As communities around the world continue to attract international immigrants, schools have become centers for learning how to engage with people’s multiple ethnic and cultural origins. Ethnocultural minority immigrant students carry diverse histories and perspectives—which can serve as resources for critical reflection about social conflicts. These students’ identities need to be included in the curriculum so that diversity and conflictual issues can be openly discussed.

Immigrant children embody the many issues confronting today’s youth in a global, transnational, and interconnected world. Drawing on in-depth empirical case studies, this book explores the classroom experiences of these children. Varying in social and cultural capital, they contend with social and cultural conflict influenced not only by global politics and familial prejudices, but also by structural exclusion in Western curricula.

In democratic peacebuilding education, diverse students express divergent points of view in open, inclusive dialogue. Negotiating their multiple identities, such children develop skills for managing and responding to that conflict, thereby acquiring tools to challenge dominant hegemonic systems of oppression and control later in life.

In vivid classroom depictions, the reader learns of many outcomes: Young, quiet, and marginalized voices were heard. Dialogic pedagogies encouraged cooperation among students and strengthened class communities. What is more, the implicit and explicit curricula implemented in these diverse classrooms served to shape how students interpreted democracy in multicultural Canada.

The diverse experiences of the young people and teachers in this book illuminate the innermost landscapes of multicultural classrooms, providing deep insight into the social and cultural challenges and opportunities that ethnocultural minority children experience at school.
TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATION AND EDUCATION

Volume 2

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Migration has been adopted by many countries as a strategy to compete for the most talented, skillful, and resourceful and to ameliorate aging populations and labour shortages. The past few decades have witnessed both an expansion and transformation of international migration flows. The resulting demographic, social and cultural changes have reconfigured the landscapes of education in the receiving societies.

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Peacebuilding, Citizenship, and Identity

Empowering Conflict and Dialogue in Multicultural Classrooms

Christina Parker

University of Toronto, Canada
Renison University College, University of Waterloo, Canada

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreword</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Yvonne Hébert</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>xiii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 1. Why Peacebuilding Education?</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflicts and Identities Embedded in Canadian Citizenship Education</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextual Background</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodological Framework</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 2. Conflict and Diversity in Democratic Classrooms</strong></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why Are Peacebuilding, Citizenship, and Identity Important in Education?</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue, Difference, and Conflict in Education for Democracy</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflictual Issues across the Curriculum</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity, Identity, Power, Conflict, and Peacebuilding Education</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Multiculturalism and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion: Conflict and Diversity in Democratic and Diverse Classrooms</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 3. Building Classroom Climate: What Norms and Pedagogies Support and Impede Dialogue?</strong></td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and Pedagogical Contexts for Inclusion</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aria Public School, Grade 4, Ms. Marlee</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aria Public School, Grade 5, Mrs. Amrita</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgetown Public School, Grade 7, Mr. Hiroshi</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different Classroom Cultures and Pedagogies for Engagement</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 4. Identity Connections: Conflictual Issues across Time, Space, and Culture</strong></td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting Curriculum and Students’ Identities</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battling (Gender) Identities in War: Deconstructing Historical and Political Issues in a Grade 7 Class</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Conflicts and Canadian Identities in a Grade 4 Class</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rights and Responsibilities of Global-Canadian Citizens: Building Character and Strengthening Values in a Grade 5 Class</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Discussion: (De)Contextualizing Identity, Conflict, and Citizenship in Ethnic Communities 80

Chapter 5. Implicit and Explicit Conflict and Diversity Learning Experiences 89
- Social and Cultural Performances: Seeking Empowerment through Roles 90
- Kings, Queens, and Peasants: Hidden and Explicit Curriculum about Social Hierarchies 92
- Building Character and Strengthening Values: Rights and Responsibilities of Canadian Citizens 99
- Rebellions and the Arab Spring in a Canadian Multicultural Context 109
- Conflict in Learning Democracy in Multicultural Contexts 122

Chapter 6. Conflict, Diversity, and the Inclusion of Student Voices 127
- Religion, Identity, and Education: Pedagogical Structures for Inclusion 128
- The Common School and Religious Schools 129
- Religious Literacy, Civic Literacy, and Interruptive Dialogue 130
- Participation and Autonomy in Dialogue 136
- Including Diverse Voices in Dialogue Activities 140
- Power and Social Status: Small- and Large-Group Pedagogical Structures for Inclusion 142
- Educating for Democracy through Diverse Conflictual Issues 145
- Connecting Teachers’ and Students’ Identities through Conflictual Issues 146

Chapter 7. Towards an Integrative Approach to Peacebuilding Education 149
- Multiculturalism, Peace, and Citizenship Education in Canada 149
- Conflictual Issues in Multicultural Contexts: Teacher Authority and Student Agency 156
- Implications of This Study 159
- Situational and Relational Applicability of This Study 164
- Promising Possibilities of Peacebuilding Education 165

Appendix: Methodology 167
- Qualitative and Critical Ethnographic Research Methods 168
- Further Contextualizing My Role as a Researcher 171
- Overview of Study Participants and Context 173
- Data Sources and Data Collection 175
- Data Collection Procedures 180
- Data Analysis 181
- Limitations of Study and Method 182
- Conclusion 183
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About the Author</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FOREWORD

We are witnessing a major shift in educational endeavours, away from neoconservative, reductivist approaches that claim to prepare children and youth for adult lives in a world of political and economic strictures. Instead, more enlightened approaches seek to prepare young people to think deeply about the world and their own purpose in life via citizenship education, represented in this book as peace education. Including others is key to peace education. In spite of conflicts and in light of increasing diversity, integrative peace education is a major force for including student voices in the curriculum.

In diverse metropolitan centres we see injustice erupt on a daily basis, as marginalized students are cast aside from a system they are unable to navigate because their identities do not permit their inclusion. This is why Christina Parker’s work is so necessary. She shows how the process of peacebuilding in a world of conflict calls for the development of identities in Canadian citizenship education, and also seriously considers why peacebuilding, citizenship, and identity are important in education more broadly. To achieve these goals, Dr. Parker focuses on the classroom, where difference and conflict in education for democracy may be dealt with by means of conflict dialogue, for which she provides many useful tools.

This book will help users make cultural exclusion visible and gather the energy and courage to do something about it: to make peacebuilding education integral to all aspects of curriculum. In the classrooms and schools discussed here, teachers and students negotiated their language, environment, and classroom participation codes to build classroom climates that developed social and pedagogical contexts for inclusion. The teachers that were part of this multilocus study used critical pedagogies to link academic status and participation—revealing the power of those who previously remained silent in the classroom. Participants learned to navigate conflict and live together peacefully.

Dr. Parker’s careful consideration of the nuances of pedagogical patterns illustrates how students interacted with cultural conflicts that were negotiated internally, so as to move forward via pedagogies for classroom engagement. Such moments championed internationally recognized principles of democracy and civic engagement—initiatives so relevant and necessary in today’s globalized world. Where implemented, these ideas can enliven schools and communities around the globe.

The book connects curriculum, student identities, and religious and Canadian conflicts within its research focus. It reveals the realities of immigrant children’s lives at school through critical ethnographic moments, uncovered with research tools such as classroom observations, interviews, group conversations, documentary knowledge, and the researcher’s personal insights. A final conversation deconstructs historical and political issues, while recognizing teachers and school sites as privileged agents and contexts.
FOREWORD

An important aspect of peacebuilding’s theoretical foundations is the significance of identity within local concerns. Dr. Parker clearly illustrates that democratic peace cannot be planted as in a garden, row by row—it must grow out of local contexts, throughout the population.

Much needed, this book’s main focus is the development of diverse students’ critical consciousness, so that they may become aware of societal inequities. This prepares them to become active, responsible citizens. The contribution of peace education to society is critical. The book visualizes a way forward, through peacebuilding. It is indispensable for peace and citizenship education.

Yvonne Hébert, University of Calgary
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is a result of a multifaceted collaborative process that involved the input and contribution of many. I am grateful for the many people in my life who have contributed to my own learning and development as a scholar in peacebuilding education. I have been privileged to work with the fascinating teachers and students who have made this book possible. I thank each of them for their contributions, openness, and commitment to dialogue.

I am grateful to Dr. Kathy Bickmore for her scholarship and mentorship in the field of conflict dialogue and democratic peacebuilding education. I thank her for her commitment in reviewing and critiquing many drafts of this text, to shape it into what it has become today.

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The Series Editors at the University of Calgary, Shibao Guo and Yan Guo, have initiated a provocative and timely book series, which opened up the opportunity to contribute to this dialogue on transnationalism and identity through a peacebuilding perspective. Michel Lokhorst and Jolanda Karada at Sense Publishers have made the manuscript preparation and publishing process seamless and I thank them for their professionalism and dedication to this series.

My parents, Frankie and Seeta Parker; my grandmother, Bhagpattee Trilokie; and my brother, Christopher Parker, have all contributed to my determination to pursue questions and experiences that have contributed to the motivation to conduct this research. I am grateful to them for their infinite love and support.

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INTRODUCTION

In late January 2009, a few hundred Sri Lankans from across the Greater Toronto Area gathered in front of the Sri Lankan consulate, on the corner of Yonge and Eglinton Streets, to protest the Sri Lankan civil war. Their numbers swelled to a few thousand overnight as the protest moved south to the United States consulate on University Avenue, this time in protest against that government’s inaction. As their numbers grew, so did their determination and range of tactics: they blocked major streets in downtown Toronto, formed a five-kilometre human chain along Yonge Street, and more. The protests continued for months, and involved sit-ins, hunger strikes, internet activism, and a continual blockade of major intersections, often during rush hour. By May 10 the protesters, including women and young children, blocked the Gardiner Expressway, a major highway in downtown Toronto, and demanded attention from the Ontario premier.

The Government of Canada’s resolute silence in face of the conflict was the eventual focus of protests in Toronto and Ottawa. Several thousand of the Sri Lankan diaspora gathered on Parliament Hill in Ottawa. These protests led to social ferment and an appeal to all Canadians for their support in resolving this conflict in their homeland. These proletarian actions attempted to get the attention of Canadian parliamentary officials. Worldwide protests were held, urging world leaders to help bring a ceasefire to the conflict. In the United States, President Barack Obama called upon both the Sri Lankan Army and the Tamil Tigers to bring an end to the bloodbath.

Meanwhile, another wave of activism developed—demonstrators began to protest the protesters. These were the Sinhalese, a Sri Lankan minority group. With their campaign motto, “Stop the Tamil Tigers,” they argued that the Tamil Sri Lankans were in fact supporting terrorists. Interestingly, mainstream Canadian rhetoric appeared to align with this group of ostensibly more peaceful protesters. Perhaps they could restore the freedom for Canadians to travel unhampered through their streets, the media said.

