Conflict Management and Dialogue with Diverse Students: Novice Teachers' Approaches and Concerns

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Abstract

Education, in settings with globalized migrant populations, does not automatically lead to peace: for instance, Othering narratives (in interpersonal interaction or curriculum texts) may exacerbate destructive social conflict when uncontested. Paradoxically, in pedagogies that do invite discussion of conflicting viewpoints, marginalized students may be reluctant to voice divergent perspectives, or may be treated disrespectfully. We probed this puzzle through an exploratory quantitative and qualitative survey of how 68 novice teachers approached conflict and ethnocultural diversity in their classrooms. Most expressed some confidence in their capacities to address conflict, though many reported feeling alone, intimidated, or unwilling to engage students in constructive conflict talk. Several emphasized that responding to students' diversities was an important part of their conflict management, while others said they treated all students the same way. Most said they needed more education and support in order to address conflict educatively in their classrooms.

How do novice teachers address (or ignore) conflicts and differences with and among diverse students? How might these approaches to conflict shape implicit and explicit learning opportunities? How might various kinds of conflict dialogue in classrooms help to build (or impede) positive peace, for diverse students in particular? We probed these questions with an exploratory survey of 35 pre-service teacher candidates and 33 first-year teachers trained in the Greater Toronto Area. Most of these diverse novice teachers were teaching in culturally diverse urban settings; however, some of these settings were relatively comfortable while others were resource-deprived, which evidently influenced the conflict cultures of their classrooms. Study participants' perceptions of ethnocultural diversity and the role of the teacher in conflict education informed the choices they made in addressing classroom conflict—and were informed by their initial teacher education experiences—in contrasting ways. Many understood conflict as primarily a discipline problem, for which some disproportionately blamed their lowest status students. Few reported intentionally introducing or guiding dialogue about conflict, such as questions of social

diversity or justice, as learning opportunities. We examine these novice teachers' responses in light of research literature on how various conflict communication processes may help to create (or impede) inclusive classroom environments, the challenges posed by these potential peacebuilding learning opportunities for novice teachers, and some ways in which teacher education and professional support may help to address these challenges.

Conflict and peacebuilding: The role of schools

Social and interpersonal conflicts are ubiquitous in our society. Experiences of life disruption, cultural transition, and frequently social-economic marginalization mean that newcomer immigrant populations presumably face even more such conflict than the general populations they join; further they may bring with them pre-migration life experiences of persecution and/or armed violence. Public schools are institutions where people from diverse groups come together, with one another and with the nation state, and where their differences and struggles often become visible in the public domain. The roots of conflict lie in socially-structured competing interests and patterns of access, and also in culturally-shaped beliefs, fears, and values (Ross, 1993; 2007). Classroom education and school practices influence (and are influenced by) both kinds of factors, in ways that may either exacerbate or ameliorate destructive inter-group conflict and marginalization (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000; Davies, 2004). As Weinstein and his colleagues explain: "Schools lie in the nexus of political manipulation, fear and societal conflict, but also can be a potent forum for change" (2007, p. 65). For example, teachers and schools may influence different patterns of access to academic help, language of instruction, segregation or integration, and "powerful knowledge" (Young, 2008). Similarly, cultural symbols, historical narratives, and commemorative practices in schools can reinforce (or, alternatively, can help to bridge and de-escalate) intergroup conflict (Bekerman, Zembylas, & McGlynn, 2009; Funk & Said, 2004). Like schooling in general, classroom texts and pedagogies may contribute to peacebuilding by confronting "structures" of violence such as inequitable access and marginalization, and/or by confronting "cultures" of violence, such as the recirculation and acceptance of violence, oppression, and enemy images (Curle, Freire, & Galtung, 1974).

