Location, Location, Location:
Restorative (Educative) Practices in Classrooms

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Perhaps since their inception, public schools have attempted to mitigate and prevent violence, inside the schools themselves and also (through the education of current and future citizens) in society at large. While conflict itself is natural and may be addressed in life-giving ways, patterns of *destructive* conflict (violence) are both symptoms and enforcers of "dysfunctional relations of power and authority" (Franklin, 2006, p. 260). What kinds of learning opportunities in schools might best address conflict constructively, and resolve the *causes* of violence, in school and in society?

Conflicts themselves —oppositions among interests, ideas, or demands— are inevitable in any community, including schools: the diverse ways educators handle these conflicts, directly and indirectly, shape students' implicit and explicit learning experiences. It is important to distinguish between "negative peace" —*cessation or avoidance* of direct, physical violence, which does not resolve underlying conflict causes— and "positive peace" —the *presence* of democratic relationships and structures for handling conflict constructively and justly, to address causes and eliminate systemic as well as direct forms of violence (Galtung, 1969). The goal of negative peace is elusive, because typical approaches tend to focus on controlling symptoms through exclusion and force, rather than on addressing underlying causes embedded in dysfunctional and oppressive relationships. Nonviolent action to create positive peace embodies resourcefulness: creation of options and relationships to address conflicts constructively, even in the face of long odds (Franklin 2006 p. 261).

Peace and conflict theory distinguishes three overlapping goals for managing conflict, ranging from relatively unidimensional (post-incident intervention) to comprehensive and proactive. Peace*keeping* involves monitoring and control interventions (including discipline sanctions) to enforce temporarily cessation of violence (negative peace). Peace*making* includes both intervention and problem-solving dialogue, to resolve disputes after they surface. Peace*building* includes peacemaking dialogue, for peacemaking but also for longer-term, more fundamental processes of redressing injustice, democratization, and nurturing healthy social relationships (positive peace – addressing the underlying sources of systemic as well as direct violence) (Galtung, 1996; I. Harris & Morrison, 2003).

Public schools, as the primary institutions where diverse populations meet to prepare for a collective future, are logical places to facilitate learning and practice of thoughtful,

inclusive conflict dialogue, as a key element of creating positive, sustainable peace. However, for various reasons they do not necessarily do so. In managing conflicts that arise, schools may emphasize reasserting control through punishment and exclusion (peace*keeping*), OR guiding thoughtful, respectful dialogue for self-governing conflict resolution (peace*making*). At other times, when conflicts are not so disruptive, schools may tend to avoid facing divisive underlying conflicts and justice matters, OR to use relatively peaceful moments to approach more challenging, constructively critical education — to (re-)build mutual understanding and social ties and to redress underlying injustices (peace*building*). Implementing comprehensive peacebuilding seems to be especially challenging where poor and racialized students are clustered in under-resourced schools, and constrained by standardized curriculum and testing.

Clearly, conflict dialogue is an important component of both peacemaking and peacebuilding, for handling conflicts after they arise inside schools and also as a component of education for peacebuilding citizenship in society. 'Restorative' approaches to conflict, clearly, rely heavily on facilitated dialogue. What *kinds* and *topics* of dialogue, with what range of participants, are typically encouraged by restorative initiatives? *Where* are these initiatives typically located in institutional contexts, and how does this make a difference?

Prior research: Reactive and proactive anti-violence education in Canadian schools

My recent Safe and Inclusive Schools project involved case studies of the ranges of anti-violence, peacemaking and peacebuilding (intervention and prevention) efforts in three large, government-funded urban school districts with differently-diverse populations, in different Canadian provinces. We interviewed district-wide purposive samples of educators engaged in peacekeeping, peacemaking, and/or peacebuilding-related efforts (in schools and as centrally-assigned leaders and resource people). In addition, in one of the districts, we 'drilled down' to interview purposive samples of educators engaged in peacekeeping, peacemaking, and/or peacebuilding-related efforts in five 'focus' schools, identified because they had comparably diverse, non-affluent populations but either quite high or quite low rates of violent incidents and punitive suspension. Although the sampling and interview questions were intended to (and did) address the widest possible range of violence- and conflict-related educational work, in retrospect the study method tended to elicit more detailed information about out-of-classroom activities than about classroom teaching.

We found a mismatch between the rhetoric of public schooling —which affirms democracy and peaceful, equitable social relations— and the actually-implemented anti-violence and conflict management initiatives in many of these public schools (Bickmore, 2010, 2011). We found more similarities than differences across the three districts, including a generally increased emphases on strict discipline and control (peacekeeping) approaches over the preceding fifteen years. To differing degrees in various schools and districts, punishments and restrictions seemed to be disproportionately imposed on less-privileged and visible minority populations of students, whereas opportunities for peacemaking and peacebuilding agency and dialogue were often disproportionately available to the highest-status students. At the same time, in all three districts, there had been recent challenges and marked policy change to revise safe schools-related programming and regulations to try to alleviate these inequities.