Many controversies abounded surrounding this protest. Misconceptions about the Sri Lankan civil war grew, due to the multitude of messages from the two Sri Lankan groups. I do not seek to editorialize on the conflict or insert my own attempt at clarifying the many misconceptions about the protests or about the Sri Lankan Civil War that arose. I am, however, interested in understanding the experiences of the many young Sri Lankan students across Toronto—for on both sides, many of the protesters were young people born in Canada. They showed up in class the next day, having either stood side by side (or face to face) in a protest the day before. Many non-Sri Lankan students also showed up in class having heard their parents’ perspectives (or perhaps complaints) about the protests.

Culturally inclusive educators strive to offer education that is relevant and affirming. Schools in metropolitan areas around the globe serve a multitude of
children who come from different parts of the world. In educators’ attempts to empower young people with these diverse identities—where identity is characterized by pluralism and globalization, not by place of birth and location of residence—they must engage with much complexity in order to affirm the students’ “glocalized” identities.

What kind of education will create democratic citizens who are critical thinkers, and who uphold strong values of their respective societies? While liberal multicultural education has typically been the response to addressing diversity in schools, I argue that it is not enough to simply present the heroes and holidays as tokens in time. Rather, a deliberate engagement with difference, which begs for the confrontation and examination of diversity and conflict, is what I believe paves the way for the inclusion of all children. In this book I examine how such education is achieved through integrating peacebuilding education. The intentional generation of conflictual dialogue for transformation includes exploring the roots of conflict, applying nonviolent solutions to conflict, and promoting inclusive strategies to resolve complex disagreement. I look at how education and instruction can promote peace, and how peace education can promote understanding of the Other and compassion for the Other.

The aim of this book is to offer an empirical account of how children of immigrants in a globalized world have negotiated their identities as members of various diasporas. To do this, I discuss the possibilities—and perils—of peacebuilding education, in a careful examination of data arising from field work in three classrooms, where I interviewed and observed teachers and students. The identities of immigrant children were honoured within the implemented curriculum. These young people are shown coping with the struggles of acculturation and the subsequent processes of containing or maintaining their cultural identities. Vignettes from observations of both teachers and students vividly depict classroom settings where conflicts and diversity were openly discussed.

This book in its discussion of culturally relevant and peace-based pedagogy fills a gap in the theory and the practice, and as such will be helpful for practising teachers, student teachers, and scholars in the field of multicultural and peace education. Original in its Canadian focus, the book will be of international relevance. It shows how teachers and students can engage in teaching and learning practices related to diversity. It shows that diversity education is happening, how it is done, and how teachers grapple with the issues.

OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

In Chapter 1, I present the theoretical foundation for the concepts I discuss in this book. I outline the opportunities available in classrooms today to create spaces to engage divergent perspectives. I introduce various processes that can be used to confront multifaceted identities, through intersectionality and the implicit and explicit narratives present in the curriculum. I question how students’ ethnocultural
and gender identities are acknowledged and incorporated into the curriculum they engage with at school.

The foundations for creating a framework for inclusive peacebuilding education is a particular focus of my analysis. I describe how conflict management tools can work to address contested classroom dialogues concerning the unsettled social and global issues that are inherently present in transnational contexts. I also review methodological approaches to conducting critical ethnographic research in diverse and privileged contexts, and situate the connection with my personal identity in this research.

In Chapter 2, I synthesize national and international research on students’ experiences with multicultural and democratic citizenship education. I also look at various methods researchers have used to study inclusion in peacebuilding education and conflict dialogue processes. I review how ethnocultural minority students’ experiences are represented or underrepresented in implemented curriculum. My main focus is how to develop diverse students’ critical consciousness so that they become aware of societal inequities. In order to make space for a democratic and inclusive paradigm, we need to know how the hidden and the explicit curricula shape what we know, how we know what we know, and how a purposive and constructive engagement with conflict creates an interruptive democracy.

In the third chapter I situate the context and characteristics of the globalized and transnational classroom cases represented in the three classrooms of my study. This research was carried out in one of the most multicultural cities in the world—Toronto, Canada. While this book presents a local case, it also illustrates connections to cross-national and global cultural contexts. Peacebuilding education is not unique to Western schools. In many ways, the principles of peacebuilding education encourage the intersection with Eastern principles and traditions, where the reliance on connection through dialogue is paramount.

In my view, in order to graduate tolerant, democratically engaged, participatory citizens, the future of schooling needs to be inherently connected to peacebuilding education. My empirical analyses therefore focus on students’ experiences with democratic citizenship education in diverse school contexts. If racialized bodies occupy the entire classroom, what approaches might the teacher use to build community and develop resilience to challenge heteronormative and Eurocentric content? And how do these approaches compare to others that work to reproduce systemic and structural power imbalances, which most schooling systems perpetuate? All students benefit from the purposive integration of peacebuilding content and pedagogy that encourages constructive dialogue about diversity and social issues. Still, however, most schools and classrooms around the world—including Canada—have not made the kinds of shifts that are possible and viable building blocks for the future development of strong, global citizens. I do, however, present cases where various pedagogical shifts have contributed to the inclusion and exclusion of diverse students in these classrooms. In spite of this, the classrooms I introduce in this book are still developing and remain in the early stages of such a pedagogical evolution.
In the fourth chapter I focus on identity and belonging, and the ways in which young people negotiate new ways of bridging and connecting their experiences with migration and citizenship across time and space. To do this, I pay particular attention to what happens when teachers engage with students who come from high-conflict parts of the world, using contested narratives and perspectives. Such situations have the power to both transform and reform critical perspectives on multicultural education and its connection to peacebuilding. I also critically examine how racialized students’ experiences are represented or underrepresented in the implemented curriculum. The vignettes highlight how both teachers and students negotiated belonging and inclusion to bridge ethnic and local identities. The teachers used a range of conflict dialogue processes and pedagogies that supported or impeded the students’ learning and inclusion in these processes.

In the fifth chapter, I examine how the hidden and explicit curricula functioned in the three classrooms to develop students’ civic and national identities. If the intention of schooling is to engage young people to be active and contributing citizens, then structural power and systems need to be confronted. I illustrate how select teachers navigated the development of their students’ critical consciousness by inviting them to both challenge and participate in mythical democracies. I also explore how these implemented curricula intersected with diverse students’ social identities and differential power locations.

Particular foundational and structural issues need to be addressed in order to formulate inclusive classroom contexts. Chapter 6 is dedicated to imagining the hope and constituting the power to integrate peacebuilding education in all classrooms. The success of these approaches is illustrated in my exploration of how silenced voices were heard and religious identities nourished.

Finally, the seventh chapter deals with implications for the pedagogical processes that seek to affirm diverse identities. Such processes show how conflict and diversity can serve as resources for critical social and academic engagement in multicultural classrooms, lead to increased academic achievement, and address broader issues of structural violence. Were teachers to implement dialogic pedagogies to integrate immigrant students’ cultural and linguistic identities, how might they also support those students’ civic and literacy engagement, and facilitate an inclusive space where all students have the opportunity to participate and have their voices heard?

NOTE

1 The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), also known as the Tamil Tigers, was founded in 1976. “Eelam” is the ancient Tamil name for Sri Lanka. The LTTE, recognized as a terrorist organization, sought to create an independent state in North and East Sri Lanka for Tamil people. This campaign led to the Sri Lankan Civil War, which officially began in 1983 and ended in 2009, when the Sri Lankan military defeated the LTTE. See “Sri Lankan Civil War” (2014).
CHAPTER 1

WHY PEACEBUILDING EDUCATION?

Sā vidyā yā vimuktaye [Education is what liberates].

—Vishnu Purana, 1.19.41

Beth Roy (1994) has recounted a story from the 1950s about Hindu and Muslim farmers in a remote Bangladeshi village, where conflict appeared to arise out of nowhere. The owner of a seemingly insensible cow explained:

“There was trouble with the cows,” said the farmer. “I tied my cow and went home. But the cow got loose and ate the [plants] in their field.” (p. 13)

Roy went on to examine the subsequent village riot that occurred:

By the time the “trouble” was over, masses of men had mobilized, several people had died, many were injured, and life in the village was altered forever after. The problem, it seems, was that the cow belonged to a Muslim and the crop to a Hindu. (p. 13)

Adults and children alike, our positions and perspectives are inherently attached to our identities. Children quickly size up their playmates, often through nonverbal communication. On the playground, they determine unabashedly who to include and who to exclude. Similarly, in the classroom, teachers of implemented curriculum may present and affiliate with hegemonic narratives by falsifying and ignoring people and histories.

While not resulting in a community riot, a religiously motivated conflict ensued in a Grade 4 classroom at Aria Public School, an elementary school in a southern Ontario community in Canada. “Your God is not the real God,” said Tina, the one girl of African heritage and only Christian in the class. Fatima, a Muslim girl who had recently immigrated from Pakistan, and who covered her hair with a hijab, knew that Tina was asking for trouble, because religious intolerance was not accepted at their multicultural school. She informed Tina that she was going to tell on her.

Tina and Fatima’s class did not have any White students—not surprising, in a school population largely comprising visible minority immigrants from India, Sri Lanka, China, and Hong Kong. The girls’ community had recently attracted an influx of immigrants. Parks there were filled with older adults, many of whom were the grandparents of children attending the school. They met in this ethnically connected community to sit, have tea, and talk. Some played cricket on the soccer field. For many of them, this was the only time they had connection with people outside of their homes. Many new immigrants are isolated upon their arrival in a
new land, but the school community served as a place where many from the same ethnic origins congregated.

In many ways, the community facilitated their integration into the larger society. The school was looked on as the place that was going to pave the way for the acculturation of their next generation: caught between multiple cultures, it remained clear that young children would continue to be taught ancestral values at home, but that the school would teach them how to be Canadian.

Ms. Marlee, the Grade 4 teacher, aware of and clearly upset by the religiously motivated conflict between Tina and Fatima, addressed her entire class of students: “When you have conflict in the playground, it shouldn’t be over religion.” Drawing on her own experiences as a second-generation immigrant, she reminded her students that their engagement in conflicts over religion violated the foundational goal of their families’ choice to emigrate: to live in peaceful Canada. In their new, chosen culture, riots or conflict based on perceived identities should not occur.

The conflict between the two girls could have been settled at this point, with the teacher admonishing them for participating in a religiously motivated debate. However, Ms. Marlee did not reprimand anyone or send anyone to the office—instead, she chose to extend this conflict. She used it as a learning opportunity. Connecting the incident to a story about Inuit creationism that appeared in their literacy textbook, she gave these instructions to her students: “Tonight, you’re going to go home and ask your parents what the 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.” Sharing these creation stories sparked considerable interest among students. Fatima and Tina listened calmly to each other speak; they and others asked questions. Together, Ms. Marlee’s Grade 4 class seemed to develop a greater appreciation for the diversity that existed among the classmates as they participated in an intellectually motivated peacebuilding dialogue. Her class lesson extended her implemented curriculum content beyond the textbook, making it relevant to the students’ diversities and conflicts. Even in constrained and conflicted classrooms, such dialogue is possible.