Peacebuilding is by no means a simple matter of silencing conflict. A dominant societal norm in relatively peaceful contexts such as Canada is to view conflict as bad and to be avoided: this stigmatizes or silences difference and dissent, thus reinforcing marginalization (Merelman, 1990). This is unlikely to help students to think deeply about the causes of, or sustainable solutions to, intergroup violence. Official curriculum and pedagogies that deny or ignore social conflict may, intentionally or not, reinforce barriers between cultural groups, and normalize existing cultural disparities and social inequalities (Apple, 1979; Delpit, 1995; Gérin-LaJoie, 2008; Willis, 2003). In contrast, pedagogies that invite students to explore conflicting perspectives on unresolved issues could become opportunities for inclusive learning, relationship rebuilding, and pluralistic democratic engagement (Freire, 1998). Thus, pedagogy for peace and reconciliation cannot actually be "peaceful," in the sense of calm or non-disruptive. "Positive" peace, referring to the *presence* of democratic relationships

and structures for handling conflict constructively and justly rather than mere absence of overt violence (Galtung, 1969), requires mechanisms and habits for conflict dialogue across difference. Given existing structural inequalities and cultures of violence, curriculum for peacebuilding needs to open spaces for students and teachers to recognize and “interrupt” problems of injustice: this would involve emergent and organized forums for positive conflict experiences such as inclusive student representation in governance, peacemaking circles, frequent generation of dialogue and deliberation, and critical pedagogies that address injustices (Davies, 2004). 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.

Cultural diversity and equity in school curriculum and relationships

As some students strive to be fully accepted into mainstream society and school communities, they may try to dissociate themselves from their families by purposely not speaking their familial languages or acknowledging their cultural heritages, much less speaking up in conflictual issue discussions that explicitly relate to their ethnic identity (Cummins, 2001; Parker, 2010). Even though mainstream curriculum narratives can be harmful and exclusionary to subordinated groups, overt conflict (even when aired with constructive intent) is *also* likely riskiest for the lowest status participants in classrooms, because their ideas and identities may be least familiar, and/or least welcome, in the eyes of classroom majorities. When cultural differences or power differentials are ignored, conflictual discussion-based pedagogies may be particularly challenging or even detrimental for marginalized students including newcomers (Hess & Avery, 2008b). Teachers who do address conflict, bias and difference as learning opportunities in heterogeneous classes may meet resistance and challenges from some mainstream as well as some minoritized students (e.g. Subedi, 2008). As Robert Putnam argues (2007), healthy relationships (what he calls social capital) may be even more vulnerable, and more difficult to build, in diverse settings. Clearly, diverse histories, perspectives, and experiences may serve as a resource for critical reflection about social conflicts (Ladson-Billings, 2004a; W. Parker, 2004). Adapting content and pedagogy to acknowledge the diversity of participants is a key characteristic of peacebuilding education (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000; Lederach, 2002). Yet, students in lower-income and/or immigrant and minority classrooms seem to have *fewer* opportunities to participate in critical questioning and thoughtful discussions, compared with students in more mainstream or privileged environments (Campbell, 2007; Conover & Searling, 2000; Dull & Murrow, 2008; Kahne & Middaugh 2008). This is not all about explicit curriculum content: an important factor that facilitates culturally diverse immigrant students’ successful navigation across the boundaries of “multiple worlds”—home, school, and community—is teachers’ personal and pedagogical engagement with these students’ particular experiences and identities (Phelan, Davidson, & Cao, 1991).