For example, recent 'anti-bullying' initiatives in several schools (across districts) had in practice diverted a considerable portion of co-curricular programming resources away from peacemaking and dialogue, toward more restrictive peacekeeping. Although clearly the safety of the most vulnerable members of school communities is extremely important, at the same time such restrictive treatment, especially when based on insufficient understanding of particular students' cultures and contexts, would reinforce social hierarchies and fracture the social relationships required for more sustainable, democratic peacebuilding. The study findings support the arguments of Elliot Aronson (2000) and Pedro Noguera (1995), who in different ways showed how competitive, dehumanizing, and inequitable school environments (compared to equitable, cooperative environments) make severe violence more likely. While the new policy discourses in the three districts recognized the problem of inequity in the ways adults were managing student conflicts, they generally attempted to be fairer and gentler in applying restrictive, adult-driven control practices, more than they added or shifted basic conflict management approaches away from a predominant emphasis on peacekeeping, toward peacemaking or peacebuilding.

The Safe and Inclusive Schools research did, however, also identify some innovative peacebuilding education initiatives in all three case study districts. Many of these programs for conflict resolution, social skills, community building, intercultural and anti-bias education, and youth leadership development tended to be small, marginal, and not institutionalized in staffing or regular curriculum. However, differences among schools within and between districts pointed to some promising avenues for change. For example, some schools had created credit courses (thus, regularized teacher staffing and timetable space, broadly accessible to students) for student peacemaking leadership activities. Two districts had approved equity and human rights (including anti-homophobia) policies and advisory staffing that were helping to infuse this kind of constructive conflict learning into implemented curriculum and school programming. A few schools had implemented restorative justice peacemaking circle processes to facilitate repair of community relationships and collective problem solving after complex violence incidents. Thus proactive, equitable, democratically-oriented anti-violence programming is indeed possible in stressed public schools serving diverse populations, but this programming is evidently at risk, in part because current standardization and high stakes accountability reforms are narrowing the space for such programming. My current Peace-Building Dialogue in Schools study picks up at this point, to try to understand what impedes and supports implementation and sustainability of democratic conflict dialogue practices, within and beyond classrooms, in the current social and political environments of public schools.

Conflict dialogue in public schools

There are many potential opportunities for constructive conflict talk (dialogue) in the regularized activities of schooling — discipline, governance, and classroom pedagogies.

> "Dialogue is a communication process that aims to build relationships between people as they share experiences, ideas and information about a common concern. It also aims to help people take in more information and perspectives than they previously had, as they attempt to forge a new and broader understanding of a situation" (Schirch & Campt, 2007, p. 6)

Various terms describe different kinds of conflict talk, such as debate, constructive controversy, issues discussion, conflict resolution, and deliberation. I use the term dialogue broadly and inclusively, to foreground processes of facilitated communication for understanding in the context of social (interpersonal and intergroup) conflict. Dialogue processes may be just as heated as debate, but are focused on developing understanding (and sometimes making decisions), not on competing or winning.

In this imperfect world, all conflict dialogue takes place in the context of dynamic and unequal social power. Dialogue can be democratic and transformative if both its subject-matter and its procedures explicitly acknowledge and address such power differentials: "Dialogue (the two acts of speaking and listening) is actually about emergence: the bringing out of new and previously hidden meanings and understandings"(Davies, 2004, p. 216). Three overlapping arenas for such dialogue in schools and classrooms include: (1) post-incident peacemaking, restorative justice, and restorative discipline programming, (2) student participation in school or classroom governance, and (3) conflict resolution education and conflict dialogue opportunities, infused in enacted classroom curriculum.

Post-incident interpersonal problem-solving: peacemaking and restorative justice: One particularly well-researched school-based conflict dialogue initiative is peer mediation, in which trained students facilitate problem-solving negotiation to help peers autonomously resolve interpersonal disputes. While peer mediation can be implemented in classrooms, giving all students in a given class an opportunity to participate (Johnson & Johnson, 1996), it is more commonly implemented as a co-curricular 'cadre' leadership initiative, in which selected students mediate on call or in the school yard, outside of regular classes. Quality peer mediation programs reduce aggressive behavior and develop both mediators' and peer participants' reasoning, social skills, and openness to handle conflict constructively (Bickmore, 2002; Burrell, Zirbel, & Allen, 2003; Cunningham, 1998; R. Harris, 2005; Jones, 2004). Inclusive programs with diverse peer mediators are the most sustainable and effective (Bickmore, 2001; Day-Vines, Day-Hairston, Carruthers, Wall, & Lupton-Smith, 1996). However, our recent research in Canadian schools suggests that many peer peacemaking programs are not being sustained in the current climate of school budget constraints, or do not offer inclusive learning and leadership opportunities to diverse students (Bickmore & MacDonald, Forthcoming 2011).

Various restorative and transformative justice circle processes for dialogic conflict management, derived from aboriginal traditions, are also emerging as effective alternatives to punitive systems in many contexts.

> Transformative processes enable the wider community to participate in denouncing crime, supporting victims, and building true solutions. They also enable the wider community to take responsibility for the underlying causes of crime: poverty, abused children, unemployment, discrimination, and other deep social problems. The community is enabled to take these on in digestible servings. It does not need to solve the whole unemployment or poverty problem at once, but each case dealt with transformatively enables the community to work on a portion of it, contribute to its healing, and understand and address better the larger issues that lie behind it (Morris, 2000, p. 254).

