INCLUSION IN PEACEBUILDING EDUCATION:
DISCUSSION OF DIVERSITY AND CONFLICT AS LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES
FOR IMMIGRANT STUDENTS

by

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Abstract

Ethnocultural minority immigrant students carry diverse histories, perspectives, and experiences, which can serve as resources for critical reflection and discussion about social conflicts. Inclusion of diverse students’ identities in the curriculum requires acknowledgement and open discussion of diversity and conflictual issues. In democratic peacebuilding education, diverse students are encouraged to express divergent points of view in open, inclusive dialogue. This ethnographic study with a critical perspective examined how three teachers in urban public elementary school classrooms with ethnocultural minority first- and second-generation immigrant students (aged 9 to 13) implemented different kinds of curriculum content and pedagogy, and how those pedagogies facilitated or impeded inclusive democratic experiences for various students. In these classrooms, peers and teachers shared similar and different cultural backgrounds and migration histories. Data included 110 classroom observations of three teachers and 75 ethnocultural minority students, six interviews with three teachers, 29 group interviews with 53 students, document analysis of ungraded student work and teachers’ planning materials, and a personal journal. Results showed how diverse students experienced and responded to implemented curriculum: when content was explicitly linked to students’ identities and experiences, opportunities for democratic peacebuilding
inclusion increased. Dialogic pedagogical processes that encouraged cooperation among students strengthened the class community and invited constructive conflict education. The implicit and explicit curriculum implemented in these three diverse classrooms also shaped how students interpreted democracy in the context of multiculturalism in Canada. Teaching students as though they were all the same, and teaching curriculum content as if it were neutral and uncontestable, did not create equitable social relations. Explicit attention to conflict provided opportunities to uncover the hidden curriculum and to acknowledge structures of power and domination, creating space for development of critical consciousness. Thus culturally relevant curricula and democratic learning opportunities encouraged social and academic engagement and resulted in the inclusion of a wider range of diverse students’ voices.

**Keywords:** peacebuilding, conflict, dialogue, discussion, democratic citizenship education, cultural diversity, immigrants, minority education, elementary classrooms
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List of Abbreviations

B: African-Canadian ancestry

DOC: Classroom document

EA: East Asian ancestry

F: Female student

J: Researcher’s personal journal

M: Male student

OBS: Classroom observation

SA: South Asian ancestry

SI: Student group interview

TI: Interview with teacher

W: White ancestry

WA: West Asian ancestry

[ . . . ]: Transcriber’s editorial clarification

*italics* Indicate stress (in interviews and classroom observations)
CHAPTER 1
CONFLICTS AND IDENTITIES EMBEDDED IN CANADIAN CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

Sā vidyā yā vimuktaye. (Education is that which liberates; Vishnu Purana, 1.19.41)

Southern Ontario is home to students whose ethnocultural ancestries are more diverse than anywhere else in the world (Statistics Canada, 2006). 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). Curriculum whose world view only reflects the dominant White, male, heterosexual viewpoints and knowledges 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, and become participatory citizens (Avery & Hahn, 2004).

How are students’ ethnocultural, gender, and sexual 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 ethnocultural, sexual, and gender identities of students and teachers presumably influence the ways in which conflict dialogue is approached in schools. But, even with the implementation of policies to infuse equity-oriented activities in classrooms, research on and evidence for the ways culturally 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.

Discussion about diversity and conflictual issues invites the inclusion of students’ diverse perspectives, viewpoints, and experiences, which can serve as a resource for critical reflection about social conflicts (Banks, 2006; 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.

In this study, 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,\(^1\) experienced and responded to conflictual issues pedagogies and discussions in relation to their own perspectives, histories, and identities. I also examined the influence that various conflict dialogue pedagogies had on facilitating inclusive spaces and motivations for diverse students to participate in social studies and language arts curricula. While some studies have explored students’ experience with conflict dialogue, few have studied diverse students’ experiences of particular conflict dialogue pedagogies in elementary classrooms. This study contributes to the literature on conflict dialogue in school settings and responds to its limitations in attending to student diversity.

In this thesis, I argue for the inclusion of conflict dialogue in the classroom curriculum. 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). These processes of constructive discussion can be understood broadly as *peacebuilding education*. Peacebuilding education is the purposive generation of conflict as a learning opportunity, in which issues are explicitly aired and taken up in ways that can promote positive peace. Galtung (1969) referred to positive peace as sustainable and just peace that promotes dialogue, relationship building, and structural change, whereas negative peace is the absence of war or physical violence. The purposive generation of conflictual dialogue means confronting difficult issues that may be highly emotional, linked to identity, and personally relevant (Bekerman, 2009; Bickmore, 2008a; Boler, 1999). Peacebuilding education includes dialogic and culturally relevant pedagogies designed to (re)build strong, healthy, human rights–respecting

\(^1\) 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.
relationships, and to challenge inequities—all necessary for democratic societies. The concept is based on Bickmore’s (2011a) three-tiered model for managing and responding to conflict in schools: peacekeeping control (for the safety of opposing parties); peacemaking conflict resolution dialogue processes; and peacebuilding. In the context of diversity, a critical multicultural education program is necessary to encourage the inclusion of diverse perspectives and to facilitate critical reflection on social power structures (Nieto, 2002). Such critical reflections are key aspects of peacebuilding education and in educating for democracy (Bickmore, 2006; Davies, 2004a).

**Contextual Background and Purpose of the Study**

This study is very dear to my heart. In some ways, it is a study of my childhood; of my own experience growing up 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 spent in the field, and each day I have spent writing this thesis—that this is a study of others and myself. I knew I wanted to study 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 study 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 study, therefore, came even closer to home than I imagined: I lived in the community I study in this thesis for 20 years. The community held 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. 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 in two different schools, one of which had been my own elementary school (Grades 1 to 8). This connection allowed me to have an insider perspective in 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 Greek, and many teachers at the school were also Greek, although I recall having had one Black teacher.

Thus, during this research, I reflected and reimagined how school content and teachers’ pedagogies 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 ago, when the students’ ethnocultural identities were directly connected to this curriculum content. Such discussions probably did take place, but I believe that at the time I felt it
was perfectly normal to be taught about other people’s histories. However, many student participants in my research were interested in learning about ancient Egypt, India, and China, as well as about Greece. This was the norm for these students, whose diverse cultural histories may now be better embedded in implemented curriculum content.

In this thesis study, I examine how the perspectives and experiences of diverse students operated within three diverse classroom contexts when issues of conflict and diversity arose. I explore 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. To do this, I investigated how three teachers facilitated implemented curriculum in ways that intersected with their students’ Canadian cultural and civic identities. My conceptual focus on peacebuilding education in a multicultural education context centred attention on dialogic pedagogies and strategies that each of the three teachers used to facilitate linkages between curricular content and their students’ identities.

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do the teachers in three public, urban, diverse Grades 4-to-7 classrooms present and facilitate discussion about social conflict and/or ethnocultural diversity in their implemented curricula, particularly in social studies and language arts? How do these pedagogies shape learning opportunities for their diverse students?
2. How do diverse ethnocultural minority and newcomer immigrant students experience this curricular content and pedagogy, in relation to their own perspectives, histories, and identities?

**Overview of Thesis**

In Chapter 2, I review research on students’ experiences with democratic citizenship education in two school contexts, along with the 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. I also present and ground in scholarly literature the theoretical framework that informed this study, focusing on critical consciousness (Freire, 1970/1994b), hidden and explicit curriculum (Apple, 1990), and conflict in diverse students’ democratic citizenship education (Davies, 2004b).

