Peacebuilding Education: Using Conflict for Democratic and Inclusive Learning Opportunities for Diverse Students

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Abstract

This qualitative study uses classroom observations, teacher and student interviews, and document analysis to show how peacebuilding dialogue processes were implemented in three elementary school classrooms in Ontario, Canada, and how diverse students, particularly ethnocultural minority immigrants, experienced these pedagogies in relation to their own perspectives, histories, and identities. The study's results showed how diverse students experienced and responded to implemented alternative curricula: when content was explicitly linked to their identities and experiences, opportunities for democratic peacebuilding inclusion increased. Authentic, critical dialogue provided opportunities for diverse students to engage in discussions about diversity and conflict, facilitating their engagement. Connecting to students' identities through peacebuilding education is important to encourage the inclusion of diverse perspectives in a democratic, multicultural learning environment.

Introduction

Peacebuilding education processes can provide opportunities for students to practise tolerance and inclusion, and become participatory citizens (Avery and Hahn, 2004). For example, engaging students in open, inclusive dialogue about conflictual issues can support them in developing their skills for democratic civic engagement (Haas, 2008; Hahn, 1998; Hess and Posselt, 2002; Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald and Schultz, 2001). Pedagogies that encourage dialogue between and among students and teachers support diverse students' learning about conflict and diversity and facilitates their inclusion in the classroom (Parker, 2012b). While teachers are sometimes encouraged by in-service professional and curriculum development events to implement peacebuilding education practices in the classroom, research shows that many teachers do not feel confident facilitating open dialogue about conflictual issues (Bickmore, 2005; 2008; Goldston and Kyzer, 2009; Yamashita, 2006). Teachers' sense of their own expertise in curriculum content and pedagogy, as well as their positionality on ethnic and political conflicts, influence how they facilitate or avoid conflictual issues discussions (Bekerman, Zembylas, and McGlynn, 2009; Oulton, Day, Dillon, and Grace, 2004).

Conflict management processes and other pedagogical tools can guide and shape the peacebuilding education experiences of diverse students, especially when sensitive or conflictual issues are being discussed. However, evidence as to how diverse students actually experience these tools is slim. For one thing, many ethnocultural minority students seem to have fewer opportunities than mainstream students to engage in issues-based discussions (Dull and Murrow, 2008; Hess and

Avery, 2008). Ethnocultural, sexual, and gender identities of students and teachers also, presumably, influence the ways in which peacebuilding education is approached in schools (Banks, 2006; Subedi, 2008). While research has shown that open discussion of conflictual issues promotes the average student's civic engagement, little evidence exists regarding how or whether diverse and marginalized students are engaged by particular dialogue practices. Even less is known about which curricular and pedagogical tools for issues dialogue may best create (or impede) democratic and inclusive learning opportunities for diverse and marginalized students. The teachers in this study used contrasting pedagogies to implement various types of opportunities for diverse students to engage in such dialogue about controversial or sensitive identity-linked issues. Through classroom observations and interviews with students and teachers, this article examines variations within and among three classroom contexts, each including diverse ethnocultural minorities, to understand how their experiences with explicit conflictual content were (and were not) addressed as learning opportunities.

Conflict Dialogue and Integrative Peacebuilding

In this article, I use the term *conflict dialogue* to describe constructive discussion of conflictual or controversial issues in educating for and about peace, democracy, equity and social justice (Bickmore, 2011b), and I argue for the inclusion of conflict dialogue in the classroom curriculum. Galtung (1969) referred to positive peace as sustainable and just; it is a peace that promotes dialogue, relationship building, and structural change, whereas negative peace is the absence of war or physical violence. *Peacebuilding education* (broadly understood as processes of constructive discussion) is the purposive generation of conflict as a learning opportunity, in which issues are explicitly aired and taken up in ways that can promote positive peace. In purposive generation of conflictual dialogue, difficult issues are confronted. These may be highly emotional, linked to identity, and personally relevant (Bekerman, 2009; Bickmore, 2008; Boler, 1999). Peacebuilding education comprises dialogic, culturally relevant pedagogies designed to (re)build the strong, healthy, human rights—respecting relationships, challenging inequities—necessary for democratic societies. The concept is based on Bickmore's (2011a) three-tiered model for managing and responding to conflict in schools: peacekeeping control (for the safety of opposing parties); peacemaking conflict resolution dialogue processes; and peacebuilding. In the context of diversity, a critical multicultural education program is necessary to encourage the inclusion of diverse perspectives and to facilitate critical reflection on social power structures (Nieto, 2002). Such critical reflections are key aspects of peacebuilding education and in educating for democracy (Bickmore, 2006; Davies, 2004).

In an integrative theory of peace education, homogenized perspectives are challenged. Diverse participants are encouraged to share their points of divergence and diverse participants' multiple worldviews are acknowledged (Danesh, 2006; Zembylas and Bekerman, 2013). A peace-based curriculum that integrates psychological, social, political and spiritual tenets is seen to invite unity, and promotes healing and transformative resolutions for a culture of peace (Danesh, 2006). Authentic and critical dialogue promotes critical consciousness (Freire, 1970/1994),

provides opportunities for student engagement, activism and inclusion (Apple, 1979/1990; Davies, 2004), and is an integrative and transformative tenet of peacebuilding education.