All conflicts bring the potential for constructive change. Still, most people shy away from conflict because it has so often led to destruction, pain, and suffering. The simple key to transformation is to see the positive possibilities that can exist within such divisive moments. Also, to engage in such conflict learning does not necessarily involve the most talented or tenured teacher. In fact, as Ms. Marlee’s character unfolds in the subsequent chapters, you will see that it was not necessarily her passion for engaging conflict that drove her pedagogy. Rather, she more consistently implemented authoritarian, conflict-neutral curriculum in a way that did not engage her students. However, even in this context, she managed to create space for dialogue. I return to an analysis of this conflict in Chapter 4.
WHY PEACEBUILDING EDUCATION?

CONFLICTS AND IDENTITIES EMBEDDED IN CANADIAN CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

Southern Ontario is home to students whose ethnocultural ancestries are more diverse than anywhere else in the world (Statistics Canada, 2006, 2011). However, many of these diverse immigrant students may not get the same learning opportunities as their mainstream peers. Teaching students as though they were all the same will not create equitable social relations (Bickmore, 2005; Dull & Morrow, 2008). A curriculum in which only White, male, heterosexual viewpoints and knowledges are reflected discourages the exploration of alternative perspectives and excludes diverse students who may not share those values and frames of reference (Kumashiro, 2000).

Issues of diversity have been addressed in various ways: through curriculum mandates, board initiatives, and teachers’ professional development. Pedagogies that invite discussion of alternative viewpoints and conflicts may engage diverse students and contribute to their inclusion in the classroom. Engaging students in open, inclusive dialogue about conflictual issues can support them to develop skills, values, and inclinations for democratic civic engagement (Haas, 2008; Hahn, 1998; Hess & Posselt, 2002; Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schultz, 2001). Such conflict-dialogue processes can provide opportunities for students to practise tolerance and inclusion, thereby becoming participatory citizens (Avery & Hahn, 2004).

How are students’ ethnocultural and gender diversities acknowledged and incorporated into the curriculum they engage with at school? Conflict management processes and other pedagogical tools presumably guide and shape the dialogue experiences of diverse students, and the ways in which conflict dialogue is approached in schools are presumably influenced by the ethnocultural and gender identities of both students and teachers. But, even with the implementation of policies to infuse equity-oriented activities in classrooms, research on—and evidence for—the ways that culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies actually are facilitated and experienced by diverse students is slim. While some educational initiatives (e.g., critical literacy, inclusive schools) have encouraged teachers to implement dialogue pedagogies in the classroom, there has been little research on diverse students’ experiences with such pedagogies.

Empowering Conflict in Peacebuilding Education

I urge the inclusion of conflict dialogue in the classroom curriculum. With this in mind, I intend this book to contribute to the research on conflict dialogue in school settings and to respond to its limitations in attending to student diversity. For this purpose, I investigated how conflict dialogue occurred in three public elementary classrooms, and what its consequences were for diverse students, especially newcomer immigrants. I researched how diverse elementary students aged 9 to 13, mostly first- and second-generation immigrants, experienced and responded to conflictual issues, pedagogies, and discussions in relation to their own
perspectives, histories, and identities. Some studies have explored students’ experience with conflict dialogue, but few have studied diverse students’ experiences of particular conflict-dialogue pedagogies in elementary classrooms. I therefore also examined how effective (or not) various conflict-dialogue pedagogies were at facilitating inclusive spaces and influencing diverse students to participate in social studies and language arts curricula.

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). Conflict-dialogue processes of constructive discussion can be understood broadly as peacebuilding education, which is the purposive generation of conflict as a learning opportunity, and in which issues are explicitly aired and taken up in ways that can promote positive peace. Purposively generating conflictual dialogue means confronting difficult issues that are highly emotional and linked to identity—in short, personally relevant (Bekerman, Zembylas, & McGlynn, 2009; Bickmore, 2008a; Boler, 1999).

Peacebuilding education includes dialogic and culturally relevant pedagogies designed to (re)build strong, healthy relationships that respect human rights, and that challenge inequities: all necessary for democratic societies. 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, 2004a).

On Identity, Transnationalism, and Inclusion: Some Definitional Considerations

Curriculum and pedagogy—including conflict-dialogue learning opportunities—can create inclusive spaces for diverse young people to find their place in the curriculum and in their world. These opportunities can connect immigrant students’ diverse and intersecting identities in ways that facilitate their social and academic engagement. Simply put, they learn how to connect their identities, experiences and the curriculum content.

An intersectional interpretation of multiple identities allows for consideration of how both adults and young children navigate the local and global cultural boundaries that shape their histories and experiences. Identity is not a singular construct; it is multiple, ever-changing, and fluid. It is “produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices” and is shaped by various social contexts (Hall, 2000, p. 17). This postmodern conception of identity “assumes different identities at different times” that are “historically, not biologically, defined” (Hall, 2006, p. 250). In partial contrast to Hall, Woodward (2002) argues that the broad cultural roots of identity are just as important as identity’s evolution or construction within the life of any individual. In her view, while race carries biological foundations, “ethnicity marks cultural and social differences between groups of people” (Woodward, 2002, p. 146).
Identity is socially constructed and understood through difference (Allahar, 2006; Gérin-Lajoie, 2011; Hall, 2006). Thus, curriculum that recognizes and addresses difference can create space for the inclusion and democratic development of diverse students. 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. When referring to ethnocultural minorities, I consider how particular ethnic origins intersect with other aspects of identity that perpetuate disadvantage, such as racialized identity, home language, poverty, and undocumented status (Ghiso & Campano, 2013). In these ways, through democratic peacebuilding education, the siloed student experience and perspective can be challenged.

Importantly, all of the children and teachers in this book identified with a visible minority group. I use descriptive terms such as *immigrant*, *marginalized*, *diverse*, *ethnocultural*, and *minority* to illustrate the wide range of groupings that children and adults carry when they are visible minorities, racialized, or people of colour, living in a context where they are not the dominant majority. Even though visible minorities may be the “majority” in terms of numbers in certain communities or contexts, they still do not have access to the same kind of power and privileges afforded to the dominant majority of the White Canadian population.

Migration patterns shifting across geopolitical borders have fuelled transnationalism, which integrates cultures, languages, and diversities. Within the Canadian context this process is pronounced, through historical and evolutionary policies and practices that have shaped how both immigrants and nationals view and respond to cross-border and hybrid identities.⁵ Transnationalists are typically characterized as those who settle in their host country but who remain in close contact with those in their home country, such as by sending resources to them and maintaining frequent communication. The receiving country sometimes looks down on immigrants for nurturing these ties and connections to their homeland (Van Den Anker, 2010).

Active civic participation, such as maintaining membership in local community groups and voting, are examples of indicators for immigrants’ level of integration. However, levels of integration vary and are dependent on various economic and sociocultural factors, such as material living conditions, health, education, and the labour market, as well as civic engagement (OECD, 2012).

*Diaspora* broadly refers to groups who live outside their ancestral regions. Members of diaspora groups are multifaceted and diverse, and carry differing experiences of and perspectives on their connection with their place of ancestry. In this way, transnational communities include diasporas (Wong, 2007/2008). Transnationalism also refers to multiple cultural associations between the host society and places of origin and ancestry.

Grouping all immigrants together does not allow for a consideration of the diversities and differences within these groups. While “immigrants” are typically grouped together, various immigrant groups contain many differences. For instance, all immigrants are not necessarily accepting of other ethnic groups and
immigrants, just because they themselves may be immigrants. In fact, some may carry strong prejudices against other ethnic groups, which may have developed in their home country or after their arrival in their new community. In this way, while inclusion may be the height of a transformational peacebuilding practice, it is also necessary to consider that tokens of inclusion may still persist within a dominant threshold of exclusion. In this milieu, Amartya Sen (2006) argued that the “adversity of exclusion can be made to go hand in hand with the gifts of inclusion” (p. 3).

I argue that including all identities in one’s thinking and practice promotes the acceptance, recognition, and involvement of marginalized identities that would otherwise be ignored or excluded.

Identity and Conflict Dialogue in Diverse Contexts

Discussions about diversity and conflictual issues invites students’ diverse perspectives, viewpoints, and experiences to come forward; this can serve as a resource for critical reflection about social conflicts (Banks, 2006a; Nieto, 1992). But many immigrant students seem to have fewer opportunities than mainstream students to engage in issues-based discussions (Dull & Murrow, 2008; Hess & Avery, 2008). While research has shown that open discussion of conflictual issues promotes the average student’s civic capacities and engagement, little evidence exists regarding how or whether diverse and marginalized students, in particular, are engaged by these dialogue practices. Even less is known about which curricular and pedagogical tools for issues dialogue may best create or impede democratic, inclusive learning opportunities for diverse and marginalized students.

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 & Saltarelli, 2000; Harris, 2004; Tawil & Harley, 2004). Cultural symbols and practices in curriculum, as well as in society, can reinforce (or mitigate) ethnic and social conflict (Bekerman, 2009; Funk & Said, 2004; Ross, 1993/2007). For Bekerman (2007), individual identity is influenced by nation-state ideologies and, thus, possibilities for interaction between students from contested settings (such as Israel and Palestine) must involve recognizing power imbalances and committing to the dialogue process.

In Ontario, such recognition is also important where teachers facilitate conflict-dialogue processes to examine and challenge cultural and political hegemony in their diverse classrooms. Like Lederach (1995) and others, Ross (1993/2007) argued that culture is central to how people approach conflict. Ross theorized that two kinds of factors influence social conflict over intergroup identity issues: psychocultural (people’s narratives and emotional interpretations—such as trust or fear—of issues or identity groups); and sociostructural (people’s interests in tangible human needs and the social institutions that differentially distribute or deny them to different social groups). He highlighted both sociostructural and
psychocultural elements in a discussion of the conflict in France over whether girls
should be free to wear the Muslim chador to school.

Cultural responsiveness and flexibility of power are key characteristics of
peacebuilding education initiatives (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000; Lederach, 1995). The
chador conflict may be seen as an unsettled issue, because many teachers and
much of the public would consider the different viewpoints as legitimate (Hess,
2001). Dialogue on such an issue could be expected to look very different in a
classroom where there were no Muslim students, where Muslim students
predominated, where only one or two students identified as Muslim, or where there
were various Muslim students (e.g., from different sects) who did not practise the
religion in the same way. Clearly, such complexities of student identities would
influence the pedagogical choices teachers would make in facilitating or avoiding
discussing conflictual issues, and the ways each student would experience those
discussions.

CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

This study is very dear to my heart. In some ways, it is a study of my childhood; of
my own experience growing up as a second-generation immigrant in a southern
Ontario community. While I did not set out to study my personal experiences, I
realized over time—each day I spent in the field, and each day I spent writing this
book—that this is a study of others and myself. I knew I wanted to research
newcomers and second-generation immigrants. I had no particular ethnocultural
group in mind, no particular location in southern Ontario; I did not anticipate that
the school board I would obtain approval from to conduct this research would be
the same school board in which I had been a student. Nor did I expect, when asked
to identify potential school sites, that one school on my list, my old elementary
school, would actually be considered by the board an ideal school in terms of what
I wanted to study.

This research, therefore, came even closer to home than I imagined: for 20
years, I had lived in the community I study in this book. The community holds my
childhood memories; it was where I walked our family dog, Dax, and played with
my childhood friends. When I first walked into the school office at one of my
research sites, I felt, for a moment, that same feeling of fear that I used to feel
when I was sent to the office. As I gathered my thoughts and composed my
feelings, the secretary asked me what she could do for me. I felt a moment of joy in
knowing that I didn’t have to report my lateness, absence, or rebellion against a
teacher. Instead, I was an adult and a doctoral candidate, and I had an appointment
with the principal. Nonetheless, while I waited I took out my Blackberry and began
to check my emails—only noticing my misdemeanour when I was met with wide-
eyed children wanting to see my “cool phone,” and even wider-eyed secretaries
who indicated that cell phones were not allowed at the school!

I conducted this ethnography with a critical perspective in three classrooms at
two different schools, one of which had been my own elementary school (Grades 1
to 8). This connection allowed me to have an insider’s perspective on a school
community that had once been my own. The difference, however, was that when I had been a student in this community, I was one of the few ethnoculturally visible minority students there. My fellow students and friends were predominantly White, and many teachers at the school were also White; I recall having had one Black teacher. During my research, I reflected and reimagined how school content and teachers’ pedagogies had shaped my own schooling experiences. In one of my study’s classroom observations, Grade 5 students excitedly engaged in a lesson about Greek gods and goddesses. In that moment, I thought about how such a lesson and classroom discussion might have gone if this classroom activity had been taking place 20 years before, when many students’ ethnocultural identities were directly connected to this curriculum content. Such discussions may well have taken place, but at the time I felt it was perfectly normal to be taught about other people’s histories, and so I may not have noticed. However, many student participants in my current research were interested in learning about ancient Egypt, India, and China, as well as Greece. This had become the norm for these students, whose diverse cultural histories may now be better embedded in implemented curriculum content.

I wanted to find out how the teachers in these three classrooms had accomplished this norm. Conceptually, I focused on peacebuilding education in a multicultural education context, centring my attention on the dialogic pedagogies and strategies the teachers used to facilitate linkages between curricular content and their students’ identities. I investigated how they facilitated implemented curriculum in ways that intersected with their students’ Canadian cultural and civic identities. I examined how the perspectives and experiences of diverse students operated within the three classrooms when issues of conflict and diversity arose. And I explored the juxtapositions and contradictions that arose when ethnocultural minority students’ cultures were reflected or not reflected in the content they were taught in these three classrooms, and how their teachers’ pedagogical processes for addressing conflict and difference did or did not support their inclusion.

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

This book is based on a critical examination of conflictual, issues-based discussions and activities in elementary public school classrooms where all the participants identified with visible minority groups. I examined variations in and among three classroom cultures, each including immigrant and marginalized students, to understand how teachers used (and avoided) curriculum content about conflict and diversity as learning opportunities, and how various students in those classes experienced those conflictual pedagogies. My purpose was to learn when and how those conflict-dialogue processes did and did not promote inclusion and facilitated democratic peacebuilding education.

I used an ethnographic method with a critical perspective in order to position it as research towards social change, without seeking to prove that social change was achieved among the participants due to their sole participation in this study (Thomas, 1993; Woods, 1996). Ethnography can be used with different levels of
WHY PEACEBUILDING EDUCATION?

criticality and forms of cultural critique, in both academic and public spheres (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005; Hammersley, 1990; van Manen, 1992). The limits, form, and extent of using this method for social justice purposes ultimately depends on the context, setting, and participants involved (Simon & Dippo, 1986). The strength of ethnography is in its aim to study cultures through immersion in a particular space for an extended amount of time. The method allows for the opportunity to observe critical incidents and discussions that occur unexpectedly and also aligns with my political purpose of supporting pedagogical and curricular change for social justice.

Educational ethnography is an in-depth study of how participants behave in and experience the classroom space. Classrooms each have their own culture, including participation norms and language (Jackson, 1968, and others). It is necessary to use ethnography with criticality, in order to study how marginalized students’ lived experiences are intertwined with power and oppressive systems.

This method provided a framework for my continuous, critical examination of schooling and curriculum at both individual and classroom levels, and encouraged my consideration of the ways in which the identities of my participants and my own history and identity connected and contrasted to form a subjective narrative (Denzin, 1997; Gallagher, 2004). Intentionally subjective, my identity helped to shape the design of my study, since my interpretations of the data ultimately reflected my own history and culture (Britzman, 2002; Fine, 1994; Gallagher, 2007; McCarthy, 1988). I acknowledge that my position as a researcher who was a second-generation immigrant did not provide me with a privileged understanding of my participants (Walkerdine, Lucey, & Melody, 2000). Even though I closely witnessed my parents’ migration experiences, my understanding of their cultural navigation and assimilation process is not and never will be the same as that of the diverse students who were part of this study. Their race, ethnicity, class, and gender identities, too, complicated their individual histories. In this way I came to understand and interpret how conflictual-issues discussions allowed for a greater or lesser sense of inclusion of diverse identities, based on my personal history and identity.

My personal experiences and connections also shaped my relationship to the schools I researched. My older brother and I both attended Aria Public School from Grades 1 to 8. I lived with my parents, grandmother, and brother in the school community and neighbourhood throughout my childhood and into early adulthood. My parents immigrated to Canada when they were young adults. They met and married in Canada, and my brother and I were born in Toronto. I myself have yet to travel to Guyana, my family’s country of origin. My racial identity would appear to be South Asian, one that I shared with many of my participants.

My connection to many of the students deepened. The fact that I had attended Aria was something the students were aware of; they displayed their excitement about it, and would often point out my and my brother’s graduation photos whenever they passed by them in the hallway.

Both Aria and Georgetown were located in working-class communities where most of the residents were newcomer immigrants. In many ways I did not feel as
though I had experienced newcomer immigrant school/community challenges (and opportunities) in the same way that many of my research participants described. Perhaps this was because I was not a newcomer, but a second-generation immigrant, and as such I experienced different kinds of challenges (and opportunities) in what was then a predominantly White school and community. 

Ghiso and Campano (2013) have drawn on realist theorists to discuss how “epistemic privilege” provides minorities with a special advantage in understanding how to identify power; those “who experience unjust or ineffective practices and policies in their own schooling may be in a unique position to investigate how to reform education for the better” (p. 254). Ethnography with a critical perspective encourages the empowerment of these hidden powers, by offering platforms for participants to identify privilege.

Aria and Georgetown were located in the same community. It had a large newcomer immigrant population, and was part of a large urban area in southern Ontario. The ethnic distribution of the community was not representative of the whole school board or urban area. Based on the most recent census data in this school board’s region 65% of the population were visible minorities, the top five of which, in descending order, were: Chinese, South Asian (e.g., Indian), West Asian (e.g., Iranian), Black, and Filipino (Statistics Canada, 2006). In 2011, 98% of the students that attended Aria, from kindergarten through Grade 8, were visible minorities, mostly from East and South Asian backgrounds. Only 48 of the 725 students were White.

All of the 746 students at Georgetown were from visible minority groups. The school secretary provided me with a breakdown of the ethnicities of the students, pointing out that they “lost their one White kid last year.” Students were predominantly South Asian, from Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. The Indian students were mostly Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim. The students’ first languages were predominantly Urdu, Tamil, Punjabi, Hindi, and Gujarati. I was told that there were 15 Black students, one student from the Philippines, and one from Vietnam.

All the students at Georgetown wore a simple uniform—a white shirt and grey dress pants. The uniform had been mandated one year after the school opened, in response to the lower socioeconomic status of many of the students. Aria was also in the process of instituting a school uniform policy for the following year. When I was a student there, we wore no uniforms; the only publicly funded schools with instituted uniform policies in this community, at the time, were Catholic schools.

I worked with classroom teachers who demonstrated some knowledge of conflict-dialogue processes and who told me that they used conflict proactively to engage all their students, particularly in the social studies and English language arts curricula. All three teachers happened to identify with a visible minority immigrant group. Attracting diverse teachers to this study, while not intentional, proved to be an enlightening addition to this study of newcomer and diverse immigrant students.

There were 78 students in the three classes that were part of this study; 39 females and 39 males. The racial makeup of students was 71% South Asian, 22%
WHY PEACEBUILDING EDUCATION?

East Asian, 5% Black, 1% West Asian, and 1% mixed ancestry. All students were either first-generation immigrants (18%) or second-generation immigrants (81.5%) with the exception of one student who was of mixed ancestry (0.5%).

I gathered students’ ethnicities through my interactions with students, from activities done in class related to their ethnicity, and during interviews with them. Ethnicities were 26% Indian, 26% Tamil Sri Lankan, 19% Chinese, 15% Pakistani, and 4% Jamaican; the remaining 10% were Guyanese, Trinidadian, Egyptian, Kenyan, Nepalese, Taiwanese, Vietnamese, and White Canadian.

I was also able to gather data on the students’ religions through my observations and interactions with them: 44.5% were Hindu, all South Asian; 19.5% were Muslim, all South Asian or West Asian; 10% were Buddhist, all East Asian; 9% were Christian, and were a mix of ethnicities; 5% were Sikh, all South Asian; and I did not gather the religious identifications of 12% of students. Overall, while my particular research concern emphasized ethnocultural minority and immigrant students, the comparisons and cultural interaction patterns among all the students in each classroom provided insights into how various diverse students experienced these processes.

I used various data sources to analyze how teachers in the three elementary classrooms stimulated discussion of curricular material, to better understand how this facilitated democratic learning opportunities for diverse students. Using observations, interviews, a personal journal, and documents such as lesson plans, worksheets, and student work samples, I studied how conflict-dialogue processes were implemented in three classrooms, and how diverse students, particularly visible minority and first- and second-generation immigrants, experienced these pedagogies.

I observed classes at each school consecutively, spending approximately six months in each classroom. I observed these teachers across the curriculum: in literacy, art, social studies, health, mathematics, science, and technology classes. My observations revealed critical incidents where conflict was evident, and in which conflict-dialogue processes were (or were not) implemented to address the conflict. As a result of my immersion in each classroom, I developed close relationships with the students. Various groups of students would typically approach me during lunch to chat about their day or their lives. The boys would ask me to play basketball with them and the girls would ask me to sit with them during lunch. In many ways, the students apparently saw me as their friend. I used both social and academic classroom opportunities to develop my relationships and to secure a level of trust with all the students.