Circle processes include victims, offenders, and community members in problem-solving dialogue, to address underlying causes of complex conflicts and aggression (also Consadine, 1999; Pranis, Stuart, & Wedge, 2003). In school settings, dialogue circle processes are particularly appropriate for addressing seriously harmful situations, and conflicts that are too complex or power-imbalanced for mediation, but like peer mediation they also can be used in less acute conflict situations and in proactive educational activities (Amstutz & Mullet, 2005; Claassen & Claassen, 2004). The research of Brenda Morrison (2007) and Gillean McCluskey and colleagues (2008) demonstrates positive results of conferencing and other circle processes, in Australian, Canadian, United Kingdom, and United States schools. They explain that inclusive, in-depth, well-facilitated conflict dialogue can be transformational when it engages hearts as well as minds, and supports development of skills and healthy relationships (as well as helping to resolve particular conflict incidents that surface).

Student self-governance: Class meetings, councils, affinity and advocacy groups:

Dialogic peacemaking such as peer mediation and restorative circles are a form of self-governance, in the sense that students participate in making autonomous decisions to help resolve problems that affect them. Other kinds of student self-governance, though not typically recognized as peacemaking, also constitute opportunities to practice conflict dialogue. In class meetings and some school councils, such dialogue is directly guided by a teacher, often with student co-leadership, aimed at supporting development of skills, strategies, and mutual understanding in the context of conflict (Angell, 2004; Cotmore, 2004). In other instances, adult advisors take a background role, providing considerable autonomy, within bounds, for some students to negotiate and make decisions autonomously: such participation opportunities have been associated in survey studies with young people's development of commitment and skills for democratic (thus, social conflict) participation (Kahne & Sporte, 2008; Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schultz, 2001).

My Safe and Inclusive Schools study uncovered a few instances in which diverse student affinity groups were empowered to self-govern and to act as equity advocates on behalf of particular identities and viewpoints, although more often student governments or leadership groups did not have apparent opportunities to address much conflict or diversity (Bickmore & MacDonald, Forthcoming 2011). Other research describes frequent patterns of inequity, in which generally high-status populations are disproportionately included and 'represented' by student councils (Wyness, 2009), or adults restrict opportunities for self-expression to students behaving 'appropriately' (Wyse, 2001). Many student councils do not have opportunities to autonomously address deeply significant or conflictual topics (Alderson, 2000; Deuchar, 2009). Clearly student participation in governance constitutes a *potential* opportunity for conflict dialogue. However, there is little evidence examining why such dialogic participation is not more common, or how it may be most effectively facilitated.

Conflict (resolution) education infused in academic curriculum: Contrasting ideologies, perspectives, and problems are embedded in any school subject matter, and may be brought out into the light, probed and discussed in classroom pedagogy (Claire & Holden, 2007; Deng & Luke, 2008; Kumashiro, 2000; Parker & Hess, 2001). Infusion of such conflict and conflict resolution as a learning opportunity need not necessarily involve public issues or controversies. David and Roger Johnson, for example, say that their proposed pedagogical strategy, though they call it "constructive controversy," "is a procedure for learning, not for

addressing controversial issues or controversial subject matter" (2009, p. 39). At the same time, they argue that addressing conflict is what makes subject matter engaging:

> Conflict is to student learning what the internal combustion engine is to the automobile. The internal combustion engine ignites the fuel and the air with a spark to create the energy for movement and acceleration. Just as the fuel and the air are inert without the spark, so, ideal in the classroom are inert without the spark of intellectual conflict. Intellectual conflict is the spark that energizes students to seek out new information and study harder and longer (Johnson & Johnson, 2009, p. 37).

Similarly, Peter Elbow (1986) argues that thinking through contradictions, for example by temporarily taking on and voicing a point of view different from one's own, is necessary to provoke deep learning.

Conflict (resolution) dialogue practices integrated into subject-matter curriculum may focus, for example, on interpersonal communication skills, and/or questions of global responsibility and justice, and/or characters' perspectives in literature or historical narratives, and/or subject-area-based strategies for addressing problems. Such pedagogies can facilitate engagement and skill building in so-called technical subjects such as math and science (Crumbaugh, 1996; Frankenstein, 1987; Settlage & Sabik, 1996), as well as in subjects more typically associated with discussion such as arts, literature, and social studies (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Luke, 2000; Sandmann, 2004; Sills-Briegel & Camp, 2000; Wasson, Anderson, & Suriani, 1999). Discussion of conflictual issues can be implemented effectively in primary classrooms (Fain, 2008) and in contested social contexts (Barton & McCully, 2007; Murphy, 2010). As in restorative peacemaking or governance contexts, dialogic pedagogies in classrooms generally imply more horizontal relationships between teachers and students than traditional teacher-centred pedagogies (Bartlett, 2005; Tholander, 2007). Clearly, not all conflict skills curriculum actually offers opportunities for diverse students to engage in sustained *discussion* of conflictual issues (Dull & Murrow, 2008). Also, curriculum that opens conflictual topics for discussion does not always explicitly support inclusion of diverse students, or guided development of skills and understandings for talking about conflict. At the same time, subject-matter curriculum carries immense potential for conflict learning and dialogue practice: it takes up many hours of the school day, and meaningful curricular topics may embody the problems and approaches to problem-solving of each field of knowledge.

