis of democratic discourse on electoral politics and equality under the law, but challenges classical liberal articulations pertaining to civil liberties, minority rights, and constraints on executive power. The result is the elevation of the elected government to near impunity, approaching what Rhoden (2015) might call electoral despotism and Norton (2012), an illiberal democracy; the dangerous implication is essentially that a government, as long as it is democratically elected, can do almost anything it wants. In fact, in *The Gazette*’s discourse, democracy appears to be articulated solely with government—although it would be interesting to see if this remained the case with a party other than the capital-L Liberals in power.

The discourses of *La Presse* and the student federations may more properly be called liberal democratic discourses, since they reproduce some of the classical liberal articulations rejected by *The Gazette* in addition to the traditionally democratic ones. For instance, they both articulate protest demonstrations as a normal, natural, and even positive part of the social realm. However, without any particular purpose or outcome, these demonstrations are merely an outlet for the airing of grievances instead of a vehicle for political change or a threat to the established order. This may be because the liberal concepts of *rights* to protest or to education are still largely missing from the discourses of *La Presse* and the federations, and the democratic notion of “rule by the people” continues to be belied by their emphasis on hierarchical relationships in

the polity at large, in universities, and even within the student organizations. Moreover, in the discourse of *La Presse*, like in that of *The Gazette*, the student associations and their “leaders” gain legitimacy only through their association with the government.

Contrary to *The Gazette*, the CLASSE exalts articulations evoking the civil liberties and minority rights of classical liberal discourse, but trades liberalism’s emphasis on individual and property rights for collective rights and what may be called, in spite of Rhoden’s objections, a “deeper” or “more substantive” conception of democracy—or perhaps something that goes beyond Rhoden’s election-centred idea of democracy altogether. The government also plays a smaller role in the coalition’s discourse than in any of the others studied. Conversely, in spite of demonstrating features of a more direct and participatory democracy, the discourse of the CLASSE, like the others, offers little opportunity for direct student involvement in the university or the organization itself.

All four of the discourses studied feature articulations challenging those of neoliberal capitalism. For example, all of them at least begrudgingly feature students as a group-subject articulated with the collective action of a strike—although stripping the strike of its labor rights connotation represents a significant compromise. The discourses of *La Presse*, the federations, and the CLASSE further challenge neoliberal articulations of the tuition increase as students’ “fair share” and as ultimately beneficial in maintaining their quality of education, suggesting instead that it is detrimental to them as well as their families in the case of the federations and possibly even the entire population in that of the CLASSE. In addition, the discourse of *La Presse* articulates a tuition freeze as a realistic possibility—but it is only the discourse of *La Presse*, and it goes no further than a freeze.

On the other hand, the discourse of *The Gazette* may be categorized as resolutely neoliberal in its distinction between students and taxpayers, its articulation of students with university through the act of paying, and its portrayal of those opposing neoliberal measures as violent children. The discourses of *La Presse* and the student federations similarly depict students as children on the basis of their presumed financial dependence, only acknowledge those rights for which they have paid, and demonstrate a neoliberal logic of calculation in focusing on the amount of the increase, whether as a dollar figure or a percentage. The FECQ and FEUQ equally appeal to neoliberal imperatives with their talk of university management.

Only the discourse of the CLASSE can be considered largely absent of neoliberal articulations, although it appears to offer few economic alternatives aside from the syndicalism and solidarity incorporated into its name; the coalition's decidedly anti-neoliberal calls for a reinstatement of the capital tax on financial institutions, an increase in the number of tax brackets, and increased support for public institutions are not expressed consistently enough to form genuine discursive articulations. Instead, the CLASSE opts to play populist politics and pander to the center by articulating itself as hero of Quebec's imagined "middle class."