In summary, the main strengths of using ethnography with a critical perspective to study conflict-dialogue processes in diverse classrooms were twofold. First, the method encouraged in-depth cultural immersion in the research setting; and second, it facilitated the use of a critical lens to continually question how social norms and dominant assumptions influenced the behaviours of participants. My use of three research sites further enhanced the in-depth, critical nature of this study, by providing opportunities to compare and contrast the ways conflict-
dialogue processes were used in these different, yet similar, classroom social contexts.

Finally, my implementation of this method enabled my research to make a significant contribution to the study of conflict-dialogue processes and democratic peacebuilding education, which connects with and goes beyond the existing research literature in this area. In the following chapters I present the different classroom cultures I observed and provide analyses and syntheses of the various themes and issues that emerged from the study.

NOTES

1 The school names in this chapter, Aria Public School and Georgetown Public School, are fictitious. I refer to the schools hereafter as “Aria” and “Georgetown.”

2 All teachers’ and students’ names used in this book are pseudonyms. For some participants, I have used culturally ethnic pseudonyms to accurately represent those whose real names reflected their ethnocultural identity.

3 For the purposes of this study, the term “second-generation immigrant” is used to refer to children of immigrants who may also be first-generation Canadian.

4 Galtung (1969) defined positive peace as a sustainable and just peace that promotes dialogue, relationship building, and structural change, whereas negative peace is the absence of war or physical violence.

5 Not all migration necessarily leads to transnationalism. For instance, refugees often have restrictions posed on rights to travel and have likely been hosted in many different countries before they have been able to securely “settle” in one place (Van Den Anker, 2010).
CHAPTER 2

CONFLICT AND DIVERSITY IN DEMOCRATIC CLASSROOMS

“Washing one’s hands” of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral.

—Paulo Freire, The Politics of Education

WHY ARE PEACEBUILDING, CITIZENSHIP, AND IDENTITY IMPORTANT IN EDUCATION?

Conflict can provide opportunities to learn for everyone, even young students. Conflict dialogue processes have been described in various contexts; in elementary classrooms, teachers may use conflict dialogue processes to facilitate open and inclusive social and academic engagement and democratic opportunities to learn. For example, a cross-national study demonstrated how open, inclusive dialogue can support democratic learning outcomes when conflictual issues were being discussed in classrooms (Hahn, 1998).

Some citizenship education has been criticized for not attending sufficiently to issues of diversity or to critical reflection regarding social and cultural inequities (Joshee, 2004; Osborne, 1995; Sears & Hughes, 2006; Tupper, 2005; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Similarly, mainstream multicultural education theories and practices have paid insufficient attention to pedagogies of dialogue and deliberation, and to developing the critical inquiry skills necessary for citizenship in pluralist societies (Banks, 2006b; Dei, 2000; Dilworth, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Nieto, 2002).

However, scholars have examined where diversity and conflict issues intersect with goals of education for democracy, through many overlapping perspectives, including antiracism, critical multiculturalism, critical pedagogy, culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy, and citizenship education. To conceptualize how critical reflection on conflict and difference may provide inclusive, democratic learning opportunities for diverse students, in this chapter I gather insights from these areas of work and place them in an overarching conceptual framework of peacebuilding. Acknowledging diverse viewpoints and critically reflecting on social power structures are key aspects of peacebuilding pedagogy and critical components of educating for democracy (Bickmore, 2006; Davies, 2004a).
Together, culturally relevant curricula and peacebuilding pedagogies can help diverse students recognize and respond to questions of power and justice in society.

DIALOGUE, DIFFERENCE, AND CONFLICT IN EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY

A curriculum may normalize hegemonic assumptions about race, gender, sexuality, and power, thereby silencing or ignoring others (hooks, 1994; McCarthy, 1988). Moreover, when such curriculum adopts a so-called neutral stance, treating conflict as something to be avoided, it implicitly invites students to maintain White, male-centred, heterosexual, and middle-class/upper-class norms and values (Apple, 1979/2004; Kumashiro, 2000). Avoiding explicit critical attention on conflict limits opportunities for students to engage in discussion and to explore alternative perspectives. In contrast, curriculum that airs conflicting perspectives invites and supports critical thinking, exposing the ideological underpinnings of the existing system.


All curriculum includes “norms and values that are implicitly, but effectively, taught in schools and that are not usually talked about in teachers’ statements of ends or goals” (Apple, 1979/2004, p. 84). Together, these norms and values are known as the hidden curriculum (Jackson, 1968). While the hidden curriculum in North American schooling typically avoids conflict, it is entirely possible for conflict, whether explicit or implicitly embedded in the curriculum, to cut against this grain. In fact, it can be used to encourage critical, inclusive engagement. Conflict dialogue can be purposefully generated to address issues of power and difference, creating spaces for inclusion of multiple histories, experiences, and perspectives (Bickmore, 2007).

The identities of people involved in any conflictual discussion can be expected to play a significant role in the ways they understand and approach social and political issues. In conflict dialogue processes in the classroom, students and teachers engage with their many identities, and draw on their diverse lived experiences and perspectives to interpret and respond to particular issues. Diverse students can better navigate the multiple worlds of home, school, and community when teachers’ pedagogical strategies engage their personal experiences and identities (Phelan, Davidson, & Cao, 1991). To support diverse students’ identities as they engage in conflict dialogue, teachers need to be equipped with culturally appropriate pedagogies (Delpit, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2004). By contrast, when power and difference are ignored, it is possible for conflictual issues pedagogies to...

In societies characterized by social inequality, the dominant group’s ways of thinking are legitimated when unproblematized; that is, when dominant world views are embedded in curriculum content, and delivered in a top-down manner (Anyon, 1981; Apple, 1979/2004). This inhibits the possibility for authentic, critical dialogue, which Freire (1970/1994b) argued is crucial for democracy and social development:

True dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking—thinking which discerns an indivisible solidarity between the world and the people and admits of no dichotomy between them—thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as static entity-thinking which does not separate itself from action, but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved. (p. 73)

Dialogue evolves through developing critical consciousness—understanding gained through a combination of transformative dialogue and praxis, action and reflection: “Dialogue (the two acts of speaking and listening) is actually about emergence: the bringing out of new and previously hidden meanings and understandings” (Davies, 2004b, p. 216). Dialogue and critical and creative thinking are ways to engage and teach towards social transformation. However, for such dialogue to be democratic and transformative, the hegemony of socially constructed norms must be explicitly challenged (Davies, 2004b). Hegemony is the pervasive and uncritical acceptance of particular ideologies and discourses that work to maintain the dominance of certain groups (Giroux, 1981). Applying Gramsci’s (1971) notion of hegemony to education, Giroux (1981) explained that this domination is perpetuated by mutual (unconscious) consent, through the “power of consciousness and ideology” (p. 16). Education typically assumes, repeats, and reinforces hegemonic discourses (Apple, 1970/2004; Giroux, 1981); but, through naming and challenging problems of inequity or domination, critical dialogue offers counterhegemonic possibilities.

**Interruption**, in which a challenging or alternative view is presented, invites students to shift their initial tacit beliefs and to form new and potentially counterhegemonic questions or perspectives (Haroutunian-Gordon, 2010). Conflict dialogue pedagogies that do not include marginalized perspectives limit the potential for such interruptive discussion (Davies, 2004b; Haroutunian-Gordon, 2010). On the other hand, conflict dialogue that includes marginalized perspectives challenges and disrupts hegemonic ideologies, and presents a way to achieve recognition of difference. Its very goal is to elicit diverse and critical perspectives that question dominant assumptions.

In a healthy, inclusive classroom, diverse students can freely and confidently learn from and with their peers and teachers, actively and respectfully exchanging multiple and divergent perspectives (Fine, 1993; Hahn, 1998; Larson, 2003). A curriculum characterized by “interruptive democracy”—frequent generation of dialogue and deliberation—engages in praxis (Davies, 2004b). Teachers in such
classrooms encourage students to challenge hegemonic assumptions, and create inclusive spaces for expressing and challenging multiple identities. Such a curriculum may include organized forms of conflict dialogue such as student councils, circle time, diverse student representation on governing bodies, and critical pedagogy to address inequalities such as class, ethnicity, gender, and global injustices (Davies, 2004b, p. 223). Overall, conflict dialogue that is inclusive of multiple and diverse perspectives may contribute to democratic learning experiences.

CONFLICTUAL ISSUES ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Schools lie in the nexus of political manipulation, fear, and societal conflict but also can be a potent forum for change.

—Weinstein et al., “School Voices: Challenges Facing Educational Systems after Identity-Based Conflicts”

Classroom discussions of social and political issues are an essential component of education for democratic citizenship because they encourage students to be active and critical participants, and because they denormalize the status quo (Bickmore, 1999; Hahn, 1998; Hess & Avery, 2008; Torney-Purta, 2001). However, many teachers do not feel confident in facilitating open dialogue about conflictual issues (Bickmore, 2005, 2008b; Goldston & Kyzer, 2009; Yamashita, 2006). Avoiding conflict and complexity is part of what McNeil (1986) called defensive teaching, which reinforces standardization of hegemonic school knowledge. But explicit conflict learning scenarios challenge such antidemocratic education, in several ways. Teachers can choose to position conflicting perspectives as teachable moments (Houser, 1996). In critical pedagogy, attention can be paid to conflicting perspectives, thus stimulating critical self-reflection and thoughtful, constructively critical discussion (Houser, 2008; Shor, 1992). Open, inclusive dialogue about diverse viewpoints on conflictual questions contributes to peacebuilding by creating space for critical democratic learning.

Topics that may spark conflict in the classroom are extremely diverse, ranging from concerns over human rights to alternative ways of interpreting science experiments (Claire & Holden, 2007). For instance, science teachers may present students with actual cases of conflicts among scientists in history (Barton & Yang, 2000; Settlage & Sabik, 1997). Lesson materials on questions of human rights, prejudices, stereotypes, gender biases, current events, Canadian immigration patterns, sex education, and social justice literature present opportunities for conflict learning.

As Freire (1970/1994b) and Apple (1979/2004) argued, there is no such thing as neutral curriculum: particular perspectives, acknowledged or not, underlie all curriculum content. Biases in curriculum emerge from teachers’ own choices and beliefs, curriculum mandates, and students’ own perspectives influenced by their cultural, ethnic, religious, and gender identities. Thus, conflictual issues and topics
explicitly embedded in curriculum content provide opportunities for including divergent perspectives.