Conflict and difference as learning opportunities in classrooms

Following the logic of Freire, Davies and others (above), classroom discussions of social and political issues are an essential component of education for democracy and peacebuilding, because they encourage students to be intellectually active, critical participants, and offer the possibility to denormalize the systemic violence embedded in the *status quo*. International quantitative studies confirm that, on average, students who report that they participate in conflictual issues discussions in open classroom climates tend to develop the skills and inclinations for greater civic participation, including respect for alternative points of view and sensitivity to matters of discrimination and equity (Hahn, 1998; Hess & Avery, 2008a; Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schultz, 2001). Most students seem to find such issues dialogue pedagogies to be especially meaningful and engaging (Avery, Simmons, & Freeman, 2007; Hess & Posselt, 2002; Simon, 2001). Some research suggests that these positive impacts of classroom public issues discussions may be especially pronounced among students of lower socio-economic status, who often have fewer opportunities for such learning outside of school (Chaffee & al, 1997; Kahne & Spote, 2008). However, Hahn (like Subedi, 2008, above) found that some students worried about negative feedback and embarrassment if they voiced unpopular views in classroom discussions. She concluded that teachers needed to consciously handle key elements of the instructional climate—content, pedagogy, and atmosphere—so as to model inclusive “democratic inquiry and discourse” (Hahn, 1998, p. 232). An open classroom climate means that diverse students can freely participate in respectfully exchanging divergent perspectives with peers and teachers (also Fine, 1993). In contrast, a competitive debate approach seems to marginalize less-confident and lower-status students, compared to a more cooperative and open discussion approach (Hemmings, 2000). One study (Larson, 2003) suggests that some high school students who were quiet in in-person class discussions gained a voice in online discussions. Clearly, complexities and diversities of student identity would influence teachers’ pedagogical choices in facilitating or avoiding conflictual issues discussions. Although nearly all dialogue facilitation guidelines advocate an unbiased or balanced stance, teachers’ choices of what to talk about and how to talk about it inevitably embody values and ideologies; they cannot be neutral. In this imperfect world, all conflict dialogue—from addressing conflicts *after* they erupt into visible incidents for restorative problem-solving, to discussions that intentionally *bring to the surface* previously silenced conflicts and unpopular viewpoints to create openings for democratization and peacebuilding—takes place in the context of dynamic and unequal social power.

Teacher development and support for peacebuilding

Educators play a vital role in helping students to develop their sense of self and acceptance of the cultural differences around them, and this goal cannot be achieved without recognizing and addressing differences (Bickmore 2008a; Kumashiro, 2004). However, pedagogies that really embrace the *conflicts* associated with social differences and disagreements are not commonly implemented in Canadian, US, UK or Australian schools (Bickmore 2005a;

Fields, 1998; Hess & Avery, 2008a; Sears, Clark, & Hughes, 1999; Yamashita, 2006). This shows that, while conflictual topics may be fleetingly mentioned, neither interpersonal restorative peacemaking dialogue nor critical citizenship conflict dialogue curricula are widely implemented in most public schools, especially in classrooms that include visible minority immigrant populations. Yet even when conflict is not visible in classroom conversations, teachers are teaching about social difference and conflict: all are shaped by cultural patterns, including language, that embody and reinforce implicit hierarchies of power through their presumptions, for example in the ways teachers and texts recognize, deny, normalize, or construct as Other certain identities and behaviours (e.g. Butler, 1999). Subject matter and pedagogies that attend explicitly to significant social conflicts are inherently complex, uncertain, sometimes controversial, and therefore risky for teachers, especially novice teachers (Kelly & Brandes, 2001; W. Parker, 2004; Simon, 2001). The choice and interpretation of such subject matter is especially complicated in relation to today's populations of diverse students with global reach (e.g. Banks & Banks, 1995; Bickmore 2007; Cochran-Smith, 1995; Harris, 1996). Even the students who are not themselves recent immigrants affect, and are more clearly affected by, a much wider world than students of past generations (e.g. Elkind, 1995; Kirkwood-Tucker, 2004; Thornton, 2005; Torres, 1998). Furthermore, it is challenging to provide students (who begin with unequal social status and different bases of prior knowledge) equal opportunities to succeed. In the context of student diversity and globalization, teaching for positive peace requires more substantive knowledge, more skills, and more comfort with openness and uncertainty than teaching towards the *status quo* and an unquestioned, dominant 'common sense.' This can feel overwhelming, especially for novice teachers, given the social pressures, practicalities, and sanctions at work in the life of a teacher (Bigelow, et al., 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2004b).