Diversity, Identity, and Peacebuilding Education

Diversity

Critical conflict dialogue insists on multiple perspectives and invites discussions about diversity, social justice and conflictual issues. Addressing social conflicts within diverse settings involves acknowledging and including the diverse points of view explicitly relating to issues being discussed. Ethnocultural minority immigrant students carry many histories, perspectives and experiences, which can serve as resources for critical reflection and discussion about social conflicts (Banks, 2006; Nieto, 1992). In contrast, teaching students as though they were all the same does not create equitable social relations (Bickmore, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Nieto, 2002). Critical conflict discussions have the potential to encourage diverse, tolerant and dissenting viewpoints, but they also risk further marginalizing or silencing diverse students. However, when social conflict issues are explicitly discussed and connected to students' diverse identities, even the typically quieter students may find their voice in classroom discussions (C. A. Parker, 2010a, 2011).

This article provides insights into how conflict dialogue learning opportunities may be inclusive of immigrant students' diverse and intersecting identities in ways that facilitate their social and academic engagement. It also explores the kinds of curriculum and pedagogy that create inclusive spaces for diverse young people to find their place in the curriculum and in their world. Here, I use *diverse* to refer to students' intersecting identities and experiences, based on their perceptions of their race, ethnicity, gender, religion, social status, and immigration history. Paying attention to these different identities pushes back against prescriptive and normative pedagogies. In this way, the siloed student experience and perspective is challenged through democratic peacebuilding education.

Identity

A curriculum may normalize hegemonic assumptions about race, gender, sexuality, and power, thereby silencing or ignoring others (hooks, 1994; McCarthy, 1988). Moreover, if such a curriculum adopted a so-called neutral stance, treating conflict as something to be avoided, it would implicitly invite students to maintain white, male-centred, heterosexual and middle- and upper-class norms and values (Apple, 1979/2004; Kumashiro, 2000). Its avoidance of conflict would limit opportunities for students to engage in discussion and to explore alternative perspectives. In contrast, a curriculum that aired conflicting perspectives might invite and support critical thinking, exposing the ideological underpinnings of the existing system.

Current political and social conflicts inevitably influence school and classroom dynamics. Curriculum (both mandated and implemented) may address social conflicts related to ethnic identities in diverse ways (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000; Harris, 2004; Tawil and Harley, 2004). Cultural symbols and practices in curriculum, as well as in society, can reinforce (or mitigate) ethnic and social conflict (Bekerman, 2009; Funk and Said, 2004; Ross, 1993/2007). Cultural responsiveness and flexibility of power are key characteristics of peacebuilding education initiatives (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000; Lederach, 1995).

Bekerman (2007) has argued that one's individual identity is influenced by nation-state ideologies. Thus, possibilities for interaction between students from contested settings (such as Israel and Palestine) would involve recognizing power imbalances and committing to the dialogue process. Clearly, such complex student identities would influence the pedagogical choices teachers make in facilitating or avoiding conflictual issues discussions, and the ways each student would experience those discussions.

Navigating Conflictual Identities and Issues in Classrooms

All curricula include implicit learning opportunities embedded in the classroom and school practices; this is known as the *hidden curriculum* (Jackson, 1968). While the hidden curriculum in North American schooling typically avoids conflict, it is entirely possible for explicit (and/or implicit) conflict learning opportunities embedded in the curriculum to encourage critical, inclusive engagement instead. Implicit and explicit curricular experiences that purposefully generate conflict dialogue and address issues of power and difference can create spaces for inclusion of multiple histories, experiences, and perspectives (Bickmore, 2005). The identities of students involved in any conflictual discussion can be expected to play a significant role in the ways those individuals understand and approach social and political issues in classroom settings. Conflict dialogue processes can create opportunities for students and teachers to engage with their multiple identities, and to draw on their diverse lived experiences and perspectives to interpret and respond to particular issues. Diverse students can better navigate their multiple worlds between home, school and community when teachers' pedagogical strategies engage their personal experiences and identities (May and Sleeter, 2010; C. A. Parker, 2010a; Phelan, Davidson and Cao, 1991). To support diverse students' identities as they engage in conflict dialogue, teachers need to be equipped with culturally appropriate pedagogies (Delpit, 2006; Dilworth, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2004).

By contrast, when power and difference are ignored, it is possible for conflictual issues pedagogies to be detrimental, particularly for students who carry marginalized identities (Hess and Avery, 2008). This article shows how the teachers in three classroom sites used curriculum content to bridge and connect to students' experiences and identities through peacebuilding education. The study of different settled and unsettled historical and controversial political issues provided opportunities for diverse students to relate to and build on the topics their teachers presented(Hess,2001,2009).

Methodology

This ethnographic study is a critical examination of issues-based discussions and activities in elementary social studies, history, and language arts curricula, held in classrooms with students who were ethnocultural minorities, mostly from East Asia and South Asia ancestry, residing as either the first- or second-generation in Canada.

Ethnography with a critical perspective pursues a *political* purpose, by describing and analyzing cultural contexts with the intent to reveal "hidden agendas, power centers, and assumptions that inhibit, repress, and constrain" (Thomas, 1993, p. 2). Educational ethnography is an in-depth study of how participants behave in and experience the classroom space. It is uniquely suited to study "the shared patterns of a marginalized group with the aim of advocacy" (Creswell, 2008, p. 475). Classrooms each have their own culture, including participation norms and language that can be studied by ethnographers (Jackson, 1968; Willis, 1977). In studying marginalized students such as ethnic minority immigrants, it is necessary to use ethnography with criticality, in order to study how these students' lived experiences are intertwined with power and oppressive systems.