In Chapter 3, I introduce and justify my methodology, in relation to literature on ethnography with a critical perspective, and discuss the specific design of my study, its participants and data collection and analysis procedures. In Chapter 4, I introduce the three teachers and classrooms I studied, and describe various students I observed and the various kinds of pedagogies that contributed to the inclusion and exclusion of diverse students in these classrooms. In Chapter 5, I use vignettes from classroom observations and interviews to illustrate how the content and pedagogy in each classroom connected to diverse students’ identities. In Chapter 6, I show how the hidden and explicit curriculum functioned in these three classroom sites to develop students’ civic and national identities. Finally, in Chapter 7 I summarize and discuss the findings of my research and
conclude with a discussion of the contributions, limitations, and significance of this study.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW:

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. (Freire, 1985, p. 122)

In this chapter, I review prior research and theory to examine how conflict dialogue processes might prepare diverse students for democratic and inclusive learning opportunities in the classroom. I first introduce the concept of the hidden curriculum, based on the work of Jackson (1968) and Apple (1979/2004), and apply that to questions of student diversity. I then introduce the concept of dialogue, based on Paulo Freire’s (1970/1994b) theory of critical consciousness and Lynn Davies’ (2004a) dialogue for democratic education to discuss how critical dialogic education may create opportunities for teachers and students to engage in inclusive peacebuilding learning. I also examine research on conflict dialogue processes to illustrate how each may support inclusive conflict learning.

Next, I review research on how various conflict dialogue processes have been used and interpreted in various contexts relating to diversity and unequal power. In particular, Hahn’s (1998) cross-national study demonstrated how using open, inclusive dialogue in discussing conflictual issues in classrooms supports democratic learning outcomes. Finally, I discuss the ways in which conflict can provide learning opportunities for diverse elementary students in the social studies and language arts. Overall, the literature review provides a background and framework for how conflict dialogue processes are used in diverse elementary classrooms to facilitate open and inclusive social and academic engagement and democratic learning opportunities for all students.
Some scholarship and practice in 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 may pay insufficient attention to pedagogies of dialogue and deliberation, or to the development of the critical inquiry skills necessary for citizenship in pluralist societies (Banks, 2006b; Dei, 2000; Dilworth, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Nieto, 2002). Scholars have examined where diversity and conflict issues intersect with goals of education for democracy through many overlapping but distinct perspectives, such as antiracism, critical multiculturalism, critical pedagogy, culturally relevant pedagogy, citizenship education, and peacebuilding. To conceptualize how critical reflection on conflict and difference may provide inclusive, democratic learning opportunities for diverse students, I bring together insights from these areas of work into an overarching conceptual framework of peacebuilding. Acknowledging diverse viewpoints and critically reflecting on social power structures are key aspects of peacebuilding pedagogy and are also critical components of educating for democracy (Bickmore, 2006; Davies, 2004a). Together, culturally relevant curricula and peacebuilding pedagogies provide opportunities for diverse students to recognize and respond to questions of power and justice in society, through critical dialogue about diversity and conflictual issues.

**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/upper class norms and values (Apple, 1979/2004; Kumashiro, 2000). This avoidance of explicit critical attention to conflict limits opportunities for students to engage in discussion and to explore alternative perspectives. In contrast, curriculum that airs conflicting perspectives may invite and support critical thinking, exposing the ideological underpinnings of the existing system.

All curriculum includes implicit learning opportunities embedded in the classroom and school practices; these are known as the hidden curriculum (Jackson, 1968). The hidden curriculum in schools comprises the “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). While the hidden curriculum in North American schooling typically avoids conflict, it is entirely possible for explicit (and/or implicit) conflict learning opportunities embedded in the curriculum to cut against this grain, and instead to encourage critical, inclusive engagement. Implicit and explicit curricular experiences that purposefully generate conflict dialogue and address issues of power and difference can create spaces for inclusion of multiple histories, experiences, and perspectives (Bickmore, 2007).

The identities of individuals 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 classroom settings. 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). In conflict dialogue processes, students and teachers can engage with their many identities, and draw
on their diverse lived experiences and perspectives to interpret and respond to particular issues. 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 be detrimental, particularly for students who carry marginalized identities (Apple, 1970/2004; Hess & Avery, 2008).

In societies characterized by social inequality, the dominant group’s ways of thinking are legitimated when unproblematized, 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)

Through developing critical consciousness—understanding gained through transformative dialogue and praxis, a combination of action and reflection—transformation. However, for such dialogue to be democratic and transformative, the hegemony of socially constructed norms must be challenged explicitly (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) explains
how this domination is perpetuated, by mutual (unconscious) consent, through the
“power of consciousness and ideology” (p. 16). While education typically assumes,
dialogue offers counter-hegemonic possibilities, when these discussions name and
challenge problems of inequity or domination.

Haroutunian-Gordon (2010) theorized that “interruption,” in which a challenging
or alternative view is presented, would invite students to shift their initial tacit beliefs and
to form new (potentially counter-hegemonic) questions or perspectives. Conflict dialogue
pedagogies that do not include marginalized perspectives limit the potential for
interruptive discussion (Davies, 2004b; Haroutunian-Gordon, 2010). The inclusion of
marginalized perspectives challenges and disrupts hegemonic ideologies. In this context,
conflict dialogue presents a way to achieve such recognition of difference because of its
goal 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, by 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**

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, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schultz, 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. Explicit conflict learning opportunities create opportunities to challenge such antidemocratic education. Teachers can choose to position conflicting perspectives as teachable moments (Houser, 1996). Critical pedagogy encourages attention to conflicting perspectives, to stimulate critical self-reflection and thoughtful, constructively critical discussion (Houser, 2008; Shor, 1992). Thus 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 can present students with actual cases of conflicts among scientists in history (Barton & Yang, 2000; Settlage & Sabik,
Lesson materials on questions of human rights, prejudices, stereotypes, gender biases, current events, Canadian immigration patterns, sex education, and literature such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960/2006) or *Three Wishes* (Ellis, 2006) present conflict learning opportunities. As Freire (1970/1994b) and Apple (1979/2004) have 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, gender, and sexual identities. Thus, conflictual issues and topics explicitly embedded in curriculum content provide opportunities for the inclusion of divergent perspectives.

Controversial issues 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). Issues discussions in classrooms promote “reflective dialogue among students, or between students and teachers, about an issue on which there is disagreement” (Harwood & Hahn, 1990, p. 1). Hess (2009) has categorized two kinds of controversial political issues: *settled* issues (including prejudice, racism, bullying), to which teachers believe there is one acceptable answer; and *unsettled* issues (including the death penalty, abortion, 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. 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 postquestionnaires, 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. The 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.

My research challenges 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 (Davies, 2004a) prevailing inequities (see also Epstein, 2000; Seixas, Peck, & Poyntz, 2011). Students’ diverse identities also increase the complexity of addressing conflictual issues in the classroom (Kim & Markus, 2005; Peck, 2010). Positioning curriculum material as
conflictual clearly offers teachers and students opportunities to make diverse, plausible interpretations through examining and evaluating politically relevant academic content.

Integrating into the curriculum opportunities for diverse students to examine, interpret, read, write, and speak about social conflicts encourages critical literacy. Critical literacy enables diverse students to challenge social injustices and to develop and take stands on social conflicts, by providing opportunities for them to “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 influenced diverse students’ literacy performance positively. 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; Norton & Toohey, 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 an ideal place for raising conflictual social and political issues. However, accountability via standardized testing that may exclude social studies, especially beyond narrow history and civics content, limits what content is taught and the extent to which it is presented critically and inclusively.

Social studies and language arts classrooms offer many opportunities to engage elementary students in dialogue about alternative perspectives. The majority of research on dialogue processes in schools has been done in these settings. For example, 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 et al., 2008). In contrast, curricula most often teach 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 make choices to not 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).

Social studies and language arts curriculum content that presents diverse perspectives in conjunction with inclusive, engaging pedagogical tools can support conflict learning for diverse students. Critical study of dominant and alternative narratives can create opportunities for students to understand how narratives work (Funk & Said, 2004). The study of fictional characters or events represented in literature may also address power relations among participants with different identities. Such engagement with difference can in turn support processes of empathizing with the Other (Zembylas, 2007). Conflict can indeed be used for learning opportunities in the classroom: “Schools lie in the nexus of political manipulation, fear, and societal conflict but also can be a potent forum for change” (Weinstein et al., 2007, p. 65).

**Diversity, Identity, Power, Conflict, and Peacebuilding Education**

Identity is not a singular construct, but 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) argued that the broad cultural roots of identity are just as important as identity’s evolution or construction within the life of any individual. In Woodward’s (2002) view, while race carries biological foundations, “ethnicity marks cultural and social differences between groups of people” (p. 146). What these theories
have in common is the insight that identity is constructed and understood through
difference (Allahar, 2006; Gérin-Lajoie, 2011; Hall, 2006). Therefore, curriculum that
recognizes and address such difference can create space for inclusion and democratic
development of diverse students.