Many teachers have had little opportunity to gain confidence or skills for handling complex social, political, and moral subject matter (especially in relation to diverse students), either in their own student years or in typical teacher education (Bickmore 2005a; Boler & Zembylas, 2003; Tupper, 2005). Therefore, avoiding conflict and complexity, they may engage in what McNeil (1986) called defensive teaching, which reinforces exclusionary standardization of school knowledge. Teacher education and professional support that address the roots of this problem may help to prepare teachers for culturally relevant, inclusive, dialogic conflict pedagogy. However, to develop confidence and competence for complex, inclusive pedagogies seems to require not mere coursework, but teacher development and support that is relatively horizontal, built around experiences of dissent and dialogue among peers (Little, 1993). Key components seem to include dissonance (disagreement, or stimuli to critical reflection such as watching their 'own' students doing things they didn't know they were capable of doing) and dialogue (questioning and problem-solving among teachers) (e.g. Bickmore 2008b; Foster, Lewis, & Onafowora, 2005).

Thus our exploratory research investigates how selected novice teachers reported that they addressed conflict with diverse students, as background for our current research that is examining how various kinds of dialogue pedagogies

either reinforce marginalization or encourage reciprocal engagement with diverse students (Bickmore, 2011).

Research Method and Data Sources

We conducted an exploratory, on-line, quantitative and qualitative questionnaire, completed in early spring 2009 by selected pre-service teacher candidates and first-year teachers trained in the Toronto area. The goal was to examine these novice teachers' understandings, beliefs, and perceived needs in handling conflict (including facilitating dialogue on conflictual issues) in their classrooms. Our research questions were: (1) How do selected pre-service and first year teachers perceive and experience conflict in the classroom? (2) How do they believe the identities (cultural, ethnic, gender) of their students affect the ways in which they facilitate dialogue on conflictual issues in their classrooms? (3) What education and support are these novice teachers drawing upon to inform their classroom conflict management/education, and what education and support do they feel they need? The data and discussion below focus on the novice teacher participants' pedagogical choices, sense of preparation and confidence, and apparent understandings of what it meant to address 'conflict' in the classroom, in relation to their perceptions of their students' diversity. Our questionnaire asked about cultural diversity only in general terms: Although most of the participants were teaching in schools with significant populations of newcomer students, clearly these exploratory findings shed only a little bit of indirect light on how these novice teachers might have been shaping the classroom conflict education experiences of their diverse students.

The questionnaire included multiple-choice and Likert scale questions, and open-ended follow-up questions. This juxtaposition of quantitative and qualitative data, analyzed in relation to review of research literature, enriched our understanding of the research problem (Cresswell, 2008). For the quantitative responses, we used statistical analysis software (SPSS 15.0) to generate descriptive statistics, frequencies and cross-tabulations. Qualitative responses were coded thematically, to identify patterns and relationships amongst participants' responses. To interpret findings, qualitative data were compared to quantitative data and to previously-published research literature. A total of 68 individuals (85% of those contacted) responded to the questionnaire. All were enrolled, or had recently graduated from, one of two post-graduate pre-service teacher education programs at the same university in southern Ontario. Thirty-three were first-year novice teachers and 35 were pre-service teacher candidates who had nearly completed their initial teacher education programs. Of the pre-service teacher candidates, 16 were enrolled in a 1-year program (sampled purposively because they had been enrolled in a conflict management elective course, in addition to their required social foundations course), and 19 were enrolled in a 2-year program that offered an anti-discriminatory education course but not a conflict management course. Since significant differences did not emerge among groups (that is, between participants in the two initial teacher education programs or between teacher candidates and first year teachers) except where noted, we mainly report on the survey responses as a whole.

Comparable to the enrollment in most North American initial teacher education programs, participants included 14 (21%) males and 54 (79%) females.

Because slightly more than three quarters of the study participants were, or had been, enrolled in an elementary 2-year initial teacher education program, the sample was lopsided toward individuals teaching in younger grades: 29 (43%) taught in the primary/junior division, 32 (47%) junior/intermediate, and 7 (10%) taught in intermediate/senior grades. Participants were asked to report their ethnicity: 22% self-identified as visible ethnic minorities, and 78% as visible majority. Five of the novice teachers were working in international contexts during the time of the study (2 in the United Arab Emirates, 2 in the United Kingdom, 1 in the French West Indies); the remainder were teaching or student teaching in the Greater Toronto Area. Participants described the locations of the schools where they were teaching as urban poverty/working class (28%), urban middle class/affluent (38%), suburban middle class/affluent (31%), or rural (3%).