Location, location, location: What kinds of dialogue?

One of the perhaps taken-for-granted differences among the above conflict dialogue opportunities is their institutional locations: in 'core' classroom curriculum, in explicit co-curricular spaces such as student organizations or peer mediation centres, or in the implicit co-curricular spaces of administration and discipline. These institutional locations for dialogue probably have very important implications for who participates, how sustained the dialogue may be, and what kinds of conflict (and justice) issues are (and are not) usually taken up in these conversations.

Clearly restorative and transformative justice practices, in their origins in and around justice systems and social movements *outside* schools, have been designed (in both theory and practice) primarily as post-incident problem-solving processes, not primarily as spaces for education, public issues discussion, or even proactive community building (Lederach, 2003; Zehr, 2002). As restorative practices have been applied *inside* schools, they have been re-

theorized to include pro-active educative and community-building elements, at other points in the conflict cycle (Morrison, 2007; Vaandering, 2009). Sometimes this has been framed as the philosophy of including a whole-school as well as an individual approach.

Despite this inclusion of proactive, long-range and broadly educative goals and activities in the *theory* of restorative justice practices in schools, it appears that most of the school *practices* taken up in the name of restorative justice, and most of the research on those practices, have focused mostly on cessation of violence (negative peace) through transforming discipline and conflict management practices, primarily outside of regular classroom curriculum (Ashworth et al., 2008; Blood & Thorsborne, 2005; Stinchcomb, Bazemore, & Riestenberg, 2006).

As one illustration, the province of Ontario, Canada, recently has put out a series of regulations and reports on developing 'caring and safe' school climates, most recently *Caring and Safe Schools in Ontario* (Ministry of Education, 2010). None of these documents give any significant attention to the explicit 'academic' curriculum or classroom pedagogy: this makes it unclear *who*, actually, might carry out the necessary changes in each school, at what times and in what locations. Sometimes when a responsibility belongs to 'everyone' and to 'all' locations in the school, in reality it belongs to nobody in particular. The 2010 document, for example, describes a safe school culture as including caring and cooperative relationships, common values, respect for cultural and individual diversity, respect for law and order, "clear and consistent behavioural expectations," and appropriate role modeling of these behaviours (p.11). What are *missing* here, typical of such discourse in many places, are:

- *education* (teaching and guiding students and adult staff in *how* to communicate about and resolve conflicts constructively, to rebuild damaged relationships, etc.) and
- *conflict resolution* (developing and sustaining school processes for airing and addressing multiple legitimate viewpoints instead of premature blame, and for inviting and supporting participation of multiple, diverse stakeholders in collective problem solving).

Some such initiatives (social skills programs, conflict mediation, character education, and even restorative circle practices) are mentioned on one page (41) as 'strategies and tools,' although the report does not address where those activities might be located in the daily work of schooling. Perhaps more importantly, 'peace' itself in the school is conceptualized as an ideal state of relations, an *absence* of problems ('negative peace'), not as redress of structural problems or as *on-going presence of processes and roles* for teaching and practicing peacemaking and peacebuilding ('positive peace') as part of the core, daily work of enacted curriculum and pedagogy.

To take up restorative dialogue primarily in the 'discipline' arena of human relations control and conflict management would tend to focus energies on individual 'problem' students & situations, *after* episodes of harm. In contrast, to take up restorative dialogue in the enacted 'curriculum' arena of classroom teaching/ learning practices would tend to focus energies on building skills, understandings, identities & relationships in 'whole' communities, and on proactive as well as responsive initiatives *throughout* the conflict cycle. What might be viable *alternative* institutional entry points for restorative practices in schools, that might not 'pull' restorative justice practice so much toward the peace*keeping* end of the continuum (in discipline), away from comprehensive peace*building* (in classroom pedagogies)?

How might various kinds of dialogue impact social inequality?

A challenge that intersects with all of the above is how restorative dialogue practices may intersect with diversity and inequity among students. The literature reviewed above suggests that various kinds of conflict dialogue may be feasibly and effectively implemented in public school settings. However, such *sustained, inquisitive, carefully-facilitated communicative talk* about difficult issues is not very often implemented in most schools or classrooms. In particular, when marginalized and lower-status students are included in restorative practices, they may be framed primarily as victims and offenders (even as somehow defective individuals), more than as learners. How may diverse, unequal-status students be fully included in various kinds of conflict dialogue in schools, and how might they be enabled (or impeded) to develop their distinct voices and democratic agency?

Even the most well-intended, inclusive discussion of conflicts may not mitigate —may even exacerbate— social inequalities (Ellsworth, 1989).