Context and Participants

The research involved in-depth study of three different elementary school classrooms, in two different, publicly funded, schools in a city in southern Ontario, Canada. I studied three classrooms (Grades 4, 5 and 7; ages 9 to 13), two in one school and another in another school, within the same city. My research design was to study any three elementary school classrooms with diverse students. After obtaining permission from the principals of the two schools, I asked for recommendations of teachers who engaged with issues of diversity and conflict and exemplified peacebuilding pedagogy in their classrooms. I followed up with those teachers and they all agreed to participate in this study.

There were 78 students in the three classes. The overall ethnic and racial makeup of students was: 71 percent South Asian, 22 percent East Asian, 5 percent African ancestry, and 2 percent mixed ancestry. All students were either first-generation Canadian (18 percent) or second-generation Canadian (81.5 percent). Most students' families had immigrated from Sri Lanka, India, China and Pakistan; some came from Jamaica. My attention to the demographic makeup of the classrooms allowed me to explore in detail how the curriculum related to these diverse cultural identities. While this demographic makeup was not representative of Canada as a whole, many of Canada's major cities attract immigrants from all over the world. Many of the students spoke different languages at home or with their peers at school—including Hindi, Urdu, Mandarin, and Cantonese—but all the students spoke English during classroom lessons and I conducted all of the student and teacher observations and interviews in English.

Data Sources and Analysis

I collected data from the following sources: 110 classroom observations, ranging from 30 to 120 minutes each; six one-hour, semistructured interviews with participating teachers (two each); approximately 30 student group interviews (each 30 to 45 minutes long, with two to seven students at a time); classroom documents, including students' work samples and teachers' planning materials; and a researcher journal. I transcribed and coded all the data, using multiple levels, to determine emergent themes and patterns across and within the research sites. Through this process of comparison and contrast I identified discussion-based peacebuilding pedagogies that addressed classroom conflicts as learning opportunities for diverse students.

The data gathered through these extensive classroom observations and interviews and through the collection of classroom documents illustrated how teachers in three classrooms facilitated democratic learning opportunities for diverse students. Data from each of the three cases showed how dialogic pedagogies supported students' learning about conflict and diversity and provided them with a greater opportunity to transcend their identities through peacebuilding dialogue.

Historical and Identity Connections: Conflicts across Time, Space, and Culture

In the following vignettes, I illustrate how teachers embedded various types of conflicts in curriculum content and pedagogies, and how these influenced diverse students' engagement and inclusion in each classroom and promoted a culture of peace.

I begin with Ms. Marlee's Grade 4 class.[1] Ms. Marlee was of Caribbean-African descent. It was her first year teaching Grade 4 at Aria Public School; previously, she had taught special education at the same school. Ms. Marlee, a Catholic turned atheist, told me in my first interview with her that she was confident in her ability to entertain beliefs from different religions, and she demonstrated this self-assurance when she led the discussion of creation stories students brought in from their various cultures.

She directly addressed an interpersonal conflict about religious difference or intolerance that came up between two girls, one a Muslim and the other a Christian, in her classroom. She guided her students to contextualize the conflict, by asking them to research and present stories from their various religions. By inviting these disclosures, linked to the identities of diverse students in the classroom, Ms. Marlee embedded conflictual religious content in her implemented curriculum.

Next, I discuss Mrs. Amrita's Grade 5 class, and show how she introduced conflictual issues that directly related to students' family experiences. Mrs. Amrita had immigrated with her family from India nine years previously and spoke English with an accent. She had been a teacher at Aria Public School for four years, but it was her first year teaching Grade 5. She knew many of the students in the class from having taught them in earlier grades and was aware of many of her students' personal familial circumstances.

She invited her students to share personal immigration experiences orally in class, and compared and contrasted these with the textbook's fictitious and historical

immigration stories. Mrs. Amrita invited critique and feedback from students. In doing so, she invited conflicting narratives into the classroom in ways that apparently encouraged the engagement and participation of all students; they felt connected to these issues, motivated by the topic, and safe to talk about their and their peers' diverse lived experiences.

Lastly, I discuss Mr. Hiroshi's Grade 7 class. Mr. Hiroshi was born in Canada and was of mixed Japanese-European descent. It was his second year teaching Grade 7 at Georgetown Public School. Mr. Hiroshi frequently presented conflicting perspectives and ideas in his classroom's open climate, predominantly in his history and literacy lessons. Mr. Hiroshi introduced historical topics as contested issues, thus including conflict in his implemented curriculum. For instance, he invited students to discern causes and outcomes of conflict, by guiding his class to compare past and present wars and rebellions during classroom activities.

Religious Conflicts and Canadian Identities

Ms. Marlee, in her Grade 4 class (ages 8 to10), facilitated a lesson motivated by an openly expressed religious conflict she had observed erupting between two girls in her classroom: Fatima, a Muslim, and Tina, a Christian. Tina, the one girl of African heritage in the class, who Ms. Marlee told me came from an observant Christian family, had told Fatima, the only girl in the class who wore a hijab that her God was not the real God because her faith didn't believe in Jesus. This was the first time Ms. Marlee had experienced such an incident in her teaching career, she said in her initial interview.