Findings

How did the teachers experience conflict, in relation to their students' diversities?

The questionnaire asked these novice teachers whether they felt that they dealt with a lot of conflict in their classrooms, giving the example of interpersonal disputes and discipline issues. Only 4% indicated that they did not deal with conflict at all in their classrooms; 41% said that they dealt with conflict in their classroom to a small extent, 31% to some extent, 17% to a great extent, and 9% to a very great extent. Without a benchmark, it is impossible to know how much conflict felt like a 'great extent' to each teacher, but it is not surprising that well over half (57%) reported handling a moderate to large amount of interpersonal conflict.

Participants identified a range of conflict experiences with students. A number of these novice teachers described conflict as "normal" in their classrooms, and did not articulate any anxiety about it. For instance, one first-year male teacher reported, "just the normal conflict for the age the students are at." Some teachers, however, reported concern about many incidences of aggression among students, such as "social exclusion, teasing, tattling, bullying." Other teachers who reported a lot of conflict described teacher-student discipline issues (rather than student-peer disputes or aggression), such as "electronic devices and movement about the classroom ... [and] talking out."

Several teacher participants evidently viewed these kinds of conflicts as bad and blamed them on students, in particular on students from lower socioeconomic status, single-parent families, and lower academic achievement levels. One referred to these students as "trouble magnets." Although none of these teachers explicitly attributed 'bad' behaviour to students' ethnocultural backgrounds (the prevailing discourse of their pre-service teacher education programs likely would have discouraged that), the demographic factors they did mention are often heavily correlated with visible minority status (Curtis, Livingstone, & Smaller, 1992). For instance, one teacher noted that: "A lot of my students come from single-parent families, or have very young, less-educated parents. There are a lot of discipline issues." Upper-stream enriched classes, in contrast, were characterized as "very easy to discipline because [these students] are highly motivated", again implying that interpersonal and discipline conflicts

were caused by bad student attitudes. One participant claimed that language learners with low English proficiency—presumably immigrant newcomers—“seem more likely to resort to aggression in their conflicts and seem less receptive to other forms of conflict resolution.” When asked directly (“Do you think the ethnic and cultural identities of your students affect the ways in which you address/ deal with conflict in your classroom?”), many teacher respondents (41%) said no. The majority said that students’ ethnicity and culture had some (27%) or considerable (32%) effect; however, apparently they understood this question in different ways. At least one teacher interpreted this question as asking whether there was conflict “over” ethnic differences among students, and said she didn’t believe there was such conflict in her classroom. Another teacher, in contrast, noted that she herself had had to learn to relate to her class of primarily South Asian-origin students:

At the beginning of the year I noticed that many of my students avoided looking directly into my eyes—something to which I was unaccustomed. I found later that many of those students believed that it was inappropriate to look directly into someone’s eyes for a sustained period of time. This affected my expectations of having any hard and fast rules when addressing conflict with Grade 6 students.

While an exploratory study like this one cannot provide robust evidence on the relation between teachers’ own ethnic identities and the ways they perceived and handled conflict with their students, it is perhaps not surprising that the teacher expressing this cultural sensitivity defined herself as a visible minority. On the other hand, several teachers stressed that recognizing and responding to the diverse cultural make-up of their classrooms was an important part of their conflict communication capacities. For example:

It’s important to understand how different cultures address conflict before you can implement conflict resolution strategies in your classroom. You need to know where your students are coming from to understand their actions.