Students’ identities and social status presumably influence their opportunities and
choices to participate in conflict dialogue processes. Diverse students’ multiple
identities—such as race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status—may influence
how they choose to participate in school. The ways in which students interpret curricular
subject matter are shaped by their personal identities, histories, experiences, and social
class (Banks, 2006a, 2006b; Delpit, 2006; Ogbu, 1992). Norton and Toohey (2011)
argued that “language learners’ identities are always multiple and in process,” depending
on the context (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). Therefore, recognizing and including diverse students’ identities through studying the
conflictual and social issues relevant to their identities is likely to influence their
engagement in the curriculum.

However, currently, Dull and Morrow (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 some mainstream and minoritized students.

Carole Hahn’s (1998) cross-national, mixed-methods study showed that, on average, students who had opportunities to participate 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). Hahn concluded that key elements of the instructional climate—content, pedagogy, and atmosphere—could “model democratic inquiry and discourse” (Hahn, 1998, p. 232) more or less inclusively. In my study, I examined what happened to visible minority newcomer students in Canadian elementary school contexts who did and did not participate in conflictual issues discussions. I also investigated how diverse students’ concerns regarding the risks of participation (e.g., embarrassment, negative peer/teacher feedback) might be overcome to create safe, inclusive spaces for minority and dissenting viewpoints. My study thus contributes to understanding how diverse, lower-status, potentially marginalized students may experience conflict dialogue processes and how their identities might be included in the curriculum in ways that promote democracy and peacebuilding education.

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;
Bekerman (2007) argued that individual identity is influenced by nation-state ideologies and, thus, possibilities for interaction between students from contested settings (such as Israel and Palestine) involve recognizing power imbalances and committing to the dialogue process. In this thesis, I argue that such recognition is also important in Ontario classrooms, where teachers may facilitate conflict dialogue processes to examine and challenge cultural and political hegemony within 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). Ross 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. Hess (2001) probably would define this chador conflict as an unsettled issue, because many teachers and much of the public would consider the different viewpoints as legitimate. 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 make in facilitating or avoiding conflictual issues discussions, and the ways each student would experience
those discussions. Cultural responsiveness and flexibility of power are key characteristics of peacebuilding education initiatives (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000; Lederach, 1995).

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 study, the predominantly Mexican and Vietnamese language minority students at American high schools 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 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 a heterogeneous 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 heterogeneously visible minority contexts experienced similar processes. Canadian ethnic minority immigrant youth studied by Lee and Hebert (2006) 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. Acknowledging and relating diverse identities to issues being discussed contributes to peacebuilding education. When teachers connect students’ identities to the curriculum content, this may motivate and empower them to
participate in democratic dialogue in the classroom (Hemmings, 2000). Discussions that encourage such diverse, tolerant, and dissenting viewpoints carry democratic peacebuilding potential, but they also risk further marginalizing or silencing diverse students.

Some students may choose to remain silent to mark their disagreement on a conflictual issue (Bekerman & Zembylas, 2011) or to mask how their personal identity connects to the issue (Schultz, 2010). Hemmings (2000) studied two high school cases and showed how social status and power dynamics between students influenced who participated in discussions, and how they did that. White’s (2011) interviews of four racial minority students, first-generation undergraduates in a predominantly White university in the western United States, found that their reticence to speak aloud in class discussions was based on fears of being seen as speaking for an entire minority group, as being academically incompetent, and of not being capable of participating in academic discourse. Thus, these four students “made conscious decisions not to participate in classes, thereby affecting their academic performance as well as their sense of belonging to the academic community in which they found themselves” (White, 2011, p. 255). Quiet students, however, may still feel connected to the conflictual issues being discussed and pedagogies that support diverse students’ inclusion may still encourage dissenting voices to be aired.

Conflict dialogue learning opportunities are also gendered; for example, masculinity is typically associated with aggressive responses to conflict (Connell, 1993; Davies, 2004a). Thus, students’ gender and sexual identities, intersecting with their religious, cultural, racial, and class identities, are likely to influence their engagement in
conflict dialogue pedagogies. Hahn’s (1998) and Harwood and Hahn’s (1990) cross-national research on students’ civic engagement and participation found gender to be a factor in students’ attitudes about equitable gender representation in politics. This suggests that students’ gender, and gender-equitable climates of classrooms, may influence the ways in which conflicts are interpreted and taken up in classroom dialogue.

A range of behaviours exists in typical gender identifications: girls and boys may “switch between scripts to achieve power or agency—sometimes using femininity, sometimes a more ‘masculine’ aggression with each other or with teachers” (Davies, 2004a, p. 64). In heteronormative contexts (Butler, 2004), gender is performed (Denzin, 1997) in ways that enact power or, alternatively, that reduce incidences of gender violence (Dunne & Leach, 2007). Male and female students, on average, may participate differently in elementary and secondary classrooms (Hahn, 1998; Sadker, Sadker, & Klein, 1991). Gender identities can be reproduced or challenged through conflict education, as students may experience what it means to have the agency to voice their perspectives.

**Pedagogical Tools for Conflict Dialogue**

Teachers often fear managing—or feel unprepared to manage—controversial and politically charged material in inclusive and constructive ways, especially in classrooms with diverse students (Bickmore, 2005, 2008b; Torney-Purta et al., 2001; Yamashita, 2006). Teachers’ sense of their own expertise in curriculum content and pedagogy, as well as their positionality on ethnic and political conflicts, influence how they facilitate or avoid conflictual issues discussions (see above and also Bekerman, Zembylas, & McGlynn, 2009; Oulton, Day, Dillon, & Grace, 2004). Studying diverse classrooms and
students’ experiences with conflictual issues discussions could reveal ways in which teachers better facilitate effective, inclusive conflict dialogue.

Conflict dialogue can address issues embedded in the planned curriculum as well as issues that are brought up in class, such as current events. 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 (Lederach, 1995) invite participants to make explicit cultural knowledges that were formerly implicit, through storytelling and critical analysis of language, proverbs, and cultural symbols. Such approaches may uncover (and make available to learners) culturally rooted knowledge resources for critical, creative, and locally relevant conflict learning. Thus, 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 could help them question and resist prescriptive Western models for understanding conflict and their own so-called common-sense assumptions regarding prevailing social relations. The way could thereby be paved for democratization.
Other pedagogical tools for facilitating conflict dialogue include structured academic controversy (Johnson & Johnson, 2009), circle processes, and controversial public issues discussions. In structured academic controversy, students are taught to take positions in structured small-group discussions, and later to reverse their perspectives and then 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 peacemaking 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 discussion and 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 be speaking. 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. My research investigated how various kinds of dialogue pedagogies (such as the above) reinforced marginalization and/or encouraged ethnic minority students to identify positively with their cultural and ancestral histories. However, the limited literature on circle processes in school settings (McCluskey et al., 2008; Morrison, 2007) has not provided evidence to show how (or whether) marginalized students, in particular, 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, more 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). Merelman (1990) theorized that students need to learn to address conflictual material in any setting, but that they would tend to build on different knowledge and skills learned informally in conflictual or peaceful contexts. He argued that educators in conflict zones initially set up their programs to address safer conflictual issues so that students 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). Conflictual issues discussions are not inevitably constructive learning experiences (Bekerman et al., 2009).

**Discussing Conflicts With Elementary 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 small 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).

Melinda 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\(^2\) to facilitate a follow-up discussion. This illustrates the importance of adequate support for teachers when they engage with sensitive material, especially with younger students. This organization’s curriculum materials and teaching training are an example of a resource to examine cases of genocide from various contexts, and guide students to explore their own identities and perspectives as citizens who can resist violence in their own societies.

Beck (2003) also studied a single case, in which a suburban American Grade 4 class engaged in a Civics Deliberation unit on rights and government. Beck 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. Elementary students are capable of engaging in conflict dialogue, under particular conditions, especially when they have the benefit of preparatory lessons and scaffolding content and process (Bickmore, 1999; Bickmore & Scheepstra, 2011; Parker, 2011).

In any context, children’s experiences of conflict are closely connected to their social status, gender, and cultural identities, and form part of their citizenship learning.