In the classroom, Ms. Marlee voiced the perspective that people should all practise acceptance and understanding of other cultures, to maintain a harmonious community. The classroom was silent as everyone listened to their teacher's 15-minute speech. Ms. Marlee, clearly upset, began by saying: "When you have conflict in the playground, it shouldn't be over religion." She pleaded passionately with the students to "Fight for those who don't have food to eat, fight for those who are violated or oppressed, but don't fight with each other about religion and about whether or not someone else's God is better than yours." Fatima and Tina, who had been in conflict during recess, were friends and both normally volunteered to speak frequently during whole-class discussions. However, in this episode they did not speak to each other, nor to the class, during this teacher-led recitation. The two girls, who were both usually vocally dominant in class, did not reply aloud to Ms. Marlee after she said this; they self-silenced. The topic appeared to be closed, settled (Hess, 2009). But I noted how, during identity-linked classroom discussions, some students may choose to remain silent to mark their disagreement on a conflictual issue (Bekerman and Zembylas, 2011), or to mask how their personal identity connects to the issue (King, 2009; Schultz, 2010).

A few students raised their hands to ask such questions as "Who is Allah?" "What is Catholic?" "Who is Jesus?" Ms. Marlee responded by offering matter-of-fact responses, such as "Allah is another word for God." The students did not respond to each other's questions. The religious conflict was a critical incident in this Grade 4

class. It interrupted the regular social studies program and invited an alternative implemented curriculum that stimulated the opportunity to learn through and about diversity (Davies, 2004; Haroutunian-Gordon, 2010; Hemmings, 2000). Ms. Marlee then talked about her own identity as a first-generation Canadian, to remind her students that their engagement in conflicts over religion violated the foundational goal of their families' choice to emigrate: to live in peaceful Canada.

The next week, during the same social studies unit, students were reading aloud from a textbook about the Arctic Lowlands. An Inuit creation story appeared in a sidebar of the book. Ms. Marlee stopped the class read-aloud to reflect on this text and asked her students where they had heard similar kinds of stories and what kind of story it was. "A true story," offered Tina. "A fiction story," said Fatima. Ms. Marlee then went to the board and wrote "Creation Story." She told the students: "Every culture in the world has a creation story. A creation story tells how "man came to be" on the planet." As she said this, many students began making noises while they raised their hands, "Oh, oh, oh, I know, me, me, me," indicating affective engagement with this idea; they wanted to speak. Ms. Marlee continued, telling students that this was an Aboriginal creation story, and it reflected on the relationship between the Earth and people, and the Earth's preceding existence. She said, "The creation story I was taught in school was about Adam and Eve." Tina enthusiastically responded, without raising her hand, "I know that one!" Ms. Marlee didn't invite any further comment from Tina. Instead, she directed her questioning to Fatima: "Fatima, is there a creation story in the Muslim culture?" Fatima, unsure of how to answer the question right away, began to converse with another Muslim student in the class, Farat, to think of a proper response. After conferring, she announced with a quiet giggle, "We have one, but it's too long."

Tina abruptly raised her hand, and asked: "What if you already know the creation story?" Ms. Marlee didn't acknowledge Tina's comment and tried to close what was becoming a conflictual conversation, even as Tina continued, "Can we tell the real story now!?" Ms. Marlee waved, clapped her hands and gathered her students' attention as she changed the subject, by announcing their homework: "Tonight, you're going to go home and ask your parents what your creation story from your culture is, and then you're going to write it out and bring it to class to share with all of us."

When Ms. Marlee stopped the class lesson to extend her implemented curriculum content beyond the textbook to make it relevant to students' diversities and conflicts, she integrated some of their perspectives and identities into the curriculum. Many students were excited to share; many simultaneously spoke over each other. At the same time, Ms. Marlee maintained her authority, by directing the questions and responding on behalf of some students. Interviews about this religious conflict conducted with Tina and Fatima separately, and with other Grade 4 students, supported my interpretation that this critical incident served to identify cultural and religious difference in a way that may have perpetuated marginalization of some students, and increased the confidence of other students who had their identities affirmed and recognized during this discussion.

The lesson in which students shared their different creation stories opened a discussion about diversity within and among religions. It provided opportunities for many students to share their familial beliefs, which seemed to foster a sense of social and identity inclusion for students. None of the students in Ms. Marlee's Grade 4 class

identified with Aboriginal Canadian culture. However, the Aboriginal creation story served as an example of difference, and created a space for Ms. Marlee to affirm that all students had different—and valid—cultural and religious identities. Swetha enthusiastically shared her Tamil/Sri Lankan/Hindu perspective with her classmates. Many, including Tina and Fatima, listened respectfully and attentively. In an interview with me Swetha spoke of her initial apprehension in doing this: "I was kinda nervous about sharing that kind of stuff. I was happy that the class understood what I was saying . . . and asked me questions." It appeared that a creation story with a divergent perspective had engaged the students in wanting to learn more about diversity.