> Just as diversity can be a deliberative strength, it can also re-inscribe social divisions if students feel they are being silenced or do not want to voice opinions that differ from the majority (Hess & Avery, 2008, p. 514)

When conflict surfaces, it is often the lowest-status or most marginalized participants who are exposed to the most risk of discomfort and harm, because it is their ways of being and thinking that are most likely to be unfamiliar or unpopular. Observational studies of teachers facilitating such conflict dialogue suggest that poor and visible minority students often have fewer opportunities to participate in sustained, inclusive discussions in academic classrooms compared to more privileged peers (Dull & Murrow, 2008), and that when those discussions do occur, they may be disproportionately marginalized or stigmatized (Subedi, 2008). Gender and sexual identities also influence the shape and consequences of conflictual discussions (Gordon, 2006). At the same time, pedagogical approaches do make a difference. For example, in comparing two classrooms in the same school, Hemmings (2000) found that a competitive debate approach tended to marginalize less-confident and lower-status students, more than a more cooperative and open discussion approach.

Agency is "…the ongoing process of (un)making ourselves through explorations of our positioning within [multiple & contrasting] discourse" (McKenzie, 2006, p. 203). How may conflict dialogues in schools and classrooms be designed and facilitated to make them safe (respectful) enough, and yet challenging (dissonant) enough, to enable young participants' relational engagement and talk across differences? What dialogue structures (format characteristics), and what skills and strategies (performance) within these formats, facilitate constructive, respectful expressions of diverse identities, ideologies, and emotions by the widest possible range of participants? What school and local social context factors make such education most feasible and sustainable? My new Peace-Building Dialogue research project is examining a range of ways in which teachers may open curriculum-linked opportunities for dialogue in classrooms, and make it constructive and inclusive in mixed groups.

A new research study: Peace-Building Dialogue

My new research project examines in depth how conflict dialogue circles and related processes may be feasibly learned and implemented, in both classroom and co-curricular

lived curriculum settings, with what consequences for educators and diverse students. This initial phase of the research involves review of scholarly literature, and grounded theory analysis (Charmaz, 2000) of contrasting cases of conflict dialogue initiatives used with diverse youth in public school settings. Qualitative, comparative case study methods facilitate rich description of complex phenomena, juxtaposing the perspectives of diverse participants with a wider perspective on their social contexts (Miller & Glassner, 1997; Stake, 2000). Through participant observation, document analysis, and semi-structured interviews, each case study examines how educators are trained as circle process facilitators, and how circle processes are implemented in each school setting (in discipline and/or classroom pedagogy). Comparisons among contrasting cases of conflict dialogue —from post-incident restorative peacemaking through pro-active democratic and peacebuilding issues discussion— should shed light on different options and elements of addressing the challenges discussed above. Eventually, the project will develop and pilot test instruments for assessing the effectiveness of particular dialogue processes in resolving conflicts, repairing harm to relationships, and facilitating young participants' development of skills and inclinations for nonviolent and democratic social participation. Videotaping training and simulation activities will provide substantive opportunities for research participants to learn with the research team and to have input in our analysis. The focus of the case studies and literature review is to refine theoretical understandings of how various kinds of dialogue processes work, how they are influenced by their school contexts, how educators may learn to facilitate dialogue, and how to capture and interpret the impact of dialogue circle participation on youth participants.

Initial case study sites have included two 'alternative' (publicly-funded magnet) schools whose missions emphasize democratic social justice education: teachers from the two schools together participated in a teacher professional development workshop (in February 2010) about how to conduct dialogue circle processes, applied to both interpersonal problem-solving (restorative justice) and curriculum infusion of dialogue opportunities.

One site, A4, is a new primary (K-4) school that has also used circle processes to begin addressing some school start-up disagreements between parents and teachers. Most of the A4 teachers chose to teach circle dialogue processes in their classrooms, and to implement them primarily for restorative problem solving (after incidents of interpersonal conflict), in class meetings. To combine additional teacher learning opportunities with student learning opportunities, each classroom teacher co-led with an outside facilitator between two and four classroom sessions for students on dialogue circle processes and norms, in addition to independently teaching and using restorative dialogue processes in their own classrooms.

For example, *Teacher 3's Grade 1 class* at School A4 began by teaching and guiding students' practice of communication skills, including a three-step conflict resolution process ("say how you feel, say what you heard and say what you need").

> At the beginning of the year, especially in Grade 1, students can't listen for very long time without breaks, so a real natural break is to give them the opportunity to sit and talk in partners (which is sometimes call 'think, pair, share,' or 'sit eye to eye, knee to knee'). And so I do that a lot at the beginning of the year, and then I assign roles to each of the pairs and then I'll give them a question to discuss, which is usually an introductory question so that they can get to know each other... breaking down just the

> skills, for what helps us in terms of effective communication, because I realize that what's critical to that circle process is being able to speak and articulate how you feel, but speak in ways that people will understand you ... By the time we started formally having circles every week, I was able to use that language and use that understanding (interview SchlA4,Jun4-T3).

By February, after some professional development on facilitating circle processes, Teacher 3 was holding weekly class meetings, in circle. She explained:

> I found that the first few times we all came together in a circle, I asked the students to review why it's important to sit in a circle. How does sitting in a circle help us to communicate? Because we can see each other, it allows us to take turns. And they had a sense that we would go around the circle, everyone would have a turn ... you could always pass if you needed to. So, those things were in place before we tried to do, uh use circles to intentionally unpack conflict (interview SchlA4,Jun4-T3).