\(^2\) 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
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 & Myers, 1990; Ramsey, 2004). Some argue that such awareness develops by the age of 4 or 5 (e.g., Derman-Sparks, 2006; Hyun, 2007; Wolpert, 2006). It is therefore important to pay attention to the ways in which ethnocultural and gender differences may influence the ways in which conflictual issues associated with such diversities are approached and experienced by diverse students in elementary school settings. Cultural sensitivity during discussions with young diverse students may contribute to all students developing positive feelings about their racial and cultural identities (Biles, 1994; Parker, 2010b).

In an urban American Grade 1 and 2 mixed classroom with predominantly Latina/Latino students, Fain (2008) studied how the teacher’s use of literature circles facilitated 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 Grade 4 classroom in the United States. Literature circles that elicit conflict dialogue may encourage students to draw on and voice their lived experiences in response to conflictual issues. One study in which I was involved showed that diverse perspectives being expressed through the viewpoint of a character in a story seemed to provide a safer way for some students to participate (Bickmore, Parker, & Larsen, 2011).
Dominant 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 to 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, one teacher in Kelly and Brooks’s study had facilitated a conflict dialogue with his Grade 2 class of primarily Indian immigrant students. A student raised the issue of atomic bombs, in relation to the conflict between India and Pakistan. 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). This is an example of how conflict dialogue pedagogies could be infused effectively and safely enough into the curriculum to engage diverse students in inclusive, democratic learning opportunities. 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, sexuality, 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). Culturally relevant pedagogy encourages a wider range of diverse students’ voices through equity-oriented teaching methods (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995). When teachers facilitate dialogue about sensitive, identity-linked issues they may encourage diverse students to reflect on how conflicts are connected to their identities through their race, ethnicity or gender; this process of cultural reflection is a main tenet of culturally responsive pedagogy. Such pedagogies are often promoted for students of colour (Nieto, 1999).

Distinct approaches to diversity and multiculturalism influence how conflict is approached in school contexts and how possibilities for uncovering hidden curriculum are managed. Banks (2006a) identified four approaches to multicultural curriculum reform: contributions, ethnic additive, transformative, and decision-making/social action. The contributions approach is the typical default approach to adding mainstream ethnic heroes and holidays into the curriculum. In ethnic additive approaches, teachers include content from various ethnic groups without encouraging students to understand society from these diverse perspectives. The transformative 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 antioppressive 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’ 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, which explicitly addresses conflicts and questions of power to motivate and equip diverse students to engage in cultural critique and democratization.

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). One of the main problems in defining or situating critical multicultural education is that both practitioners and theorists understand, experience, and interpret difference differently (Gérin-Lajoie, 2008b; Nieto, 1999). The dominant discourse of liberal multiculturalism promotes equity and diversity at a minimal and generic level and focuses on “celebrating” differences (Gérin-Lajoie, 2008b; Harper, 1997; Nieto, 1999). For instance, some teachers believe that an adequate response to multiculturalism and diversity would be to hold a “holiday party” instead of a “Christmas party.” Such conventional views of liberal multiculturalism are presented as “‘feel-good’ additives” to curriculum programs or to “boost self-esteem for ‘minority’ students” (Nieto, 1999, p. 27). One of the core concepts of multicultural education has to do with facilitating inclusion of diverse students. Nieto (2002) used the multicultural education frame to describe a critical approach to multiculturalism: antiracist education, basic education, important for all students, pervasive, education for social justice, a process, and critical
King (2004) argued that a critical multicultural praxis involved “moving beyond dysconsciousness and miseducation toward liberatory pedagogy” (p. 81). Jacquet (2008) extended this definition of critical multiculturalism as 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” (p. 61). Such critical 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 within the classroom. Multicultural education that is critical, transformative, and antioppressive is enacted when students freely examine and present multiple perspectives in democratic classrooms (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. Joshee (2004) discussed assimilation-oriented federal Canadian policies that “were meant to be a homogenizing force that would work with immigrant and native-born children and their families to create ‘good Canadian citizens’” (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 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. This critical multicultural approach encourages dialogue about diversity and conflictual issues and the necessity of action for social change towards justice.

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

When teachers connect curriculum content to diverse students’ experiences they might empower students to critically reflect on their social and cultural identities. Critical race theory scholars (e.g., Delgato, 1995; Lopez, 2003) argue that maintaining a false neutrality about race and racism ignores the impact and reality of racism in schools. Applied critical race theory encourages diverse students’ acknowledgement of, and counter-narratives about, racism and injustice, which can provoke critical reflection and open space to challenge the status quo (Delgato, 1995; Knaus, 2009). Knaus (2009), 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. Critical race theory led him to include the students of colour in his classroom as he engaged his
students in sharing 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 Howard’s (2004) qualitative study of an American middle school history classroom, the teacher used counter-storytelling as a method of resistance to racism; through the inclusion of alternative narratives, students reflected on their social realities and engaged in dialogue about race. In these instances, culturally relevant pedagogies supported students to share personal experiences and created space for discussions that empowered ethnocultural minority students to engage in critical dialogue about social issues.

Dilworth (2004) explored how 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. 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, where they presented multiple perspectives and encouraged students to critically reflect on the contributions of diverse groups of people to society. Like Howard’s (2004) study, Dilworth’s study showed that while integration of
multicultural content was a necessary component of citizenship education, teachers’ personal choices strongly impacted the extent to which students were provided with opportunities to dialogue about conflictual issues and develop a deeper awareness of their sociopolitical communities.

As in any conflict dialogue process, engaging in discussion of sensitive issues can be detrimental to classroom social relations, particularly if adequate preparation has not been made. For instance, Dudley-Marling (1997) attempted to engage with his diverse Grade 3 students’ cultural histories in Toronto. However, during one 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.” Dudley-Marling’s experience shows that while dialogue is essential for critical discussion and reflection on cultural and social issues, it can also be harmful. Students might be sensitive to discussions that highlight their perceived ethnicity and experiences based on stereotypes. In this thesis I advocate for dialogue about diversity, but such practices are not a panacea; in fact they are risky pedagogy. Such risky practices, however, are necessary to disrupt the guise of neutrality and to address social injustices (Freire, 1985).

Conflict dialogue processes can open space for discussion of alternative viewpoints across all subject areas, particularly when teachers encourage diverse students to voice their perspectives. In language arts, by studying conflictual issues in fiction or nonfiction plots and themes, diverse students may relate to conflicting perspectives of characters. For example, in a previous research study (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 support diverse students’ inclusion, students may indeed be encouraged to share sensitive or personal issues about cultural conflict.

When teachers’ pedagogical strategies engage diverse students personal experiences, they affirm students’ identities and encourage their active engagement in the curriculum (Cummins, 2001; Nieto, 1992). 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). To support diverse students’ identities as they engage in a critical multicultural education program, teachers need to be equipped with culturally appropriate pedagogies (Delpit, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2004). In sum: Critical multiculturalism and culturally relevant pedagogy are necessary components of peacebuilding education. Transforming implemented curriculum by inviting dialogue about conflict and diversity may increase the possibilities of inclusion for all diverse students’ experiences and identities and contributes to building peace.
Conclusion: Conflict and Diversity in Democratic and Diverse Classrooms

If curriculum and pedagogy engage diverse students’ identities, histories, and perspectives, possibilities for inclusion may increase. Democratic peacebuilding education relies on dialogic pedagogies to offer opportunities for all students to participate and have their voices heard. The literature reviewed above shows how curriculum might explicitly engage in constructive conflict as learning opportunities for diverse students, and it also shows the need for further investigation in elementary classroom contexts, to understand how these processes are used and whom they include. Hidden curriculum embedded in classroom practices that teach acceptance of the status quo may 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, 1970/2004b), 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—some of which may be relevant to diverse students’ identities.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY:

CULTURAL IMMERSION—AN ETHNOGRAPHY, WITH CRITICALITY

Overview of Methodological Framework

[Traditional ethnographers] intended to provide accurate descriptions of “facts” about behavior, presented as self-evidently accurate and “objective,” but not about their functional significance in use, or as Clifford Geertz (1973) said, what distinguishes an eye blink from a wink. (Erickson, 2011, p. 45)

This study is a critical examination of conflictual, issues-based discussions and activities in Grades 4 to 7 classes of diverse students, focusing particularly on implemented social studies, history, and language arts curricula. I examined variations in and among three classroom cultures, each including diverse immigrant and marginalized students, to understand how teachers used (and avoided) curriculum content about conflict and diversity as learning opportunities, and how various diverse 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 chose educational ethnography with a critical perspective as a methodological frame, to align with my political purpose to support 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). In studying marginalized students such as ethnic minority immigrants, it is necessary to use ethnography with criticality, in order to study how these students’ lived experiences are intertwined with power and oppressive systems. The method is therefore uniquely suited
to study “the shared patterns of a marginalized group with the aim of advocacy” (Creswell, 2008, p. 475). When ethnography is used with criticality, it facilitates close examination of how power and privilege influence the experiences of diverse and marginalized students.