Creation stories sparked considerable interest in Ms. Marlee's Grade 4 class, and seemed to help students develop a greater appreciation for the diversity that existed among their classmates. Discussion amongst class members of the stories presented by students in front of the class was lively. The students felt free to voice perspectives similar and different among their peers as they asked and responded to both their teacher and peers' questions about their religious beliefs. Ms. Marlee was the only other person in the class who shared Tina's African-Canadian heritage. With her, Tina exhibited greater comfort in disclosing her personal religious beliefs, and demonstrated excitement in class. Tina read a summary of the creation story from Genesis 1:1, starting with "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" and finishing with "On the seventh day, He rested." As she read aloud, her peers, including Fatima, respectfully listened. With similar confidence, Fatima shared her version of a Muslim creation story, reciting the birth of Muhammad and then called on two other, typically quiet, students, Farat and Lina, to provide additional details about followers of Islam. Fatima's collaboration with her Muslim peers helped her to respond to Ms. Marlee's request. Other Muslim students in this class, such as Farat and Lina, became engaged in the lesson when asked, also by the teacher, to reflect on their personal religious identity. The classroom discussion illustrated how opportunities to dialogue about conflict could prepare students for speaking and listening in the wider diverse, ethnocultural Canadian political community outside the classroom.

Building Character and Strengthening Values: Rights and Responsibilities of Global-Canadian Citizens

Mrs. Amrita encouraged all her Grade 5 students (ages 9 to 11) to raise their hands whenever she posed a question. She often called on students who did not have their hands up, which reinforced the universal participation that she wanted. She often said things like: "Everyone, look at me, I want everyone to participate here, all hands go up," or questioned students publicly: "Why don't you have your hand up?" Mrs. Amrita also used a show of hands to poll her class about their experiences. During a discussion on immigration, for example, she asked students to raise their hands if their parents were immigrants. All except three students raised their hands: Quda, Nimi and Frank had themselves immigrated with their parents. Mrs. Amrita's direct questioning invited students to share their identities (in this instance, that they all had immigrant parents). In her immigration unit, she asked the Grade 5's: "What are some of the

reasons to move to Canada?" Frank, who had recently immigrated from Kenya, readily responded, "War. It's too dangerous." Mrs. Amrita then asked, "What does 'refugees' mean?" Kevin, a Chinese boy whose mother had been initially denied entry into Canada, responded, "It means they don't feel safe, and then decide to come here as a refugee to live here."

At the beginning of the unit, Mrs. Amrita told her students to interview their parents about immigration experiences, such as why people moved to a new country and why they immigrated to Canada. Using the textbook Mrs. Amrita also taught rules and laws for immigrating to Canada, discussing the differences between family and refugee classes. Many students in this class were personally familiar with the latter.

In a follow-up lesson, the next day, Mrs. Amrita asked them again, "Why do you think people immigrate to Canada?" Eleven hands immediately went up:

Kate: War.
Jess: Better job.
Sugriva: Education.
Nita: Better opportunities.
Quda: They want peace.
David: They want new things.
Frank: Maybe the place they live in, the government is not treating them well. *(He raises his hand again right after he says this response, indicating he has more to share.)*
Kate: Freedom to practise their religions.
Frank: Canada is a free country.
Kevin: They want freedom.
Uma: A multicultural country where everyone is respected.
Mrs. A: You know, boys and girls, when you come to Canada they don't ask you to leave your religion or your culture behind: *They want you to bring everything with you* so that you can practise your own religion, culture and beliefs and embrace [them] within Canada.

Mrs. Amrita reinforced peacebuilding and multiculturalism throughout most of this Grade 5 unit. Mrs. Amrita asked her students to collect information from a variety of sources (family, peers, and texts), which encouraged their reflective interpretations of the immigration topic that they found personally relevant. She told them: "Canada is everyone's country," and encouraged students to share with each other their stories about their ancestors. None of the students immediately raised their hands in response: perhaps they were unsure of whether they had the right answer (i.e., that Canada was "everyone's country"). She continued to ask probing questions, and allowed for some wait time, which proved to be a tool for further engagement. Six students raised their hands to share their stories. All of them reinforced the idea that newcomer immigrants face challenges in Canada. One South Asian boy said, "When my dad first came to Canada, he had a lot of challenges speaking English. . . . He wanted to go back." Resonating with this idea, Jess said: "My parents came from Vietnam and there was a war there and they came here on a boat across the ocean. They didn't know how to speak English and they missed home."

In this classroom where vocal participation was the norm, Mrs. Amrita now stated another norm: she would give students the choice of whether to voice their experiences by calling only on those who raised their hands. She would not force anyone to share. Students shared and heard peers' diverse perspectives during this period of sharing their or their parents' experiences of immigrating to Canada, but did not ask each other questions as they usually did in this class. Instead, Mrs. Amrita provided comments and often related the students' stories to her own immigration experience, thus modelling discussion about personal or sensitive identity-linked conflicts.

The process of researching cultural histories in collaboration with students' families and then engaging in sharing with their peers illustrated Mrs. Amrita's views that students' cultural resources were valuable material for discussions about citizenship and integration in Canada. The process also acknowledged that young students might have different understandings of their world and personal history (Bekerman, Zembylas, and McGlynn, 2009; Kelly and Brooks, 2009). Even though some students chose to not share their stories, all students still experienced the process of hearing alternative histories, which may have contributed to affirming their identity and facilitating their inclusion through this peacebuilding process. While overt conflict did not erupt in this class session, students might have experienced—and potentially resolved—internal conflict about their diverse narratives (Bekerman and Zembylas, 2011).