## Chapter 10: Conclusion

In this thesis paper, I have presented the results of a comparative discourse analysis based on the post-structuralist, post-Marxist discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe (1985), with supplemental analytical tools borrowed from Fairclough's critical discourse theory (1995). I have deconstructed the discursive articulations, exploring the relationships between polysemic signifiers sedimented as moments and nodal points, in the discourses of *The Gazette*, *La Presse*, the FECQ and FEUQ, and the CLASSE surrounding the 2012 student strike and widespread uprising known as the *Printemps érable*. Finding that the signifier "students," and its French-language equivalent "*étudiants*," form nodal points of identity or master signifiers occupying a key position at the center of each discourse, I used these signifiers as the starting point of my analysis and examined how they are articulated with other signifiers, which ultimately produced a portrait of the student identity in each one. Finally, I compared these identities in terms of who they exclude, their capacity to unite or divide, the various roles they entail, the rights associated with them, their correlating visions of education, and their connection to overarching hegemonic political and economic discourses.

Any notions of a typical media discourse or a generic student discourse were quickly debunked, and it could even be argued that the discourse of *La Presse* has more in common with that of the FECQ and FEUQ than with that of *The Gazette*; the reality of the two solitudes, the oft invisible but gaping divide between Quebec's anglophone and francophone communities, is perhaps a contributing factor here. *The Gazette*'s discourse may best be described as that of an illiberal or perhaps neoliberal democracy, one that retains principally those articulations of liberalism that conform to free market principles—most significantly individualism. Meanwhile, *La Presse* and the student federations both reproduce a more-or-less liberal democratic discourse as well as expressing an unease with neoliberalism, unquestioningly accepting some of its articulations while rejecting others. The discourse of the CLASSE, in turn, goes beyond liberalism in articulating what Beggs (2008) might describe as a "postliberal" democracy; non-liberal, but not anti-liberal, in recognizing that the rights of voluntary groups, in their exertion of moral authority, may temporarily override those of their individual members. This discourse includes some features of direct and participatory democracy, as well as a resistance to

neoliberalism, although there is little indication of any articulations representing alternatives, let alone the kind of economic radicalism that many of its opponents—and some of its proponents—identify it with.

This research is most significant in identifying discursive articulations to foster, and those to resist, for those of us working toward social justice in education and more generally. Moreover, in illustrating how discourses are more likely to contest the hegemony of liberal democracy than that of neoliberal capitalism, it reaffirms the dominance of the latter; the political is ultimately subordinate to the economic. Put another way, it is much more feasible to challenge Quebec's political order if this challenge remains within the bounds of the hegemonic economic paradigm, at the risk of coming off not just as radical but as totally absurd, perhaps even incomprehensible. This observation appears to endorse Gintis and Bowles' assertion that the education system is a sub-site of the state with the purpose of "*serv*ing the site of capitalist production" (1982, p. 51, emphasis in original).

Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) discourse theory served as a valuable tool in analyzing the discourses of the newspapers and student associations, although it did present some challenges. One such challenge was in deciding whether a connection between two signifiers was strong enough to constitute an actual discursive articulation, and distinguishing between undefined elements and fixed moments—fixed at least temporarily or contingently. Another challenge was that, in focusing on the individual articulations between each signifier, it became difficult to make judgements about each discourse as a whole; in everyday terms, it was hard to see the forest for the trees. Moreover, an analytical approach based on discourse theory is confined largely to the obvious sense of the words on the page, with little allowance for such intricacies as nuance or insinuation, making it difficult to fully make sense of each document. In this regard, framing analytical approaches such as Entman's (1993; 2007) described in the conceptual framework above may have proven more useful.

It could also be argued that I should have instead employed Fairclough's (1995) critical discourse theory as the primary framework for my analysis. His three-dimensional model of discourse, and particularly his concept of discursive practice as mediating text and social practice, would have proven useful in assessing how representative each text is of its discourse. For example, are the CLASSE's press releases really the best indicators of the discourse of that

organization, or were they purposefully crafted by its communications team with the news media in mind in order to be more palatable to a mass audience? Could the articles in the CLASSE's own newspaper, *L'Ultimatum*, better defy the hegemony of neoliberal capitalism? Could its manifesto, *Nous sommes avenir*, do more to express the coalition's commitment to the principles of direct, participatory democracy? For that matter, is the CLASSE's discourse really representative of that of its member associations, or of students at large? Additionally, Fairclough's notion of intertextuality would have allowed for an analysis of the change in discourses over time, as some of them are clearly not saying the same thing in February as they are in June. For the moment, these possibilities remain open for further research.

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