What are such conflictual issues? In one definition, they are “those on which society has not found consensus and which are considered so significant that each proposed way of dealing with them has ardent supporters and adamant opponents” (Johnson & Johnson, 2009, p. 39). Hess (2009) categorized two kinds of controversial political issues: settled issues (including prejudice, racism, and bullying), to which teachers believe there is one acceptable answer; and unsettled issues (including the death penalty, abortion, and same-sex marriage), where public opinion is still widely split and teachers accept the legitimacy of alternative viewpoints. Hess (2001, 2009) argued that unsettled issues are the best topics for issues discussions, because they provide the opportunity to take a legitimate stance on either side of a question. In issues discussions in classrooms, of course, “reflective dialogue [is promoted] among students, or between students and teachers, about an issue on which there is disagreement” (Harwood & Hahn, 1990, p. 1). Hess and Posselt (2002) studied how Grade 10 students in two social studies classrooms participated in discussions on such unsettled issues as gambling, physician-assisted suicide, and free speech. Through pre- and post-questionnaires, observations, and interviews, the authors found that students’ engagement was affected by “knowing a lot about the topic, being interested in the topic, and recognition from classmates” (Hess & Posselt, 2002, p. 299). They argued that positioning curricular material as controversial can motivate students to work together to find evidence to support their opinions, thereby increasing their confidence and interest in the material, and their participation in dialogue processes. These authors did not examine the ways these issues and pedagogies might have differentially engaged diverse students. Clearly, any curriculum is culturally bound, and varies depending on the context in which the issue is being discussed.

Positioning curriculum material as conflictual clearly offers teachers and students opportunities to make diverse, plausible interpretations through examining and evaluating politically relevant academic content. However, students’ diverse identities increase the complexity of addressing conflictual issues in the classroom (Kim & Markus, 2005; Peck, 2010). Thus, I challenge the notion that unsettled issues are necessarily the most fruitful topics for discussion (Hess, 2001; Hess & Avery, 2008; Hughes & Sears, 2007). Instead, in examining how diverse students engaged in reflective dialogue on a broad spectrum of conflictual issues, I discovered that they found meaning in relation to their diverse identities. For instance, historical oppression and marginalization of particular cultural groups, such as Japanese-Canadians during World War II, are represented in Canadian textbooks in ways that implicitly or explicitly reinforce or challenge the status and membership of diverse students’ ethnocultural groups in society. As Apple (1979/2004) and Barton and Levstik (2003) argued, critically addressing such social conflicts creates opportunities for democratic citizenship learning that interrupts prevailing inequities (Davies, 2004a; see also Epstein, 2000; Seixas, Peck, & Poyntz, 2011).
Integrating into the curriculum opportunities for diverse students to examine, interpret, read, write, and speak about social conflicts encourages critical literacy. With critical literacy, diverse students can challenge social injustices, develop and take stands on social conflicts, and “analyze and understand the social realities of their own lives and of their communities” (Cummins, 2009, p. 6). Engaging students in higher-order thinking involves purposeful inclusion of diverse perspectives, which deepens discussion and engages critical reading and writing (Applebee, 2002). Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, and Gamoran (2003) studied 64 middle and high school English classrooms and found that discussion-based pedagogies and high academic standards positively influenced diverse students’ literacy performance. Further, addressing conflictual issues that are clearly relevant to students’ identities and life experiences can offer newcomer immigrant students and language learners greater opportunities to participate. For language learners, “opportunities to practice listening, speaking, reading, and writing” in the target language are vital for second-language acquisition (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 414). Such engagement encourages opportunities for literacy improvement as diverse students read and write about important social issues that are meaningful and engaging (Cummins, 2009, 2011).

Pace (2011) has reminded us that “teachers provide students access to particular educational experiences through the choices they make about content and methods” (p. 34). She studied how social studies content was taught in American schools that did not hold standardized achievement tests (Pace, 2008). She found variations between what was taught in more affluent schools with mostly White students, and in poorer schools with more visible minorities. Much of the literature points to social studies as the ideal curricula in which to raise conflictual social and political issues. However, accountability via standardized testing that may exclude social studies (especially beyond a narrow history and civics content) limits what content is taught and the extent to which it may be presented critically and inclusively.

Social studies and language arts classrooms offer many possibilities of engaging elementary students in dialogue about alternative perspectives. The majority of research on dialogue processes in schools has been done in these settings; considerable research has been done on the rationale, complexity, and consequences of teaching conflictual issues in social studies and history curricula (e.g., Barton & Levstik, 2003; Osborne, 1995). “Schools teach a version of history that reflects ‘their’ truth—a nationalist perspective using literature and historical sources as evidence for that perspective” (Weinstein, Freedman, & Hughson, 2007, p. 63), which may marginalize students who do not identify with that history. A case study of Palestinian and Israeli teachers who cowrote a dual-language narrative on their countries’ conflict history showed how curriculum content might be constructed to teach students to make sense of contrasting interpretations of historical events, in order to facilitate de-escalation of violent conflict (Steinberg & Bar-On, 2009; see also Freedman, Weinstein, Murphy, & Longman, 2008). In contrast, curricula most often offer hegemonic narratives that ignore conflicting perspectives on history and social structures—such as those of immigrants or
indigenous peoples—and the people who have been marginalized through that history (Bannerji, 2000; Nicholas, 1996). As discussed above, many social studies teachers avoid making choices to engage in such complex and conflictual pedagogies; instead, they encourage their students to memorize and reiterate stories and facts from the past (Hughes & Sears, 2007; McNeil, 1986; Tupper, 2005).

Conflict can indeed be used for learning opportunities in the classroom. Social studies and language arts curriculum content that presents diverse perspectives, in conjunction with inclusive, engaging pedagogical tools, supports conflict learning for diverse students. Critical study of dominant and alternative narratives helps teach students to understand how narratives work (Funk & Said, 2004). And the study of fictional characters or events represented in literature can address power relations among participants with different identities. Such engagement with difference can in turn support processes of empathizing with others (Zembylas, 2007).

**DIVERSITY, IDENTITY, POWER, CONFLICT, AND PEACEBUILDING EDUCATION**

Students’ identity and social status influence the ways they may choose to participate in conflict dialogue: diverse students’ multiple identities—including race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status—in particular. Studies have shown that students’ personal identities, histories, experiences, and social class shape the ways in which they interpret curricular subject matter (Banks, 2006a, 2006b; Delpit, 2006; Ogbu, 1992). “Language learners’ identities are always multiple and in process,” depending on the context, according to Norton and Toohey (2011, p. 437). Cummins (2001) argued that when “students’ developing sense of self is affirmed and extended through their interactions with teachers, they are more likely to apply themselves to academic effort and participate actively in instruction” (p. 2).

However, Dull and Murrow (2008) and Kahne and Sporte (2008) have found that students in lower-income schools with higher percentages of newcomer immigrant and minority students had fewer opportunities to participate in conflictual issues discussions in their social studies classes than students in affluent and homogenous classrooms. In one case, Subedi (2008) observed and interviewed two immigrant teachers who tried to engage students in conflict dialogue about cultural differences in their diverse social studies classes, and found that these teachers were met with significant resistance and challenges from mainstream and minoritized students alike.

Hahn’s (1998) cross-national, mixed-methods study showed that students who participated in conflictual issues discussions developed skills and inclinations for greater democratic civic participation. However, in interviews Hahn also found that some students in the classrooms she observed feared they would be embarrassed if they voiced unpopular dissenting views in classroom discussions (see also Bekerman, 2009; King, 2009). She concluded that key elements of the
CHAPTER 2


Participating in classroom discussions is risky for anyone, and feared repercussions (such as peer or teacher reprisal) when participating in conflictual issues discussions are even greater for visible minority newcomer students in Canadian elementary schools. These students simply may not possess the social or cultural capital to present the nuanced, normative perspectives that dominate most classrooms. One approach to address this fear is to create opportunities for young people to connect their identities to the curriculum.

While such connections might contribute to promoting democracy and peacebuilding education, it is still a complex endeavour that involves negotiating identities amidst sometimes painful acculturations. In an attempt to fit in to their new society, many minority immigrant students sometimes attach negative connotations to their ethnicities. For example, in one American study, predominantly Mexican and Vietnamese minority high school students felt excluded because of how stereotypes and misperceptions concerning their ethnic identities and immigration histories were presented in the classroom (Urrieta & Quach, 2000). As some students strive to be fully accepted into mainstream society, they may try to dissociate themselves from their families by purposely not speaking their familial language or connecting with their cultural heritage (Cummins, 2001; C. A. Parker, 2010b).

A climate of social prejudice may also contribute to students’ marginalization, silence, or exclusion during conflictual issues discussions that touch upon or imply linkages to their ethnic identities. In their study of Asian students in a predominantly White high school, Quach, Jo, and Urrieta (2009) found that in this majority White population, some visible minorities vigorously attempted to subscribe to this Whiteness, while others chose to emphasize their ethnocultural differences. There is minimal research on whether students in predominantly visible minority communities experienced similar processes. But, in a Canadian study, ethnic minority immigrant youth formed strong attachments to their ethnic cultures and identities—and, at the same time, also identified with the larger Canadian political community—when these were recognized positively at school (Lee & Hébert, 2006).

Acknowledging and relating diverse identities to issues being discussed contributes to peacebuilding education. Discussions that encourage such diverse, tolerant, and dissenting viewpoints carry democratic peacebuilding potential, but they also risk further marginalizing or silencing diverse students. However, when teachers connect students’ identities to the curriculum content, this may motivate and empower students to participate safely in democratic dialogue in the classroom, lessening that risk (Hemmings, 2000).

Pedagogical Tools for Conflict Dialogue

Teachers often fear managing controversial and politically charged material in inclusive and constructive ways, especially in classrooms with diverse students
Teachers’ sense of their own expertise in curriculum content and pedagogy, as well as their positionality on ethnic and political conflicts, influences how they facilitate or avoid conflictual issues discussions (see above and also Bekerman et al., 2009; Oulton, Day, Dillon, & Grace, 2004). Studying diverse classrooms and students’ experiences with conflictual issues discussions is an effective means of revealing ways in which teachers can better facilitate effective, inclusive conflict dialogue.

Many pedagogical tools are available to teachers for guiding and inviting students to participate in discussions of conflicting perspectives. Some pedagogies prescribe particular, “correct” ways of handling conflict, while others rely on broad principles for including the diverse experiences of the participants to guide the dialogue process. *Prescriptive* approaches to conflict education often reflect dominant norms and behaviours, by teaching an assumed-neutral package of “how tos” that emerge from dominant cultural contexts, leaving minimal space for diversity of experiences and perspectives of participants (Lederach, 1995, p. 5).