Feeling the need to present prescribed content in conjunction with students' personal narratives, Mrs. Amrita encouraged students to read the chapter in their textbook that provided the dominant narrative about immigration in Canada. During the whole-class reading of the text, it appeared that the textbook narrative was perceived by many students to not relate to the experiences shared in the class. Mrs. Amrita did not initially introduce the topic of immigration as a controversial or political issue. But an implicit issue was raised: How did the textbook depiction represent or distort immigration histories in Canada? In an interview, a group of girls (mixed East and South Asian) articulated their comfort with the more varied oral and printed texts that had been used through this unit of study:

Uma:	*(Tamil Sri Lankan)* Yeah, well, most of the people in the class, their parents, came from a different country to Canada, so it was pretty much easy for our homework [to write about our family] because we could just ask our parents, who actually know and have experienced it. And when Mrs. Amrita was teaching us, we had an idea of what it was about, because of our parents.
CP:	So you thought you understood it more?
Uma:	Like one of the immigration stories [in the text] was about *an emergency,* and that's why my parents came because there was an emergency, like, a war and they were refugees.
CP:	Did you feel uncomfortable when Mrs. Amrita was talking about it?
Uma:	No. But I had an idea of what she was talking about.
CP:	So you felt connected to it.

Uma: Yeah.

Kate: *(Chinese)* It's also good because, like, if we needed some background knowledge, we could just ask our parents and we could understand more about it, than someone who was born here.

Typically, Mrs. Amrita openly acknowledged social power structures during classroom discussions. During one of the discussions on immigration, she encouraged students in the class who had only recently immigrated to Canada to voice their experiences. These particular newcomers all responded to her invitation. Clearly, they felt safe enough to share this part of their identity. Mrs. Amrita and many of her students expressed the belief that they were free in this classroom to engage in discussion about conflictual and sensitive issues, such as immigration and current events. The commonality between Mrs. Amrita's identity as a relatively recent immigrant from India and the students' East and South Asian backgrounds seemed to provide a certain level of comfort during discussions about diversity. In most instances, students' evident inclination to share and participate in such discussions illustrated their sense of social identity inclusion.

In classroom discussions, Mrs. Amrita often encouraged students to voice their perspectives. However, her peacebuilding education norms for engagement also allowed students the choice to self-silence during conflictual or identity-linked discussions. This permission to self-silence, in a climate that consistently encouraged students' participation, was an integral element for building an inclusive classroom environment that not only encouraged diverse students to speak, but also allowed them the freedom to feel safe in their silence (Davies, 2004; Ellsworth, 1989; Zembylas and Michaelides, 2004).

Battling Identities in War:
Deconstructing Historical and Political Issues

In Mr. Hiroshi's Grade 7 class (ages 12 to 13), students frequently engaged in discussion about diversity and social conflicts. The issues discussions led by Mr. Hiroshi encouraged students to reflect individually and in small groups on connections between lesson topics and their own experiences and histories.

Mr. Hiroshi taught his students about the War of 1812 as both a historical and a political conflict. He did not ask "Who won the war of 1812?" Instead, after stating the typical Canadian historical contention that it was a war that no one won, he asked his students to consider what the causes of the war might have been. Mr. Hiroshi's open-ended questioning about causes of wars stimulated mostly male students, here, to respond. Akmed (a Muslim boy) and two other Sri Lankan boys said that they thought the terrorist attack on the United States on September 11, 2001 was the cause of the war in the Middle East. Tyrone posed a controversial rhetorical question that seemed to illustrate how he understood this conflict: when countries do not get along, they go to war. Tyrone appeared to assume that both countries in this case struggled with building a peaceful relationship.

Mr. Hiroshi taught history through multiple stories that extended across time and space; he connected current and past conflicts in order to help students reflect

more critically on the present. The following snippet illustrates how Mr. Hiroshi compared the Rebellions of 1837[2] to his students' lived experiences:

Mr. H: I was thinking about how people were rebelling in 1837 and how you were all connecting that to what's happening in Egypt[3] and one thing I want you to be aware of is what's going on in the world. (*asking students directly*) Does it affect any of us? Right here and right now as we're sitting here, does it affect us? Can I use you as an example, Mona?

Mona: Yes. . . . My neighbours and my family are still there [Students curiously look towards Mona].

Mr. H: So it may not affect a lot of you now directly, but…we want to recognize what's happening in the world…and how we're connected to it.

Initially, most of the students may have felt disconnected from this conflict, but it may have become more personally relevant when Mr. Hiroshi posed the question "Does it affect us?" and their classmate, Mona, shared her personal connection to it. This is an example of how a social conflict was connected to students' personal experiences and identities. Such connections may encourage students to feel included and represented in academic discussions (Branch, 2004; Dei, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Over the course of the term, Mona frequently brought in newspaper articles about the Arab Spring and posted them on the class current events board.

Mr. Hiroshi showed how peacebuilding education involves making conflicts explicit and connecting to students' experiences. Kincheloe, McLaren, and Steinberg (2011) argued that, for such critical engagment, "teachers must understand what is happening in the minds of their students" (p. 166). Mr. Hiroshi's students were aware of his practice of including current world issues in the curriculum. For instance, in an interview, Crystal and Anita (higher social status girls) both said they believed that they were knowledgeable about the world and confident in their preparation for participation in society because of the ongoing world issues discussions that Mr. Hiroshi had implemented:

Crystal: Mr. Hiroshi doesn't shelter us from what's going on in the world; he's preparing us . . . For the world.