This Grade 1 class discussed issues such as student-student aggression (pushing, etc.) on the playground and, in another instance, the exclusionary ways the class had been treating one unpopular student. In the former instance (obsSchlA4,Mar8-T3,Gr1), the teacher managed the conversation without a talking piece, sometimes addressing individual students whose experiences she wanted to bring into the conversation, in other cases ceding the floor to whichever students volunteered to speak up (thus some remained silent). She asked a series of open-ended and probing questions to elicit an initially-silent student's point of view, and to guide his classmates to set aside blame and hear his perspective, and she invited and paraphrased other students' alternate perspectives on the situation. In another instance (described in an interview), Teacher 3 passed a talking piece around the class circle, inviting each student to talk about, "what can we do to have a safe class, with [the targeted student as well as themselves] included in it?" They went on address the question, "What do you do if someone in the class is behaving in a different way? Like, what are some of the ways we can respond and support each other?" While students had the option to pass without speaking, Teacher 3 said all students were highly engaged in these circles, because they had strong feelings about these conflicts. The teacher encouraged students to name frustrations and validated their feelings. She distinguished feelings from behaviour, telling the children that "not liking is OK, but [not] doing mean things and sharing that with other people..." Problems discussed in these circles sometimes responded to immediate issues that had arisen, and sometimes addressed issues children had submitted anonymously to a 'problem box.'

Teacher 3 reflected that it generally took 15-20 minutes for a talking piece to go around the circle and give every one a chance to speak, which could be "too much sitting ... very hard [for such young children] to wait your turn." Therefore, she interspersed circle dialogues with various activities such as talking to a partner, moving to a new place in the circle, brainstorming, or role-play practice with new skills and roles. With this modification, these Grade 1 students showed aptitude and interest in discussing and suggesting constructive responses to interpersonal disputes, even to complex issues of social exclusion and fairness. When Teacher 3 did pass the talking piece to every student, it elicited involvement of more students in the dialogue process than when students just volunteered or were called upon. Teacher 3 reflected that her first semester of having implemented these processes had gone

well, and described her intent to expand her use of circle dialogue to include more curriculum-linked lessons such as reading and discussing stories about conflicts. She concluded:

> I think it's important to not be so afraid of conflict, because it's such a natural part of this collaborative work we do. But hopefully it says to kids that conflict's okay, and let's just figure out ways that we can learn about each other and learn about ourselves through our discussion of conflict.

In the *same school, the Kindergarten teacher* used a talking piece (that had been introduced to the class earlier with the visiting co-facilitator) to engage her class in sharing ideas and listening, developing awareness of their own and alternate perspectives, and suggesting resolutions to problems (obsSchlA4,Mar8-T1GrK). The first time Teacher 1 passed the talking piece, she asked the children to each share "one thing you like about what you've done in Kindergarten." In the second round, she invited them to share "something you're *not* happy about ... or would like to change at Kindergarten." Teacher 1 sent the talking piece around twice for each question, to give initially silent children an additional opportunity to speak. She injected a few probing questions to encourage students to think about the consequences of particular ideas. For example, after one child suggested they bring in sand, to change the classroom into a beach, Teacher 1 wondered aloud how the school's caretaker might feel about that, and invited children to "come up with a solution" such as a box to contain the sand. This whole process took under 20 minutes: 16 of 19 students (three chose to pass) orally practiced several skills relevant to democratic citizenship and academic success, as well as peacebuilding.

About three months later (obsSchlA4,June10-T1GrK), Teacher 1 invited the same Kindergarten class to reflect upon, and then participate in a talking circle about, social exclusion behaviour that the teacher had witnessed among the students on the playground. After reviewing the circle guidelines, Teacher 1 invited the children to, "Think about a time when you were excluded." The teacher began by offering her own example in response to this question, and most children had examples to offer here. After thanking children for sharing and paraphrasing their responses, Teacher 1 asked, "Think about a time when you excluded someone else." She did not model answering the question this time, and children were unwilling to admit having ever excluded anybody, even after assuring children that the circle was not to place blame, and circulating the talking piece a second time. The teacher stopped the circle and asserted that she had indeed observed such behaviour. After a break (inviting children to shake their bodies and make noise briefly), Teacher 1 asked the students to suggest strategies so no one would be excluded in their class in the future. Their responses were simple and reflected prevailing practice at the school (e.g. "Just don't exclude them. ... let people play and stuff like that. ..."I think that we can all remind the children that are trying to exclude people not to exclude people."). Teacher 1 concluded the circle: "It sounds like it's not just the excluder that needs to try, but everyone to help. If you would stop someone from excluding touch your nose." All the students touched their noses. Only about 6 of the 17 students present participated orally this time, and none really aired conflicting points of view. Clearly this circle addressed a concern that was quite difficult for these small children to address, in this way and under these conditions.

A *second project site, A2,* is a longer-established senior elementary (K-8) school. In addition to the peacemaking circle training for selected teachers from schools A4 and A2, A2

staff had carried out additional professional development for all their teachers on infusing equity education in the curriculum. Concurrently, there is a new playground peacemaking mediation/conferencing initiative for a pull-out 'cadre' of junior (grade 5-6) students. In classrooms, two of the school A2 teachers trained to use circles chose to focus on infusing controversial issues dialogue, often incorporating drama pedagogies, in academic curriculum units.