By contrast, *elicitive* pedagogies invite participants to make explicit cultural knowledges that were formerly implicit, through storytelling and critical analysis of language, proverbs, and cultural symbols (Lederach, 1995). Such approaches can uncover culturally rooted knowledge resources for critical, creative, and locally relevant conflict learning. In this way, conflict education is a type of cultural learning; participants identify the different understandings of conflict embedded in curriculum content, thereby co-creating a new body of knowledge. Explicitly inviting students to voice and examine their diverse experiences helps them question and resist prescriptive Western models for understanding conflict and their own so-called common-sense assumptions regarding prevailing social relations. The way can thereby be paved for democratization.

Other pedagogical tools for facilitating conflict dialogue include structured academic controversy (Johnson & Johnson, 2009), peacemaking circle processes, and controversial public issues discussions. In structured academic controversy, students are taught to take positions in small-group discussions, then later to reverse their perspectives, and finally to attempt to reach consensus. The purpose of these dialogues is not to solve any conflictual issue. In the final stage of the process, students analyze and integrate the best arguments and evidence presented. While there is some empirical research on structured academic controversy, there is little research on how such a small-group conflict dialogue process might differentially engage and support learning of diverse and/or marginalized students.

Another pedagogical tool for conflict dialogue is the circle process, types of which include talking circles and community circles. These may be used in classrooms to build community or resolve conflict (Bickmore & Scheepstra, 2011). Circles can also be used during class meetings, to offer all participating students the opportunity to speak in decision-making on issues they are concerned about. Some facilitators may circulate a “talking piece,” to provide all students with the opportunity to participate—the person who holds the talking piece, which is passed sequentially around the circle, is the only one who is entitled to speak. In such a circle, everyone is given the opportunity to voice his or
her perspective, and as the talking piece is passed around, everyone is encouraged
to listen.

Circle processes invite those “who are quiet, shy, or struggling to find their
voice in a group space … to share what’s on their minds and hearts” (Pranis,
Stuart, & Wedge, 2003, p. 93). Such pedagogies may contribute to creating
inclusive spaces for students who may feel marginalized or less confident to voice
their perspectives. Peacemaking circles are designed to facilitate discussion and
resolution of particular problems or conflictual issues; they work towards
transformation through open-ended dialogue. In general, my research investigated
how various kinds of dialogue pedagogies reinforced marginalization and/or
encouraged ethnic minority students to identify positively with their cultural and
ancestral histories. The limited literature on circle processes in school settings
(McCluskey et al., 2008; Morrison, 2007) did not show how or whether
marginalized students might experience a reduction in their sense of inclusion
through such processes.

In one Grade 9 world history class, Kohlmeier (2006) found that when historical
events were presented to students as being debatable, the students became engaged
and intellectually stimulated to gather evidence and take on various perspectives
(see also Hahn, 1998; Hess & Avery, 2008; Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Kohlmeier
used a discussion tool known as the Socratic seminar, in which students engage in
critical dialogue about multiple perspectives on a question posed by the teacher.
However, Kohlmeier’s study did not address how diverse students in this
classroom might have experienced this conflict dialogue process in different ways.

King (2009) used an ethnographic method to study a cross-cultural
reconciliation program involving Catholic and Protestant Northern Irish high
school students and their teachers. In addition to extensive classroom observations,
he conducted semistructured interviews with teachers and students, to explore how
multiple perspectives influenced students’ experience and participation in
conflictual issues discussions. He found that through the use of conflict dialogue
processes (including structured academic controversy), these students were
equipped to engage in critical self-reflection while also exploring multiple
perspectives.

Overall, the above cases illustrate how dialogic practices are demonstrably
possible in social studies classrooms. Children in highly conflictual and in
relatively harmonious settings may develop different understandings and
approaches to conflict (Kitson & McCully, 2005). Conflictual issues discussions
are not inevitably constructive learning experiences (Bekerman et al., 2009).
Students need to learn to address conflictual material in any setting, but they tend
to build on different knowledge and skills learned informally in conflictual or
peaceful contexts (Merelman, 1990). Educators in conflict zones initially need to
set up their programs to address safer conflictual issues so that students can first
learn basic skills and values and develop trust: “Attempting too early to debate
group political aims would destroy trust, alienate students, and bring parental
reprisals” (Merelman, 1990, p. 59; see also Hemmings, 2000; Hess & Avery, 2008;
King, 2009; Schultz, Buck, & Niesz, 2000).
Discussing Conflicts with Young Students

A number of studies of conflictual issues discussions have investigated the experiences of high school students (Byford, Lennon, & Russell, 2009; Freedman et al., 2008; Hess, 2001; Hess & Posselt, 2002; Kohlmeier, 2006; A. Ross, 2007). A smaller body of theory and research challenges preconceived notions about the supposedly limited capabilities of elementary children to engage in such discussions (Angell, 2004; Beck, 2003; Kelly & Brooks, 2009).

It is vital to provide adequate support for teachers when they engage with sensitive material, especially with younger students. Fine (1993) described a vignette from her research in a Grade 7/8 classroom, in which two students voiced perspectives that differed from the teacher’s views about the Holocaust and Israeli-Palestinian relations. In an effort to address one student’s anti-Semitic bias regarding a so-called Jewish conspiracy, the teacher brought in a guest facilitator from Facing History and Ourselves to facilitate a follow-up discussion. This organization’s curriculum materials and teacher training helps students examine cases of genocide from various contexts, and guides them to explore their own identities and perspectives as citizens who can resist violence in their own societies.

Elementary students are capable of engaging in conflict dialogue, especially when they have the benefit of preparatory lessons and scaffolding content and process (Bickmore, 1999, 2014; Bickmore & Parker, 2014; Parker, 2011, 2013). Beck (2003) studied a case in which a suburban American Grade 4 class engaged in a Civics Deliberation unit on rights and government. He reported that the teacher’s preparatory lessons on how to engage in conflictual discussions had created a classroom climate where at least some students felt comfortable in expressing minority points of view. During classroom discussions, one student’s point of view was that, if someone was accused of murder, he shouldn’t get a lawyer: “He should just go to jail” (Beck, 2003, p. 326). Beck’s study shed light on how young children could engage in conflict dialogue about issues that may be familiar to their lived experience.

In any context, children’s experiences of conflict are closely connected to their social status, gender, and cultural identity, and form part of their citizenship learning. Children who grow up in diverse neighbourhoods tend to become aware of ethnic and racial differences at an earlier age than children who live in monoracial settings (Kendall, 1983; Parker, 2010a; Peck & Sears, 2005; Ramsey, 2004; Ramsey & Myers, 1990); some argue that such awareness develops by the age of four or five (e.g., Derman-Sparks, 2006; Hyun, 2007; Wolpert, 2006). It is therefore important to pay attention to the ways that these differences may influence the ways that diverse students in elementary schools experience conflictual issues associated with such diversities. Cultural sensitivity in discussions with young, diverse students can contribute to all students developing positive feelings about their racial and cultural identities (Biles, 1994; C. A. Parker, 2010b).
Literature circles that elicit conflict dialogue may encourage students to draw on and voice their lived experiences in response to conflictual issues. For instance, inviting students to express their viewpoint through a character in a story can provide safety for students to participate (Bickmore & Parker, 2014). In an urban American Grade 1/2 mixed classroom with predominantly Latina/Latino students, Fain (2008) studied how the teacher’s use of literature circles facilitated the students’ discussion about issues of oppression. The teacher purposely selected controversial literature; the narratives explicitly addressed issues of racism, discrimination, and social exclusion. Fain argued that the literature circle provided a “safe space” where the students “established their voices in democratic ways by taking multiple positions in the dialogue” (Fain, 2008, p. 207). DeNicolo and Franquiz (2006) described similar critical incidents during literature circles on cultural literacy in a diverse American Grade 4 classroom.

Stereotyped notions of “childhood innocence” may make educators reluctant to raise conflictual issues with young children (Bekerman et al., 2009; Davies, 2004a; Yamashita, 2006). Kelly and Brooks (2009) challenged these preconceptions in their study of how novice teachers in British Columbia approached social justice issues in their Grades 4, 5, and 6 classrooms. They found that the teachers’ presumptions about students’ innocence and indifference to political and social justice issues (such as death, drugs, or poverty) usually caused those teachers to report that they avoided discussing controversial issues in their classrooms.

However, conflict dialogue pedagogies can be infused into the curriculum safely enough to engage diverse students in inclusive, democratic learning opportunities. For example, one teacher in Kelly and Brooks’s study facilitated a conflict dialogue with his Grade 2 class of primarily South Asian immigrant students. In a discussion of the conflict between India and Pakistan, a student raised the issue of atomic bombs. The teacher linked this issue of global conflict with a lesson the class had already done on interpersonal conflict, in order to reduce the “heaviness” of the topic (Kelly & Brooks, 2009, p. 208). Clearly, issues discussions with young children are not only possible—they are also necessary. Voicing divergent perspectives and stories in the curriculum may contribute to diverse students’ understandings of how issues of power and inequity are associated with their and others’ race, ethnicity, gender, and migration experiences.

CRITICAL MULTICULTURALISM AND CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY

As Delpit (2006) has argued, mainstream cultural codes for language and interaction are generally assumed in schools, rather than being taught explicitly: this inexplicitness tends to disadvantage culturally minoritized students, such as new immigrants, who do not have prior access to such cultural knowledge. Culturally relevant pedagogy aims to challenge mainstream hidden curricula that teach acceptance of the status quo, by making the dynamics of the dominant society explicit—accessible for learning and for critique (Howard, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1995). It encourages a wider range of diverse students’ voices through
equity-oriented teaching methods (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995). A main tenet of culturally responsive pedagogy is cultural reflection; teachers facilitating dialogue about sensitive, identity-linked issues can encourage diverse students to reflect on how conflicts are connected to their identities through their race, ethnicity, or gender. Such pedagogies are often promoted for students of colour (Nieto, 1999).

Distinct approaches to diversity and multiculturalism influence how conflict is approached in schools and how possibilities for uncovering hidden curriculum are managed. Banks (2006a) identified four approaches to multicultural curriculum reform: the contributions approach; the ethnic additive approach; the transformation approach; and the decision-making and social action approach. The contributions approach is the typical default approach, in which mainstream ethnic heroes and holidays are added to the curriculum. In ethnic additive approaches, teachers include content from various ethnic groups without encouraging students to understand society from these diverse perspectives. The transformation approach is fundamentally different from the first two approaches, because it considers how dominant assumptions can be challenged by interrogating the multiple perspectives of several ethnic groups. The decision-making and social action approach includes all elements of the transformative approach, but also provides students with opportunities to critically reflect on social issues and make decisions about how to take action and solve these issues.

Kumashiro (2000) also identified four approaches to antipressive education: education for the Other, education about the Other, education that is critical of privileging and Othering, and education that changes students and society. As in Banks’s model, the first two approaches reflect liberal and additive approaches to address issues of diversity and oppression and the last two approaches promote critical transformative multiculturalism. The latter approach explicitly addresses conflicts and questions of power, to motivate and equip diverse students to engage in cultural critique and democratization.