Anita: Like, he tells us everything. . . . And yeah, we're lucky to be in Canada, where that's not happening to us.

In this way, discussions about conflictual issues facilitated students' engagement and broader understanding of their position in the world. While Mr. Hiroshi did not handle overt, interpersonal conflict between students, he, like Mrs. Amrita, invited conflictual discussions within the curriculum. Mr. Hiroshi believed that modernizing historical conflicts (e.g., the Acadian expulsion[4]) by relating them to the present (e.g., war in Sri Lanka) would contribute to a deeper understanding of both past and present conflicts, as many students were from Sri Lanka or had family in Sri

Lanka. In an interview, Mr. Hiroshi reflected on this component of peacebuilding education:

> Mr. H: I incorporate a lot of world issues . . . to make things a little closer to home for them. . . . I'm trying to [teach] about Acadian expulsion. . . . It's the hardest concept for them to grasp. But, but . . . we can modernize it by using examples from the Tamil people in Sri Lanka. You know anyone [in this class] could connect to that.

Through the study of current events in relation to historical events, a range of diverse students, including quiet ones and those of lower social status, were given opportunities to individually and collectively shape their perceptions of their world. It appeared, from the students' level of engagement, that most agreed with their teacher's positions on the conflictual issues he presented. However, because of this close relationship and Mr. Hiroshi's overall popularity amongst students, it may have been challenging for some students to dissent and challenge the status quo, particularly because of their age and social position (Houser, 1996).

Thus, it is important to consider that even among the multitude of connections amongst students, and between students and Mr. Hiroshi, this meant that there was little or no open disagreement about alternative perspectives on some conflictual issues (C. A. Parker, 2011). Mr. Hiroshi expressed this awareness himself during our interview: "The stuff I didn't agree with, they didn't agree with either." It is possible that some students did not concur with their teacher's position, and their response may have been to self-silence (Ellsworth, 1989; Epstein, 2000).

Discussion:
Contextualizing Peacebuilding Education in Diverse Classrooms

In this article, I have discussed how three teachers presented curriculum content to facilitate the process of strengthening connections between historical and current issues in relation to students' diverse identities. When the three teachers developed connections between the curriculum content and the students' cultural identities, they increased their engagement and opportunity for learning. Mrs. Amrita in Grade 5 and Mr. Hiroshi in Grade 7 frequently facilitated various historical and identity connections across time, space, and culture. Ms. Marlee, in Grade 4, integrated opportunities for such connections by taking up an interpersonal classroom conflict and reflecting on it through the curriculum content. Overall, these teachers used diverse pedagogical processes in conjunction with local, global and historical content to facilitate culturally sensitive and responsive learning environments for diverse students.

Examining Identity, Conflict, and Citizenship

Conflict is inescapably tied to diversity. In contrast to Hess (2001, 2009), this article has shown that any topic, settled or unsettled, can be addressed as a conflictual issue, especially by inviting recognition of diversity. As discussed above, Mrs. Amrita

presented Canadian immigration as an unsettled issue, even though it appeared as settled in the text. Her invitation to compare and contrast the dominant Canadian narrative with students' own divergent immigration stories provided opportunities for students to share the economic and cultural adaptation challenges and conflicts that come with immigration.

Ms. Marlee, at first, presented information as uncontested based on her perspective, which was that religious intolerance was wrong, and then asked students to research their personal stories in collaboration with their families and peers, in order to engage in a meaningful reflection and dialogue about religious difference. In this way, Ms. Marlee used the initial interpersonal conflict between Tina and Fatima as a teachable moment to create a powerful learning opportunity for diverse students. In a similar way, Mrs. Amrita's students collected information from a variety of sources (family and peers, as well as texts), which encouraged their reflective questioning and interpretation of at least one topic—immigration— that they found personally relevant. While an overt conflict did not erupt in Mrs. Amrita's class, the similar process of researching about cultural histories in collaboration with students' families and then engaging in sharing with their peers illustrated how students' cultural resources were valuable material for discussions about citizenship, integration, and peacebuilding.

In both Ms. Marlee's and Mrs. Amrita's classes, divergent perspectives were raised about various texts. Ms. Marlee used an Aboriginal creation story from the class text and Mrs. Amrita used generic, fictitious immigration stories from the text to introduce the topic to students. In both instances, textbook stories conflicted with the students' personal narratives and experiences. When teachers invited exploration of these conflicts and provided time to dialogue about this difference, opportunities opened up for students to reflect on diversity and conflict, and to draw on connections to their personal experiences.

Mr. Hiroshi used a different technique. He showed students a newspaper article about the uprising in Egypt, and encouraged students to make self-to-text connections by inviting one student, Mona, who had a personal connection to this conflict, to speak to it and make it real for the other students. Mr. Hiroshi often used current events to connect to his students' diversities and to compare and contrast these with historical events. Mr. Hiroshi presented and played with conflicts to varying levels. This pattern of consistent inclusion of current events and experiences in relation to historical conflict facilitated a safe-enough space for Mona to share her personal connection to a conflict.