In particular, an *intermediate (grade 7-8) teacher* taught students the circle process, and related skills and concepts for understanding and communicating about conflict, as part of an extended Drama and English Language Arts unit based on a short story about a racially-tinged school bullying situation (*The Staircase,* by William Bell). This teacher had taught about controversial issues in other subject areas and units, such as a Health unit about homophobic and other harassment in which the students analyzed lyrics of popular music. A Social Studies unit on Canadian historical aboriginal/Métis sovereignty rebel leader Louis Riel included a mock trial, with students playing the roles of prosecution, defense, and witnesses. Lessons in the *Staircase* unit included circle processes in which students played the roles of various characters in the story (improvising to express the perspectives as they imagined them). Teacher 5 also invented a few roles (assigning these to students, or sometimes playing a role herself) to extend the story and guide students' examinations of different viewpoints and conflict issues. The unit culminated in two peacemaking circles, each led by two trained student facilitators, about experiences of being excluded and of excluding others: students participated in these circles 'in role,' voicing the perspectives of various characters in the story as they imagined them.

Teacher 5 guided the students, step by step, to imagine alternate points of view, and to distinguish wants from needs, in analyzing the conflict. She also included interactive exercises on the themes of conflict and social exclusion, such as a game about in-groups and out-groups (obsSchlA2,Mar22-T5). For example one day (obsSchlA2,Mar23-T5), students assigned to play the role of a character Jason met together to discern his wants and needs, while others who would play Megan did the same. The teacher guided students to reflect independently in writing, and later to share aloud if they wished, what the 'other' character wanted, what their own character ('self') would do, to predict consequences and name feelings, as well as to reflect (out of role) about students' own views about fitting in.

Often Teacher 5 took other roles, and/or asked questions, to elicit deeper student engagement with the conflict issues in the story. For example, at one point in this unit (obsSchlA2,May5-T5), the class had developed a negative attitude about Akmed, the character targeted by aggression in the story (comparable to the views of his classmates in the story — describing him as unpopular, unfriendly, and rude). In response, the teacher introduced a character she invented (Akmed's aunt) to change the dynamic: she had students work in pairs to develop questions to ask her, then 'visited' the class (in role as the aunt) to present a re-humanizing perspective about Akmed, which evidently caused a significant change in many students' perspectives about the situation.

Except in some of the role plays of story elements (as described above), Teacher 5 invites students to volunteer responses to questions in free-flowing whole-class discussions, rather than using a talking piece to explicitly give every student a turn to speak. As a consequence, from a third to half of the class was typically silent in whole-class discussions,

and a few voices tended to dominate. In the role-play exercises including the circles (and also in pair work and reflective writing tasks), in contrast, every student participated orally.

In an interview (schlA2Jun8-T5), Teacher 5 explained that when her adolescent students explored issues through taking on the perspectives of characters (in fiction, history, or current news scenarios), instead of being asked directly to disclose their own feelings about 'real life' situations, class discussions took on more depth and inspired more enthusiastic engagement. To make the dialogue feel safer, "I start where it's not about them," and then let the students reflect on the connections to their own experience.

> I'm a huge proponent of drama. One of the fastest ways to break down those barriers is when they can go into role. The kids that don't participate suddenly become the kids that participate the most. So when you go into those particular ...settings, that's one of the pieces that will help. [I am] Figuring out how to make it efficient enough to actually be able to do it. In Language [subject area], I'll get into it very deeply.

Teacher 5 explained that, in her class, she usually addressed conflict situations in two different ways —both in role and (out of role) in whole-class debriefing discussions— to give diverse students multiple points of entry. She said that she had formerly held class peacemaking circles (on interpersonal/community issues) every week, but that she didn't do that any more because it was "hard to find time" in the context of academic curriculum demands. While she acknowledged that the drama work in her academic curriculum units also took a lot of time, she said "it's worth it" because she believed that it provoked deep engagement, and awareness of multiple perspectives, on complex questions related to social justice.

Context factors facilitating and impeding restorative peacebuilding dialogue in classrooms

Routine aspects of school institutions sometimes impeded thoughtful enacted curriculum in general, and conflict dialogue in particular. For example, announcements over the PA system, lasting nearly five minutes each, interrupted T1's class at School A4 (observations March 29, April 7). The teachers, in particular those who were most enthusiastic about implementing circle dialogue and related learning activities, explained the importance of creating regularized spaces and structures for peacebuilding learning, inside their regular enacted classroom curricula, in order to create the developmental time for sustained deep learning and transformation of classroom relationships.

> For me it helps to put it right into my timetable and I think that will insure that I commit to it. ... call it an instructional period. ... Identify the learning that's happening in a circle, so: it's your oral language, it's your drama, it's your emotional work (which isn't on the report card, but it's your learning skills). So, you sell it to teachers by saying there's value in this work because you can report on it in these areas. But there's also value in this work beyond the report card. Because it helps you to create a culture in your classroom that will enable you to do more group work or ... where kids can be working more independently without teacher support 'cause the kids will know how to support each other. So I think uh, now that I've gone though this process ... I will put it into my timetable so that it becomes part of my program (IntvSchlA4-T3, June4'10).