The strength of ethnography is in its aim to study cultures through immersion in a particular space for an extended amount of time. Ethnography was thus an ideal method for this study because engaging students in pedagogies such as issues discussions takes time and occurs unexpectedly.

Various conflict dialogue pedagogies in contemporary social studies and language arts curricula offer opportunities for critical analysis of cultural, historical, and social issues. For example, students may study how societies and citizens make choices and how exploring multiple perspectives can facilitate peaceful and restorative resolution of conflicts. I collected data over multiple units of study for almost an entire school year to understand how teachers implemented conflict dialogue processes and how students’ experiences changed and transformed through various dialogue practices.

Most studies I reviewed in Chapter 2 used qualitative methods to study how dialogue about difference and addressing conflict can promote democratic peacebuilding and citizenship learning. My study adds to this body of research through its examination of how various conflict dialogue processes differentially facilitated or impeded the participation and engagement of diverse students. I compared practices both within and between three different classrooms in the same school district to show how diverse students’ participation was influenced by various conflict dialogue pedagogies, with particular attention to the experiences of immigrant students.
The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How did the teachers in three public, urban, diverse classrooms in Grades 4 to 7 classrooms present and facilitate discussion about social conflict and/or ethnocultural diversity in their implemented curricula, particularly in social studies and language arts? How did these pedagogies shape learning opportunities for their diverse students?

2. How did diverse, ethnocultural minority and newcomer immigrant students experience this curricular content and pedagogy, in relation to their own perspectives, histories, and identities?

**Qualitative and Critical Ethnographic Research Methods**

In-depth qualitative research is designed to gain a deep understanding of particular phenomena in relation to particular individuals and contexts (Creswell, 2008). Unlike quantitative research, where the purpose is typically to summarize and generalize characteristics of a program or population, qualitative inquiry provides spaces to study particular individuals, often including marginalized or silenced groups of people, up close (Creswell, 2008).

Qualitative methods that have been used in the past to study questions related to conflict dialogue in classrooms have included teacher focus groups (e.g., Kelly & Brooks, 2009; Oulton, Day, Dillon, & Grace, 2004), student focus groups (Schultz, Buck, & Niesz, 2000), teacher observations and interviews (Goldston & Kyzer, 2009; Subedi, 2008), and teacher and student interviews (Yamashita, 2006). Research studies that used ethnographic case study methods (King, 2009; Larson, 2003; Schweber, 2006) to observe
and probe the meanings of teacher and student experiences have provided useful insights into how to study issues discussions, but not necessarily in relation to diverse students.

Hess and Posselt (2002) used a mixed-methods design to study students’ experiences of controversial issues discussions in a high school classroom. Their quantitative pre- and postquestionnaire examined the ways students felt about participating in discussions. Their qualitative data, from focus groups and interviews, substantiated and explored deeper meanings. Although they recorded basic race and gender categories, they still did not examine differences among diverse learners’ participation patterns and experiences. Hahn (1998) also used mixed methods in her cross-national study of social studies classroom climates. In a large-scale (28 countries), cross-national IEA (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement) civics study, Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schultz (2001) used quantitative survey methods to explore 14-year-old students’ self-reported experiences in democratic citizenship education. However, the study’s data on student diversity were largely limited to broad categories of gender and country of citizenship. Although valuable, the above studies have not provided much detailed, identity-sensitive insight into how diverse students experience such processes.

Fine’s (1993) qualitative phenomenological (descriptive) study provided rich descriptions through observations of teachers’ pedagogy and students’ participation in conflictual issues discussions, contributing greatly to understanding how diverse students participated in issues discussions. However, unlike ethnography with a critical perspective, phenomenology does not include critical cultural analysis.
Traditional ethnography has its roots in cultural anthropology, where researchers purposely set out to study other, distant cultures. Most educational ethnographers have explored the cultures of classrooms, but typically within their own Western contexts (e.g., Hammersley, 1990; van Manen, 1992; Woods, 1986). Many of these early ethnographers were sociologists from the Chicago School, who were determined to move away from a positivist philosophy (Gérin-Lajoie, 2003). Out of this movement, many branches have evolved, including realist ethnography, autoethnography, life story, feminist ethnography, postmodern ethnography, ethnographic case study, and critical ethnography.

Hammersley (1990) used classroom ethnography to study how classroom order in an downtown urban setting was influenced by students’ cultural differences, particularly their race, ethnicity, and class. Like Jackson (1968), Hammersley used in-depth analysis to create a theoretical description of the school’s social and cultural characteristics. Jackson, a sociologist, studied classroom life to understand students’ experiences there. Jackson’s study showed the many complexities of using classroom observations and shed light on issues of marginalization and silencing of students. Both Hammersley and Jackson offered insights into how issues of cultural differences and marginalization can become apparent through observational study, thus offering methodological support for using classroom observations to study diverse students’ experiences with conflict dialogue processes.

Early ethnographic approaches sought to maintain neutrality and distance between researcher and research participants. For example, Peter Woods (1986), in his studies of various teaching methods using classroom ethnography, argued that researchers could develop a skewed, nonobjective understanding if they became too personally involved in
their research. Instead, nonparticipant observations, also known as the “fly on the wall”
approach, were advocated (Woods, 1986, p. 36). However, Woods (1996) later
challenged his own early approach. He recognized the importance of acknowledging the
ethnographer’s self, and in fact argued that it was necessary to become immersed in the
role of the Other in order to obtain insider knowledge and understanding of people’s
diverse life experiences.

Maintaining a subjective position as an ethnographic researcher can allow for a
broad and critical perspective, including access to the cultural and social knowledge
within the environment (Thomas, 1993; Woods, 1996). For example, Paul Willis’s
(1977/2003) study of how British working-class boys challenged their school’s culture by
purposely not responding to expected classroom authority provided insights into how a
socioeconomically homogenous group constructed themselves as Other. Some have
argued that Willis’s ethnographic account in Learning to Labour was an ambivalent
approach to critical ethnography because, while it spoke to making human agency visible,
it presented an uncritical, romanticized view of the Other (Gordon, Holland, & Lahelma,
2002, p. 192). Willis’s study was useful, however, in understanding the importance of
studying the behavioural choices that certain (potentially marginalized) groups may
adopt, in an attempt to (dis)conform to the their identit(ies).

Hermeneutic phenomenology, another approach, is closely aligned to cultural
anthropology and traditional ethnography. Van Manen (1992) advocated human science
research that was hermeneutic (i.e., interpretive) and phenomenological (i.e., descriptive).
He advocated examining lived experience as people live it and deriving essential themes
to further explore the phenomenon while engaging in a process of in-depth study (van
Manen, 1992, p. 30). However, van Manen argued that it was necessary for researchers to maintain their objectivity, remaining distant from the lived experience of the humans being studied. The limitation of using such a method for my study is that it assumes objective and true realities, whereas I have applied a subjective and critical lens for gathering and analyzing my data.

Phenomenography is a method that employs graphic media, such as photographic images, to provoke participants’ interpretation and discussion about a topic. There are many criticisms of phenomenography (Sandbergh, 1997). However, the strength of its design is in drawing on particular prompts to stimulate participants in discussion. Peck, Sears, and Donaldson (2008) used phenomenographic interviews to study students’ conceptions of ethnic diversity in a small, rural community in New Brunswick. The 44 Grade 7 students in their study overwhelmingly identified “ethnic diversity” as “foreign” or “weird,” thus identifying Canadian as White (Peck et al., 2008, pp. 75–78).