One teacher said that parents had expressed concerns about discriminatory conflict management, but denied the validity of their perspective: “I have a lot of parents who feel that their children are targeted because of their culture, even when this is not the case.” Overall, even though the majority of participating teachers said that students’ cultural identities affected how they dealt with conflict, many chose to overlook the ways their own understandings of students’ divergent cultural and ethnic identities, or discriminatory environments, might act as barriers to addressing conflict justly and constructively. In response to a similar question about whether gender and sexual identities of their students affected their handling of conflict, a similar proportion (43%) said it did not. The majority (57%) indicated that gender had some (26%) or considerable (31%) effect on the ways in which they treated conflict in the classroom. However, again qualitative responses showed that teachers perceived gender and its implications in different ways. Some said they treated all their students the same. Others attributed different conflict management styles to their students’ essential

differences, for example suggesting that girls and boys had conflict over “somewhat different issues,” or reiterating the common view that girls tend to be more “emotional,” whereas “boys tend to argue about games and who did what first.” Thus, as with other aspects of culture, the majority of the novice teachers in this study reported that students’ gender differences had some impact on the ways they handled conflict, but most of them attributed most of this difference to something inherent in the students.

(How) Did the teachers address conflicting perspectives as learning opportunities?

We asked teachers in a few ways about how much, and how, they addressed or guided conflict in order to facilitate student learning; and to what extent they facilitated particular conflict communication strategies (communication skills, dialogue, negotiation, mediation, circle processes, class meetings, or other student governance). Internal consistency analysis indicated that participants’ responses to these items were so inter-correlated that they should be grouped together for further analysis (Cronbach’s Alpha = .837). The combined frequencies with which teacher participants reported facilitating such conflict dialogue processes ranged from 1.29 to 4.86 on a 5-point scale (from ‘not’ to ‘a very great extent,’ mean score 2.86). A small percentage of teachers (7%) indicated that they used these dialogue processes never (7%) or only to a small extent (24%), whereas the majority reported that they facilitated such dialogue to some extent (29%), a great extent (25%), or a very great extent (15%).

Thus, although most of these novice teachers reported attempting to facilitate conflict learning to some extent in their classrooms, there were wide variations among individuals—in how often they addressed conflict explicitly, in which kinds of conflicts, and in how they understood what was to be learned by whom. Another question asked how the teachers planned for dealing with or addressing conflict in their day-to-day lessons and also whether their lessons addressed diverse, conflicting and/or controversial perspectives, for example by engaging in discussion of public issues and critical thinking in lesson subject-matter. The intersecting open-ended responses to these three questions are presented together.

Several teachers said that they did *not* plan for conflict learning, but just dealt with conflicts after they arose. Others elaborated that they taught conflict management “implicitly” through role modelling, vocabulary, and respectful demeanour. Others tried to “prevent” conflict (or, as another framed it, to deal with it proactively) through the ways they organized their lessons and nurtured classroom community. Some pre-service teacher candidates, unsurprisingly, deferred in conflict management to the previously set rules and authority of their associate (mentor) teachers. This presents an interesting contradiction to the quantitative responses above, in which most of the teachers claimed to address conflicting perspectives as a learning opportunity fairly often. Future research would be needed to probe what teachers are actually doing when they believe they are teaching about conflict, and how these choices impact on ethnocultural minority and newcomer immigrant students in particular, as well as what kinds of teacher education and professional development might help in these situations. As one teacher saw it: “I was trained in subject-area teaching methods ... not in engaging kids in dialogue and mediation.” In another teacher’s classroom,

conflict mediation and dialogue were facilitated by a child and youth worker; not by the regular teacher. Implicitly, these teachers seemed to assume that regular academic subject matter did not carry a point of view, nor that it could appropriately embody divergent points of view, and thereby invite critical thinking or interruption of cultural domination, as part of the planned curriculum. Many participants represented conflict as an interpersonal problem that students could and should grow out of, rather than as a societal phenomenon for which schools should prepare them.