Uncritical, liberal approaches to multiculturalism produce national histories that imagine Canada as a socially just and successful multicultural state; in this way, normative Canadian history produces Canada as a nation that is “tolerant” and “innocent” (St. Denis, 2011, p. 310). But these multicultural initiatives can work against Aboriginal sovereignty and anticolonialism, sometimes excluding them: “By inciting multiculturalism, public schools effectively limit meaningful incorporation of Aboriginal content and perspectives into public schools” (St. Denis, 2011, p. 307). Multiculturalism sometimes equates Aboriginals’ history and that of immigrant groups, inaccurately assuming shared commonalities. By doing so, it erases the specific experiences of Aboriginal peoples, who are indigenous to the land—experiences that are very different for people who have newly arrived to the country.

In order to respond to the so-called problem of difference, multicultural education is often used to promote a discourse of hybridity, cosmopolitanism, and equality amongst all cultures (Gérin-Lajoie, 2008a, 2008b; May & Sleeter, 2010; Nieto, 1999). But practitioners and theorists understand, experience, and interpret
difference differently (Gérin-Lajoie, 2008b; Nieto, 1999). In the dominant discourse of liberal multiculturalism, equity and diversity are promoted at a minimal, generic level and focus on “celebrating” differences (Gérin-Lajoie, 2008b; Harper, 1997; Nieto, 1999). Some teachers still believe that an adequate response to multiculturalism and diversity would be to hold a “holiday party” instead of a “Christmas party.” While this is a step towards inclusiveness, such conventional views of liberal multiculturalism are presented as short-term “feel-good” additives to curriculum programs, meant to “boost self-esteem for ‘minority’ students” (Nieto, 1999, p. 27). But one of the core concepts of multicultural education has to do with facilitating inclusion of diverse students, through sustainable interventions. A critical approach to multiculturalism presents antiracist and social justice education as basic education that is pervasive and important for all students (Nieto, 2002). A critical multicultural praxis involves “moving beyond dysconsciousness and miseducation toward liberatory pedagogy” (King, 2004, p. 81). Mainstream views that perpetuate dysconsciousness are challenged by acknowledging that education is not neutral. Dysconsciousness means uncritically accepting social structures which maintain a limited awareness of inequity and diversity:

Dysconscious racism is a form of racism that tacitly accepts dominant White norms and privileges. It is not the absence of consciousness (i.e., not unconsciousness) but an impaired consciousness or distorted way of thinking about race as compared to, for example, critical consciousness. (King, 2004, p. 73)

Critical multicultural education focuses on knowledge construction and praxis; it is an “anti-racist, egalitarian, inclusive process that is embedded in all aspects of school life: program, pedagogy, social interactions between school actors, and notions of learning and teaching” (Jacquet, 2008, p. 61). This kind of teaching is necessary in order to pay attention to race and racism, equality and equity, and inclusion and exclusion, in both the content and pedagogy that students are engaged in at school. When students are free to examine and present multiple perspectives in democratic classrooms, multicultural education becomes critical, transformative, and antipressive (Banks, 1996; Nieto, 2002; Kumashiro, 2000).

Multicultural education is part of citizenship education; however, both have been taken up in various ways. Liberal, additive, and uncritical approaches focus on generic, top-down content that ignores conflict and uncertainty. For example, while there have been nation-wide shifts in educational policies that seek to promote greater understanding and respect for diversity, early assimilation-oriented educational policies “were meant to be a homogenizing force that would work with immigrant and native-born children and their families to create ‘good Canadian citizens’” (Joshee, 2004, p. 135). Such assimilation policies promote liberal, additive approaches that educate for and about the Other but do not invite critical reflection about social issues. Canadian federal policies have since been repositioned to reflect a social cohesion approach, which recognizes diversity but
CONFLICT/DIVERSITY IN DEMOCRATIC CLASSROOMS

still maintains an uncritical approach to multicultural and human rights education (Joshee, 2004).

When power and hegemony are ignored, liberal multicultural educational practices can easily be implemented in the curriculum. In contrast, critical, progressive, and transformative approaches embrace the inevitable (and potentially positive) consequences of conflict and explicitly surface the hidden curriculum. Such approaches encourage dialogue about diversity, conflictual issues, and the necessity of action for social change to produce justice.

Teaching marginalized students to be good citizens is a goal of both multicultural and citizenship education (Ladson-Billings, 2004; Osborne, 1995). Critical multicultural education allows students and teachers to draw on their diverse lived experiences and perspectives to interpret and respond to particular issues. A critical multicultural education program encourages diverse students to reflect on how their lived experiences are part of conflictual and social issues in the democratic society in which they live. When teachers explicitly acknowledge issues pertaining to ethnocultural difference, such as racism, they acknowledge social conflict, thus fulfilling the peacebuilding education mandate of including social conflict issues in the implemented curriculum (Bickmore, 2008a).

Through connecting curriculum content and students’ experiences, teachers empower students to critically reflect on their social and cultural identities. Critical race theory scholars (e.g., Delgado, 1995; Lopez, 2003) argue that maintaining a false neutrality about race and racism ignores the impact and reality of racism in schools. By acknowledging counternarratives about racism and injustice, applied critical race theory provokes critical reflection and an open space to challenge the status quo (Delgado, 1995; Knaus, 2009). Knaus, a high school teacher, described his personal experience in applying critical race theory in his class of predominantly African American and Latino students in California; his students were able to share their personal experiences with racism and oppression. Bolgatz (2005) showed how the pedagogy of two teachers, one Black and one White, facilitated conversations about race and racism in a high school class. The two teachers team-taught lessons that asked students to discuss issues of race and racism. Key features of their practice included explicitly teaching students to listen, “back up their opinions with evidence, and make use of their own experiences in discussions,” and engaging students in peer-to-peer discussion (Bolgatz, 2005, p. 30). Similarly, in a qualitative study of an American middle school history classroom, the teacher used counterstorytelling as a method of resistance to racism; including alternative narratives, students reflected on their social realities and engaged in dialogue about race (Howard, 2004). In these examples, culturally relevant pedagogies supported ethnocultural minority students to share personal experiences, thereby creating space for them to engage in critical dialogue about social issues.

In another study, two male teachers, one Black and one White, integrated multicultural content in their diverse middle school and high school social studies classrooms and found that the teachers’ lived experiences influenced how they chose to present conflictual historical issues (Dilworth, 2004). In both classes, the
teachers articulated their confidence about integrating multicultural content in their curriculum, but both still relied heavily on the classroom textbook that presented multicultural issues through limited additive approaches. They extended their implemented curriculum through the contributions approach, presenting multiple perspectives and encouraging students to critically reflect on the contributions of diverse groups of people to society. The study showed that while integrating multicultural content was a necessary component of citizenship education, teachers’ personal choices strongly impacted the extent to which students were able to dialogue about conflictual issues and develop a deeper awareness of their sociopolitical communities.

Obviously, discussing sensitive issues can be detrimental to classroom social relations if adequate preparations have not been made. For instance, one Toronto teacher attempted to engage with his diverse Grade 3 students’ cultural histories (Dudley-Marling, 1997). However, during a discussion about a folk tale, he mistakenly assumed one of his students, an Afghani, was from Pakistan. The student, who had spent a year at a Pakistani refugee camp, was hurt, and retorted, “I’m not from Pakistan.” Like this student, others might be sensitive to discussions that highlight their perceived ethnicity and experiences based on stereotypes. While I advocate for dialogue about diversity, I also acknowledge that such practices are not a panacea; in fact they are risky pedagogy. Even though risky, however, such practices are necessary to disrupt the guise of neutrality and to address social injustices (Freire, 1985).

When teachers’ pedagogical strategies engage diverse students’ personal experiences, they affirm students’ identities—encouraging their active engagement in the curriculum (Cummins, 2001; Nieto, 1992). To provide this support, teachers need to be equipped with culturally appropriate pedagogies (Del phit, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2004). Particularly when teachers encourage diverse students to voice their perspectives, conflict dialogue processes can open space for discussion of alternative viewpoints across all subject areas. For example, in the language arts curriculum, studying conflictual issues in fiction and nonfiction plots and themes can help diverse students relate to conflicting perspectives of characters. In a previous research study (C. A. Parker, 2010b), I described a new immigrant student who initially showed reluctance to engage in a multicultural unit integrated to the Grade 4 English language arts curriculum. However, he spoke up during a class discussion following a read-aloud of the picture book *The Name Jar* by Yansook Choi. The book is about a girl named Unhei who is embarrassed by her Korean name when she first goes to school in America, because her classmates cannot pronounce it. After the class read the book the student chose to share cultural and language challenges he had experienced when he moved back to China for a few years after his family first came to Canada. Despite this student’s limited English language skills, he became comfortable participating in a discussion about this story as he related it to his own troubling story of cultural transition. This study demonstrated that, when curriculum content and pedagogy supported diverse students’ inclusion, students may indeed be encouraged to share sensitive or personal issues about cultural conflict.
In sum: cultural responsiveness and flexibility of power are key characteristics of peacebuilding education, because they address destructive social conflict and systemic violence (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000; Lederach, 1995). Critical multiculturalism and culturally relevant pedagogy are necessary components of this peacebuilding education. Transforming implemented curriculum by inviting dialogue about conflict and diversity increases the possibility of inclusion for all students, and contributes to building peace.

CONCLUSION: CONFLICT AND DIVERSITY IN DEMOCRATIC AND DIVERSE CLASSROOMS

When curriculum and pedagogy engage diverse students’ identities, histories, and perspectives, the students increasingly become included in the class. Democratic peacebuilding education relies on dialogic pedagogies to offer opportunities for all students to participate and have their voices heard. In elementary classrooms there still remain shifting approaches to understanding how these processes are used and whom they include. Hidden curriculum embedded in classroom practices that teach acceptance of the status quo tend to exclude some diverse students. However, as many diverse immigrant students acculturate to classroom settings, they may also encounter cultural barriers in the explicit, planned classroom curriculum. Apple’s (1979/2004), Freire’s (1970/1994a, 1970/1994), and Davies’ (2004a, 2004b) theories suggest that inviting students to explore conflicting perspectives on unresolved issues would facilitate education for democratization. Conflict dialogue pedagogies may or may not be sensitive to diverse students’ identities. Equity issues embedded in curriculum (e.g., experiences of historically marginalized, oppressed groups) are often skimmed over or not mentioned at all. In contrast, the infusion of conflictual issues dialogue provides opportunities to voice multiple, contesting, perspectives—which may be relevant to diverse students’ identities.

NOTES

1 Facing History and Ourselves is a North American organization that began as a way to support educators to teach about the Nazi Holocaust; it is an example of an organization that educators may consult for support in facilitating conflictual issues.