Phenomenography could be a useful method when trying to connect to students’ lived experiences, as the stimuli guide what students talk about in interviews (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000). However, as it stems from phenomenology, this method still tends to assume an “immediate experience without being obstructed by preconceptions and theoretical notions” (van Manen, 1992, p. 184). In contrast, I see realities as always contextualized within a particular place and time. While the ethnographic interviews I used in this research study did not formally introduce predetermined media, I still drew on student work samples and activities and referenced instances from my observational data to support the facilitation and discussion of particular issues.
Critical ethnographers collect data from many of the same sources as traditional ethnographers do: observations, interviews, and document analysis (Creswell, 2008; Gérin-Lajoie, 2003). However, there is still a clear difference between the purposes of the two approaches, as Jim Thomas (1993) has pointed out: “Conventional ethnography describes what is; critical ethnography asks what could be” (p. 4). The difference between ethnography and critical ethnography is that critical ethnography pursues a political purpose, by describing and analyzing cultural contexts with the intent to reveal “hidden agendas, power centers, and assumptions that inhibit, repress, and constrain” (Thomas, 1993, p. 2). In this way, critical ethnography encourages exactly what conflict dialogue processes engage: a critical interpretation and discussion of hegemonic assumptions.

Foley and Valenzuela (2005) illustrated the challenges of critical ethnography in their article describing their two different approaches to the method. Foley engaged in what he believed was a cultural critique, within the confines of academia. While Valenzuela also engaged in a similar academic cultural critique, she also purposefully became involved in political movements through her research study. In this way, a critical ethnographic approach may involve a clear effort towards political and social emancipation for research participants, both within and outside the academy.

Simon and Dippo (1986) argued that critical ethnographic research must study a problem with the intention to grapple with issues of oppression and inequity, in order to engage in a transformative critique of dominant social norms (p. 197). I agree that it is necessary to continually critique the social and cultural practices that may contribute to the marginalization of various groups. However, because of the nature of my research
and the diverse population about whom my research was concerned, my advocacy within
the context of the school setting was minimal.

This study, therefore, is not a critical ethnography, in the sense that it does not
offer an explicit process of emancipation and transformation for the participants, one in
which I would be able to show what Simon and Dippo (1986) have argued is participants’
development of critical consciousness about their social world. While an awareness of
culture, diversity, and equity within the context of conflict and the curriculum may have
become more apparent for some participants (e.g., through interview questioning,
explanation of research study), it was not the intention of this research to seek social
change among the participants or in the research setting, especially because of the age of
the students and the confines of the public school classroom.

In sum: I have used an ethnographic method with a critical perspective to conduct
my study and I position it as research towards social change, without seeking to prove
that social change was achieved among the participants due to their participation in this
study. Overall, researchers who use ethnography with a critical perspective show how
there can be different levels of criticality and forms of cultural critique, within both
academic and public spheres. The limits, form, and extent of using this method for social
justice purposes ultimately depends on the context, setting and participants involved in
the study.

My Role as a Researcher

My intention as a researcher was to develop a deep, critical consciousness of the
contexts I studied by engaging in self-reflexive analyses that continually questioned how
my privileged position as a researcher shaped my views and interpretations of the data.
During the data collection period I wrote 27 personal analytical journal entries, based on field observations and interviews, and conversations with staff, students, and community members. I also kept a research journal that continued beyond the field site journalling that I did during this period. This ongoing reflection through journalling encouraged a continuous process of critical self-reflection.

Using ethnography with a critical perspective 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). My research method was intentionally subjective, because my identity helped to shape the design of my study (Britzman, 2002; Fine, 1994; Gallagher, 2007; McCarthy, 1988). Likewise, my interpretations of the data ultimately reflected my own history and culture. At the same time, I acknowledge that my position as a researcher who is 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 the cultural navigation and assimilation process is not and never will be the same as the diverse students who were part of this study. Their race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual identities, too, complicated their individual histories. Thus, when I interpreted students’ actions and behaviours in the classroom, I kept a continuous line of questioning in my head: “who are the primary subjects?”; “who are the informants?”; and “who am I?” In sum, my qualitative ethnography with a critical perspective shaped the way I came to understand and interpret
how conflictual-issues discussions created spaces that allowed for a greater or lesser sense of inclusion of diverse identities.

My personal experiences and connections also shaped my relationship to the schools I researched. My older brother and I both attended Aria P.S. ¹ from Grades 1 to 8. I lived with both my parents, grandmother, and brother in the school community and neighbourhood throughout my childhood and into early adulthood. The fact that I had attended Aria was something the students there 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. The major difference for me as researcher, however, was that when I was a student at Aria I was one of the few visible minorities that attended the school, as students with Greek ancestries heavily dominated the student population. This was a major point of reflection for me, especially because 98 percent of the students that now attended Aria P.S., from Kindergarten through to Grade 8, were visible minorities, coming mostly from East and South Asian backgrounds. Only 48 of the 725 students were White.

I had a different relationship with Georgetown P.S., a newer school in a newly developed part of the same neighbourhood. As an undergraduate student, I still lived in the neighbourhood with my father. At that time, I volunteered at Georgetown, first as a teacher’s assistant in a Grade 5 classroom, once a week for one school year (2003/2004). Then I worked one-on-one as an in-school mentor at Georgetown in the Grades 2 and 3 classes, as part of the Big Brothers Big Sisters program (2004/2006).

¹ The school names, Aria Public School and Georgetown Public School, are fictitious.
In this period the ethnic backgrounds of the Georgetown P.S. student population were essentially the same as they were when I collected my data. The students were 100 percent from visible minority groups. There were 746 students at the school; 53 staff members included four caretakers, three secretaries, two administrators, and four educational assistants (EAs). 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” (personal communication, June 2011). Students’ backgrounds were predominantly South Asian, from Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. The Indian students were mostly Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim. The languages spoken by students at the school were predominantly Urdu, Tamil, Punjabi, Hindi, and Gujarati. 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 was put into practice 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 in the year I conducted my data collection. When I was a student there, we wore no uniforms; the only publicly funded schools with instituted uniform policies, at the time, were Catholic schools.

Both Aria and Georgetown were located in working-class communities where most of the residents were newcomer immigrants and mostly from East Asian and South Asian backgrounds. I did not see the community as ethnically diverse when I lived there, as the community was mostly White. (We were one of the few visible minority families in the neighbourhood.) In many ways I did not feel as though I 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 experienced different kinds of challenges (and opportunities) in what was then a predominantly White school and community.

Overview of Study Participants and Context

Research School Sites

In my study I attended to the ways in which particular, diverse immigrant students experienced conflict dialogue pedagogies. Because of my particular interest in newcomer immigrant students, I situated my study in metropolitan areas in southern Ontario, since the majority of visible minority newcomer immigrants to Canada reside there. These schools were located in a community with a large newcomer immigrant population in a large urban city in southern Ontario. Therefore, the ethnic distribution of this area is not representative of the whole school board or urban city. Based on the most recent census data from 2006, in this school board’s region 65% of the population were visible minorities, and the top five visible minorities, in descending order, were: Chinese, South Asian (e.g., Indian), West Asian (e.g., Iranian), Black, and Filipino (Statistics Canada, 2006).

This newcomer immigrant population, an important part of visible minority populations in Canada, motivated and enabled me to study one aspect of how diverse students may be equipped for successful integration, acculturation, and inclusion through dialogic and democratic conflict learning opportunities in their classrooms. For this study, I sought to select a school board that supported initiatives for the inclusion of diverse students, including newcomer immigrants. In this way, I hoped my research
would contribute to ongoing efforts to improve education in the board I worked with and boards that shared similar mandates.

I conducted the field work during the 2010/2011 school year. I first received university level ethics permission in September 2010 and subsequently applied for school board ethical permission. Upon approval of the school board in October 2010, I began to contact the principals of the schools from whom I had received permission to conduct my study. In my school board application, I identified three schools that I believed would be ideal settings and contexts for the study, based on my own experience of growing up in the community and on my volunteer teaching that I had done in one of the schools. The school board suggested a fourth school that shared demographic characteristics similar to Aria P.S. and Georgetown P.S.