Several other teachers, however, described regular (although low-risk, non-controversial) conflict communication activities, such as daily or weekly community sharing circles, daily social skills lessons, or regular class discussions and requiring students to make presentations in front of the class. Of the teachers who did believe conflict could be addressed educatively in regular subject matter lessons, more identified Language Arts (69%), Social Studies (43%), and Physical Education and Health (35%) than Drama (10%), Science (6%), and Mathematics (3%). This result may be skewed by the teaching specializations and levels represented in this sample. Several of these novice teachers expressed reluctance to address topics that might provoke critical thinking about social conflicts. One frequently expressed concern was that participants felt it would be especially risky for them, as intern or first-year teachers, to address controversial issues. Others argued parents would see such topics and processes as distractors from “real” subject-matter curriculum, or object to their explicitly value-laden nature:

I think if I were to start to engage my kids in teaching about dialogue and mediation, for instance, that parents might think that I’m wasting my time trying to teach their kids values and might accuse me of not sticking to the curriculum. ... [dialogue and negotiation is] not what parents want.

Others, in contrast, said they supported the idea of approaching conflicts and inviting conflicting perspectives as learning opportunities, but did not yet feel confident in their own capacities to handle such complex topics and processes. Clearly, many of these new teachers avoided addressing (and especially avoided intentionally introducing) conflicting perspectives as learning opportunities in their classrooms. It is notable that, in their responses to this part of the questionnaire, no respondent mentioned the gender or ethnocultural diversities of their students as potential learning resources, nor did anyone question the primacy or applicability to all students of the texts and curriculum mandates they were implementing.

What education and support did the teachers have for classroom conflict education, and feel they needed?

Participants rated the extent to which they believed they had more to learn (for example, from colleagues/mentors and from experience), and the extent to which they wanted to learn more peacebuilding strategies and practices, to help them to better facilitate conflict learning in their classrooms. Their responses to these three questions were sufficiently inter-correlated that they could be reliably

grouped together (Cronbach's Alpha = .859). Responses ranged between 1 (low) and 5 (high), with a mean of 4.34, indicating that on average, these teachers were very interested in learning more about strategies and practices for dealing with conflict. In response to related questions, participants reported that they had some limited access to professional development and resources to help them learn to handle conflict educatively, and the majority said they would like more such resources. Several participants suggested that workshops, mentors, and/or joint planning meetings would be a big help. As one participant put it, "I don't have enough support or resources to confront these issues first hand."

When asked, "Most days, how *confident* do you feel when addressing conflict in your classroom?" participants rated their confidence from 1 (low) to 5 (high). We were surprised that most reported feeling confident to some extent (45%), a great extent (40%), or even a very great extent (6%). Relatively few participants said they were not (3%), or only to a small extent (6%), confident.

In elaborating, however, many participants expressed considerable concern over how their confidence influenced their ability to address conflict. While a small number said they did have solid support at their schools, another wrote, "I feel alone in dealing with conflict." Thus there was considerable variation among respondents, but the qualitative analysis suggests that most of these novice teachers felt only limited confidence about handling conflict in the context of diversity, and wanted more opportunities to learn to do so.

Participants were asked to what extent they believed their teacher education programs had adequately prepared them to handle conflict or facilitate conflict learning in their classrooms. On average, 28% indicated that their programs had prepared them only to a small extent, 50% to some extent, and only 3% to a very great extent (average score 3.66 out of 5). A cross-tabulation showed no significant difference between pre-service and first-year teachers' responses (Pearson chi-squared = .381).

However, there were interesting differences between the 16 teacher candidates who were enrolled in a conflict management elective course in the one-year program (PS1) and the 17 teacher candidates enrolled in the two-year program that did not offer a conflict management course (PS2). PS1 teacher candidates' responses ranged across the scale, with 75% reporting that their program had prepared them some, to a great extent, or to a very great extent (PS1 total average score 3.1 of 5). PS2 teacher candidates' responses ranged only from 1 to 4, with just 52% reporting that their program had prepared them some (3) or to a great extent (4) (PS2 total average score 2.4). While this exploratory study did not have a large nor randomly selected sample, this result suggests that pre-service teacher education that is explicitly focused on addressing conflict in the context of diversity may help novice teachers to feel confident and competent in this pedagogical area. Respondents elaborated in various ways, some pointing to practical teaching experience, rather than teacher education, as the best way to learn to handle conflict. Again, these responses indicate that most of these novice teacher participants felt at best partially prepared to handle classroom conflict.