Teacher 5 reflected that she felt lucky to be working in an alternative school (within the publicly-funded system), where there was more flexibility (compared to most regular community schools) to team teach and to adjust the timetable, to do sustained, integrated curriculum work. Even in this school, she felt that the demands of curriculum coverage often impeded sustained, dialogue-driven peacebuilding education. Typical of all teachers participating in this study, she also expressed the need for on-going professional dialogue and support for her own learning.

> What would be great would be to hook up with other teachers who are ahead or at the same place [in implementing dialogue circles in their classrooms]. One of the frustrating things about teaching is not being able to reflect.... sometimes getting a little piece of feedback is helpful. I'm open to it: 'What about this, did you think about this?' How to develop from there (IntvSchlA2-T5,Jun8'10).

Similarly, Teacher 3 at School A4 found the opportunities to experience a peacemaking circle herself (in a professional development session), and to exchange ideas with colleagues, to be essential in building her capacity to implement pro-active conflict dialogue education and peacemaking circle meetings in her own classroom.

> I think what really helped me was talking with, uh having a place to go to with my questions. And of course, being able to observe examples or models. So, participating in a circle was the ultimate because I have a sense of what you could do eventually. But now I've got the task of getting my kids to that place. So ... I think it's going to help if the other teachers also put it into to their programs, because then I can go to the other teachers when I have questions and say I tried this and it worked or didn't work, what do you think I could try next time? (IntvSchlA4-T3, June4'10)

Discussion

Thus teachers in similar kinds of schools who participated in the same peacebuilding circle training, working with children of different ages, chose different paths to incorporate conflict dialogue as a learning opportunity in their classrooms. At school A4, teachers primarily used conflict dialogue as a restorative problem-solving practice after incidents of student-student conflict, while carrying out academic curricula that did not particularly recognize or address conflict. Meanwhile at school A2, teachers primarily used conflict dialogue as a way to encourage thoughtfulness, emotional engagement, and awareness of justice issues in academic subject matter, while using teacher-driven progressive discipline strategies (and an out-of-classroom peer mediation program) to address interpersonal conflict with students. In both cases, the alternative school settings seemed to make it more feasible for teachers to adjust their implemented curricula in these ways, although they still felt the pressure of meeting mandated curriculum demands.

Because these educators focused their restorative dialogue work on peacemaking and problem-solving meetings (student governance) and implemented academic curriculum *in classrooms, all* of their students had *frequent, on-going* opportunities to practice recognizing, communicating about, and creating resolutions to conflicts — not only in relation to simple disputes, but also in relation to complex instances of social exclusion/inclusion and (in)equality. The management of conflict was not relegated to the margins of school processes, nor limited to those individuals considered most directly 'at fault' for destructive

behaviour, nor limited to those conflicts that had escalated into major disruptions. These teachers attempted to practice a 'positive peace,' in which all members of the community were expected and invited to participate in interpreting, discussing, and discerning appropriate responses to conflicts — as part of the daily life of the classrooms, and as part of what makes curriculum meaningful and worth learning.

In some instances, the dialogic learning opportunities that arose in the cases above were instigated by episodes of harmful social behaviour, as is normal in restorative justice practices. In more instances, however, the teachers in this study initiated 'proactive' opportunities for students to practice conflict dialogue — teaching new ways of communicating about conflict such as talking-piece circle processes, and/or guiding students to probe and respond to the conflicts embedded in literature and social life. A particularly interesting theme to examine further is how teachers tap into students' imaginations, for example by inviting them to 'play' the roles of characters in peer conflicts, and of characters in literature that addresses relevant conflicts at some 'distance' from the actual current lives of the students in the room. In various ways, these teachers found ways to make conflict dialogue 'safer,' especially for lower-status student participants, by encouraging them to voice and listen to perspectives of 'others' (with whom they might or might not identify personally), rather than only speaking about conflict when that would expose their own identities and experiences. In debriefing those learning activities —privately in writing, with a partner, or in larger groups— students could choose to apply those perspectives and insights to specific conflict situations in their own lives, or to remain at a distance (even then, they would be practicing the skills and knowledge-building associated with conflict communication).

The research project has not proceeded far enough yet, to really understand the impact of these curriculum transformations on equity among diverse students. However, already it is clear that making restorative peacebuilding dialogue part of regular, whole-class learning activities had increased the time to experience and take part, and the opportunities to observe diverse peer and adult models participating, in pro-active, inclusive dialogue about questions of conflict and justice, for essentially *all* students in these classrooms.

There is already much theory and research about what "could" or "should" be done to improve the democratic and peacebuilding learning opportunities of students in public school, and it's clear that conflict dialogue is an important part of that picture. What is missing and still needed is a well-grounded theoretical framework for understanding *why* those promising democratic peacebuilding pedagogies are so rare, especially in under-resourced public schools serving diverse populations, and *what can be done about it* in particular social (and national) contexts. The Peace-Building Dialogue study is beginning to describe, analyze, and theorize specific initiatives in which such schools and teachers facilitate democratic and restorative conflict dialogue (peacebuilding) learning opportunities, and the institutional context factors that help and hinder that important work.

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