While the principals at the three schools I identified all responded favourably to my request, I decided to only pursue cases at Aria and Georgetown. The third potential school, I later found, was not as culturally diverse, and the only interested teacher at the school was a Grade 2 teacher, which was outside of my proposed sample range of Grades 4 to 8.

I emailed the principal and vice-principal at Aria Public School and provided a brief summary of my research along with information about my school board level permission. I did not receive a reply right away and followed up with one phone call and an additional email to the principal. In this email I also explained that I had once been a student at Aria P.S. and that it would mean a lot to me to conduct this study in their school. The principal then responded, copying the vice-principal, and a meeting was arranged for the three of us. In this meeting, both the principal and vice-principal asked
me questions about my study and worked together to brainstorm which teachers they could approach to participate in the study I was hoping to conduct. They told me that they had two or three teachers in mind and would approach them about their participation and get back to me. After this meeting, I again followed up with two additional emails asking for the status of the teachers’ potential interest. I received a reply from the principal that one teacher, Ms. Marlee, who was also pursuing a PhD at the time, expressed interest and invited me to contact her. She also mentioned that she had “one really great teacher in mind”—Mrs. Amrita, but that she still needed to follow up with her about it. I contacted Ms. Marlee via email and we set up an appointment to meet during morning recess in her classroom. I explained the study to her and she expressed interest in participating, explaining that she taught her curriculum with particular attention to issues of diversity. After receiving permission from Ms. Marlee to conduct the study in her classroom, I spoke to her students about my study and gave them the permission form to take home to their parents (see Appendix A).

After I began my classroom observations in Ms. Marlee’s class, the school principal would remind me as she was passing by in the hall that she had still been meaning to ask Mrs. Amrita about my observing her class and again remarked that she would be an ideal teacher for my study. In mid-December, I went to visit Mrs. Amrita in her classroom during recess and introduced myself. I explained that her principal had recommended her and said that I wanted to express my interest in working with her. I gave her a copy of my teacher consent letter (Appendix B) and verbally explained the

2 All names used in this dissertation have been changed to pseudonyms. For some participants, I have used culturally ethnic pseudonyms to accurately represent those whose real names reflected their culture.
study to her. In response, she excitedly told me about the units she was planning for January: citizenship, immigration, and government—all topics that would clearly raise the potentially conflictual issues that I hoped to study in my research. She immediately gave me a copy of her classroom schedule and said that I could choose the days and times that I wanted to come in, starting in January. When signing the permission form, however, she appeared to be reluctant at first, because she said that, “I do all of these things, but I don’t have a name for them, so I won’t be able to tell you what it is that I actually do” (J, December 2010). Thus, she was apprehensive about participating in the teacher interview. I left the information with her over the December holidays and told her that she could think about it and let me know definitely in January. I reapproached Mrs. Amrita in January 2011 at which time she readily agreed to be part of the research study. After signing the permission form, I dispersed information and consent letters to all of the students in her class and began classroom observations in January.

I emailed the principal of Georgetown P.S. in November. The teacher and principal I had worked with as a volunteer were no longer at the school. However, a fellow teacher whom I worked with when I was an occasional teacher and with whom I did my master’s program, told me that she knew of a teacher who taught in the area where I was planning on conducting my research. Coincidentally, her colleague taught at Georgetown P.S.—the same school where I had applied to conduct my study. I followed up with an email to this teacher, Mr. Hiroshi, to get a sense of his interest in participating in my study. He responded enthusiastically and invited me to contact him again once I spoke to his principal.
The principal at Georgetown P.S. agreed to meet with me and I told her about my study and she asked questions about board level approval, timelines, and teacher and student involvement. I then told her that I had become aware of a teacher at her school that might be a potential fit, but would welcome any other recommendations. She responded enthusiastically about Mr. Hiroshi, saying that he would be the first person that she would have recommended on her own and thought that my working with him and his students would be ideal for my study. She spoke to Mr. Hiroshi on her own and received his personal approval and I then met with Mr. Hiroshi to further explain the details of the study and to review consent procedures. He immediately signed the consent form and asked if he could photocopy the parent and student information and consent forms for me and then agreed to disperse them later that same afternoon. I began observations the following week.

I commuted to the research sites in my car. The commute to Aria Public School took 25 to 35 minutes, depending on the traffic and time of day. I commuted to Georgetown Public School in 35 to 45 minutes, again depending on traffic and weather conditions. My observations took place over the fall, winter, and spring seasons. Aria and Georgetown P.S. were four kilometres away from each other and because the commute between the schools involved using small, local school zone streets, it took 9 to 12 minutes to drive between the two schools. I parked my car in the staff parking lot and upon arrival at each research site I greeted the school secretaries and signed in at the front desk and then put a “School Visitor” identification card on a lanyard around my neck.
Teachers

I used purposive sampling to identify three teachers who expressed interest in participating in this research. They worked in classrooms with diverse and recent immigrant students, and believed they were using conflict dialogue processes in their day-to-day pedagogies. One of the benefits of purposive sampling in qualitative research is that it allows the researcher to choose “information-rich” research sites (Patton, 1990, as cited in Creswell, 2008, p. 214). I initially set out to find teachers in elementary classrooms (Grades 5 to 8) in areas of southern Ontario where a high population of visible minority newcomer immigrants resided, as well as where discussion-based pedagogy was being undertaken. However, when a Grade 4 teacher, who was also recommended by the principal, expressed interest in participating, I modified my sampling criteria. The literature on conflictual issues and younger children (see Chapter 2) illustrates not only the necessity of discussing conflictual issues with young, diverse students, but also, typically, that younger students want to discuss these issues. For these reasons, I was happy to include a Grade 4 class in my sample.

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. After obtaining permission from the school board I asked principals for their recommendations of teachers who were practising such pedagogy in their classrooms. I followed up with the recommended teachers to seek their approval and permission to participate in the study. All three teachers that I contacted agreed to participate.
I originally intended to select teachers who had been teaching for at least three years, to improve reliability and comparability among research sites; I was working on the assumption that novice teachers might still be learning how to use conflict dialogue processes (e.g., Bickmore & Parker, 2010; Parker & Bickmore, 2012). Thus, Mr. Hiroshi, who was only in his second year of teaching, but implemented conflict dialogue pedagogies, was probably not typical of other novice teachers.

I did not purposively sample for cultural and ethnic backgrounds of the teachers in the various classrooms I studied. However, all three teachers happened to identify (at least partially, in Mr. Hiroshi’s case) 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.

**Students**

My critical sampling of Grades 4 to 8 elementary classrooms and their particular marginalized populations of visible minority newcomer immigrants was necessary in order to collect the specific data needed to answer my research questions (Creswell, 2008). Comparing the three classrooms and lessons in each over time provided insights into how similar and different conflict dialogue processes were used and how different students responded. The teachers that indicated an interest in participating in the study were from Grades 4, 5, and 7. I did not intentionally omit Grades 6 and 8; however, retrospectively I feel that their omission was in many ways strategic. During my time spent in the staff room or hallways, I found that the Grade 6 teachers at the school often spoke about the time constraints in covering curriculum expectations to prepare their students for the standardized Educational Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO)
testing that all students in Grades 3 and 6 are legislated to take in Ontario. And many Grade 8 teachers spoke about the pressure of preparing their students for high school curricula content. At a broad, general level, therefore, it was favourable in many ways to have researched Grade levels 4, 5, and 7, where such ongoing tensions or stressors were not as prevalent in teachers’ day-to-day curricula planning and pedagogy. Overall, the study was intent on documenting best and inclusive democratic practices and thus, I believe that the grade levels that were both inadvertently and perhaps implicitly secured as research sites did in the end become best-case settings for the study of elementary school students’ experiences with conflict dialogue pedagogies.

The study analyzed how teachers’ pedagogies influenced diverse students’ participation in conflict-infused curricula, by examining how students engaged with their peers and teachers in the classroom. 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% 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 0.5% for a student who was mixed.

All students in each of the three selected classrooms were included as participants. Out of the 78 students, 52 received permission from their parents to participate in the study. Twenty-six students did not provide consent and were aggregated (not identified as individuals) in the observational data.

Out of the 52 students whose parents provided consent to be interviewed, 60% were female and 38% were male. The racial breakdown of the interviewed students was 65% South Asian, 27% East Asian, 5% Black, and 1% mixed ancestry.
I gathered students’ ethnicities through my interactions with students, from activities done in class related to their ethnicity, and during interviews with students. 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.