An additional question asked whether participants believed that the anti-discriminatory (social foundations) course in their teacher education programs had helped them "to prepare for addressing conflict constructively, equitably, and inclusively with culturally diverse students." Interestingly, 13% reported that

these courses had not helped them at all to address cultural conflict, and one person didn't answer the question. Most teachers indicated that their foundations course had helped to a small (27%) or some (32%) extent. About a quarter said that this course had helped them to a great (16%) or very great (10%) extent. One participant explained:

I think my training in anti-discriminatory education has provided me with much more knowledge of how to address conflict constructively, equitably, and inclusively than do new graduates of other teacher education programmes, as well as compared to many long time practicing teachers.

Another explained that his anti-discriminatory education course had helped him to approach his diverse class in ways that he wouldn't have been able to do otherwise:

I don't think I'd have the patience for the disrespect some of the students show and some of the behaviours that occur in the classroom without those [anti-discriminatory] classes. For example, some of my students who are black talk all the time, but I understand that this might be the way they are used to interacting while at home and with their own peer group, so I think I'm much more patient than I would have been without my anti-discrimination classes.

This teacher shows awareness of the disconnection or clash between his black students' home environments and the cultural expectations of the school. At the same time, his comments may betray a deficit understanding of such home-school differences ("disrespect" and talking out of turn "all the time" — the teacher's "patience" may indicate caring, but it also may indicate lowered standards). Overall, these novice teachers approached their own and their students' cultural and gender identities and diversities in contrasting ways, in their management of conflict, and facilitation of conflict learning.

Discussion & Conclusion

Clearly, conflict dialogue is an important, although risky, way to potentially engage diverse students in democratic citizenship learning. The majority of the novice teacher participants in this exploratory survey reported that they were teaching in classrooms that were at least somewhat ethnoculturally diverse. However, respondents differed in whether and how they acknowledged adapting their teaching or interpersonal conflict management approaches to students' diverse gender and cultural identities. Several asserted that their conflict management approaches were not affected by the diversity of their student population, applying a 'one size fits all' approach. On the whole, the study participants expressed some limited confidence in their own capacities to manage conflict and to facilitate dialogic conflict learning with their students, but they did not feel sufficiently prepared to deal with conflict. However, many did state that their pre-service teacher education, in particular in anti-discriminatory education (social foundations) and among those enrolled in a conflict management elective, had helped considerably to prepare them for addressing

conflict equitably and sensitively, in particular with ethnoculturally diverse students. While many teachers considered themselves fairly well prepared to address conflict in their classroom in a peaceful manner, most reported dealing with conflict primarily reactively, rather than actually planning lessons or activities that would encourage conflict dialogue across difference. In sum, this research suggests that focused teacher education and professional development around peacebuilding and conflict dialogue processes, in the context of gender and ethnocultural diversity and inequity, may offer the kinds of support that novice teachers need (and typically do not have), to engage diverse newcomer immigrant students in constructive, inclusive conflict communication learning. North American classrooms are inevitably linked to global and local conflicts, through the personal histories of diverse immigrant student participants as well as through transnational communications, media, and curriculum texts. Clearly, teachers face the daunting question of how to address such conflicts in ways that would support democratic education and peacebuilding, and typically they have had little opportunity to gain confidence and competence in this area. Silencing expression of differences (or blaming disruptions on students) would tend to deny opportunities to unlearn patterns of social exclusion, neocolonial biases, and violence. Yet at the same time, facing social conflicts explicitly and interactively can be intimidating, for both teachers (especially beginners) and students (especially those from marginalized groups). Our exploratory study suggests that novice teachers who have had explicit opportunities to learn to effectively use conflict communication processes in the context of diversity (through conflict management and/or anti-discriminatory social foundations courses) may be somewhat better prepared to create inclusive learning spaces for all of their students. Thus, further research is needed about how teachers may be supported to learn how to address conflictual issues and contexts constructively and equitably, and about how their resulting conflict dialogue and communication pedagogies might facilitate increased participation and engagement among students with unequal status and diverse perspectives, histories, and identities, in various contexts.

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