In these three cases, students' identities and teachers' identities played major roles, together, in how different conflictual issues were grappled with and responded to. These examples of peacebuilding—writing creation stories in Ms. Marlee's class, sharing immigration stories in Mrs. Amrita's class, and discussing the conflict in Egypt in Mr. Hiroshi's class—showed how possibilities for dialogue were opened up when teachers affirmed students' identities and encouraged them to share their personal perspectives. In all three instances, the teachers shared their own personal connection and perspectives on the issues: Ms. Marlee disclosed her religious perspective, Mrs. Amrita spoke about her challenges in acculturating to Canadian

society, and Mr. Hiroshi shared his position on the impact of war and rebellions. While these teacher disclosures prompted some students to participate, the sensitive and controversial topics may still have silenced others. In this way, teachers' skills for encouraging and facilitating identity-linked or sensitive conflicts are an integral element for ensuring the safety and inclusivity of all students' diverse experiences.

Empowering and Engaging Diverse Perspectives

Hemmings (2000) theorized that when teachers connected students' identities to curriculum content, minoritized students were empowered to participate in democratic dialogue processes. In the cases discussed here, many diverse students, even the typically quieter ones, when invited, appeared to want to discuss conflictual issues, both by sharing their experiences and by expressing their desire to learn and talk more about current events occurring around the world. Teaching explicitly about conflict and diversity through a critical multicultural program invited quiet and diverse students in the classroom to speak. Through discussions about diversity and conflict, the three teachers facilitated peacebuilding, which then invited further opportunities for learning about divergent or conflicting perspectives.

Navigating the multiple worlds of home, school and community is eased when the relationships between teachers and peers, and between content and pedagogy, are closely interconnected and related (Cummins, 2001; C. A. Parker, 2010a; Phelan, et al., 1991). Teachers need to integrate culturally relevant pedagogies in their practice, in order to better negotiate diverse ethnocultural minority students' identities and citizenship, critical multicultural education programs, and discussion-based teaching about conflict and diversity (Banks, 2006; Delpit, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2004).

These classroom cases illustrated the similar and different ways three teachers led their ethnocultural minority students to grapple with different norms for engagement in dialogues about difference and social conflicts; dialogues were about war, religion and cultural/social exclusion. In sum: all three teachers used a variety of dialogic pedagogies to encourage their diverse students to study how conflicts had historically been approached and could be resolved peacefully by exploring and including multiple perspectives, evident in current events and students' experiences.

Conclusion: Inclusive Spaces for Diverse Students

Teaching, especially at the elementary school level, includes showing young students how to enact good, moral behaviour that reflects national ideals (W. C. Parker, 2011). Culturally sensitive classroom discussions and interactions amongst peers and teachers help teach students about how to both perceive and act on their morals and values in diverse contexts.

When students' perspectives are delegitimized, their inclusion is compromised, especially in discussion of identity-linked narratives (Bekerman and Zembylas, 2011). Thus, bridging students' diversities and having opportunities for sustained dialogue are essential components of peace-based curricula (Danesh, 2006; McCauley, 2002). This study illustrated how diverse students responded to conflictual issues pedagogies and discussions, when teachers and peers affirmed their diverse identities and

perspectives. Consistent opportunities to critically examine conflictual issues through peacebuilding education pedagogies facilitated inclusive spaces for diverse students to participate freely and safely.

In this study, I examined what happened to visible minority immigrant students in Canadian elementary school contexts who did and did not participate in conflictual issues discussions. I also investigated how diverse students' concerns regarding the risks of participation (e.g., embarrassment, negative peer/teacher feedback) might be overcome through peacebuilding education and dialogue, so as to create safe, inclusive spaces for minority and dissenting viewpoints. In addressing such issues, peacebuilding education processes may be used to examine how such interpretations reinforce cultural hegemony.

Through exploring how peacebuilding education processes facilitated or impeded students' social and academic engagement, this research adds to the body of literature on peacebuilding education in school settings while also responding to its limitations in attending to student diversity. It also contributes to understanding how diverse, lower-status, potentially marginalized students experience conflict dialogue processes and how their identities can be included in the curriculum in ways that promote democracy and peacebuilding.

Peace-based pedagogical experiences illustrate what Walter Parker (2011) called "wiggle room"—room to allow for movement within institutional constraints. Wiggle room to infuse dialogue across and about difference can be found in prescribed curriculum content. The classroom teacher carries the important role of continuously mediating and leading the positioning of conflict in the classroom. However, in this study, when conflictual talk was closely attached to students' identities, the various students' responses in each context, and their high level of engagement when conflictual talk did closely relate to their identities, were clear indicators of how curricular content can be made to relate and connect to students' past, present, and future experiences in their diverse world.

Notes

1. Names of individuals and schools have been altered for confidentiality.

2. These were uprisings in Lower and Upper Canada in 1837 and 1838. In the Lower Canad Rebellion, French and English settlers rebelled against British colonial government. The Upper Canada Rebellion, led by William Lyon Mackenzie, who in 1834 was Toronto's first mayor, focused on the oligarchy known as the Family Compact. The rebels who led the uprisings stimulated governmental and political reform.

3. Referring to the Arab Spring in 2011 and the ongoing uprisings that called for political change and social reform.

4. The Arcadian Expulsion was the expulsion of Acadians from the Maritime region by the British.

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