**Data Sources and Data Collection**

Various data sources were used to analyze how teachers in three classrooms used processes to stimulate discussion of curricular material and 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 elementary classrooms, and how diverse students, particularly visible minority and first- and second-generation immigrants, experienced these pedagogies.

The study began with classroom observations. During the observation period at each school, I conducted individual and group interviews with students who volunteered
and were given parental/guardian consent to participate. I also interviewed each classroom teacher twice, once at the beginning of classroom observations and again towards to the end. With the participants’ consent, the individual teacher and student interviews were audiorecorded, enabling me to be more present as a facilitator during the interviews. I took some handwritten or typed notes during interviews, and in some cases used them to go back and fill in gaps (e.g., muffled voices, inaudible speech) after transcribing the recording. The same research procedure was conducted at each research site.

**Classroom Observations**

I conducted classroom observations primarily during the language arts and social studies classes. However, I also observed other subject areas, including history, geography, math, physical education and health, visual arts, and science. Observations were an essential component of this ethnographic research because they provided opportunities to see the actions and behaviours of participants. The observations took place over an extended period of time throughout the school year, providing even greater opportunity to notice how differences in participants’ attitudes, perceptions, and behaviour changed in different contexts and at different times. Between November 2010 and June 2011, usually for four days a week, I spent two or three hours a day (depending on the class schedule) observing the language arts and social studies classes in each classroom.

Because my research was intended to demonstrate how conflict dialogue processes facilitated inclusive learning environments for diverse students, I focused my observations specifically on curricular areas that previous research had identified as
commonly used, workable spaces for conflict learning. While conflict learning can be infused into all curricular areas, my study built on prior research that addressed the complexities of teaching conflictual issues in the social studies and language arts curricula.

My observations revealed critical incidents where conflict was evident, and in which conflict dialogue processes were (or were not) implemented to address that conflict. These incidents, described in observation field notes, were sometimes used to stimulate discussion during group interviews with students and during individual teacher interviews. Alan Sears (2005) has pointed out: “If you look around the classroom, it is worth thinking about what the room itself is designed to teach you” (p. 47). Taking my lead from Sears, I paid attention to how the space and environment of the classroom were set up, particularly when conflict dialogue processes, such as circles, debates, and simulations were used.

My observations were guided by a protocol (see Appendix C) that documented how various students engaged with conflict dialogue pedagogies. I carefully documented teachers’ and students’ behaviour during classroom lessons using in-depth observation notes, which are characteristic of ethnographic research with a critical perspective. My observation protocol had a section reserved for reflective comments and questions that arose as I conducted the field observations. These analytical notes aided in facilitating ongoing critical, self-reflexive commentary on the data. I also provided each teacher with a copy of my observation notes and asked for their feedback and reflection.

While I initially set out to be a passive observer, I found that my role evolved to a participant observer in all three classrooms. I assisted teachers in monitoring students by
handing out materials, responding to students’ questions, and when invited, sharing my perspective during classroom discussions. I further discuss my role as participant observer in Chapter 4.

**Semistructured Student Group Interviews**

Group interviews are used to “collect shared understanding from several individuals as well as to get views from specific people” (Creswell, 2008, p. 226). I conducted semistructured group interviews with students who agreed to participate in each classroom. During each such interview (see Appendix D), I asked students about their perceptions and experiences with conflict dialogue processes, discussion and diversity within their classroom. All the students were invited to participate.

There were two rounds of interviewing, one at the beginning of the data collection period and for a second time towards the end of it. A minimum of two and a maximum of seven students in each group interview was set, to maximize opportunities for diverse students to speak up freely. I conducted nine group interviews in the Grade 4 class, 11 in the Grade 5 class, and nine in the Grade 7 class. For the second set of group interviews, I was able to be more strategic about grouping participants with allies or close friends or others who in most cases appeared to feel more comfortable speaking about their experiences. I was also able to ask more specific questions during the second round of interviews because I drew on classroom observations and I also learned how to better structure my questions and interview techniques based on my experience from the first set of interviews. I informed the students that I would request follow-up interviews with some of them, under three circumstances: if time ran out; if I needed to clarify

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3 I am choosing to use the term “group interviews” rather than the commonly used term “focus groups.”
information that the student shared with me; and/or if the student expressed interest in adding more information to the specific questions or issues raised during the interview. I conducted the interviews during the observation data collection period.

In the Grade 4 class, 14 students received permission to participate in the interviews. In the Grade 5 class, 20 students received permission and in the Grade 7 class, 19 students received permission. I interviewed all students at least once. Each interview lasted between 20 and 60 minutes, depending on time constraints and on what students chose to disclose or speak about at length (e.g., incidents of bullying, familial stories, clarification of information). The amount of time allotted allowed for interviews to be scheduled during recess or lunch. Because of the age range (9 to 13) of student participants, I initially felt that 20 to 30 minutes would be the maximum length of their attention span. However, most students wanted to speak more and often asked to be interviewed again, even after I finished asking all the questions on my interview protocol. It is known that group interviews may encourage students to feel comfortable voicing their perspectives in a small group with some of their peers (Creswell, 2008). Having this kind of small group dialogue offered a supportive space where students appeared to have the courage to voice and engage deeply in dialogue about their perspectives concerning certain critical classroom incidents. I also used a circle process during the small group interviews. To encourage dialogue, I sometimes employed the use of a talking piece. This encouraged all students to speak, knowing that they would each have the opportunity to share when the talking piece was passed to them (Pranis et al., 2003; see also Chapter 2).

Group interviews are used to “collect shared understanding from several individuals as well as to get views from specific people” (Creswell, 2008, p. 226). I chose
not to interview students individually because of the limited time span of my data collection period. Because of the topic and content of the interviews, I felt that the group interviews would provide opportunities to practise and engage in the kind of discussions that I asked students to reflect on through the interview questions. The discussions among the students evolved and they built on each other’s perspectives as they responded to the questions.

During these interviews, I encouraged students to speak about their experiences during the classroom lessons. I often prompted them with descriptions from observations of their class. Some prompts I used included: “I noticed that when ____ said ____, you responded by saying ____ . Why did you say that? How did that make you feel?” I also encouraged other students to add their perspectives and opinions. Building on each other’s ideas helped the students to gain a better understanding of the classroom experience. In order to sustain a democratic space during these group interviews, I acted as a facilitator of the conversation and tried to ensure that all participants had the opportunity to voice their perspective.

**Semistructured Individual Interviews**

I conducted two individual semistructured interviews with each of the three classroom teachers, once at the beginning and again towards the end of the observation data collection period. These interviews probed teachers’ understanding of how and why they used conflict dialogue pedagogies to engage diverse students in democratic learning (see Appendix E). With their consent, I audiorecorded the interviews. In the first interview, I asked them to articulate their plans for implementing curriculum about conflict and diversity and to discuss how they had prepared their students for engaging in
these discussions. In the second interview, I asked these same questions, in addition to asking them to discuss the various kinds of conflict dialogue processes that I had observed them using, and the ways in which they felt they facilitated the involvement of diverse student learners in these processes. The interviews served as an opportunity for the teachers to voice their reflections on how the curriculum units I observed had progressed throughout the term. The interviews also encouraged teachers to reflect on how they perceived diverse students’ engagement in the material had evolved through the use of particular pedagogical tools.

**Document Analysis**

Documents are useful for qualitative research because they often carry the “advantage of being in the language and words of the participants, who have usually given thoughtful attention to them” (Creswell, 2008, p. 231). I conducted an analysis of classroom documents to gather contextual information about the teachers, students, and the implemented curriculum. Information from all documents collected was masked as needed to protect the identity of the students, teachers, and schools.

With their permission, I collected documents from students, which included work samples and ungraded written reflections intended for teachers’ formative feedback. Also included were student portfolios, online classroom discussion boards on class blogs (Mr. Hiroshi’s class), and journals (Mrs. Amrita’s class). The students’ work samples provided insights into how they perceived and understood certain conflicts and issues related to diversity that arose in the classroom and in the curriculum.

From each teacher I requested a copy of the following documents: classroom schedule, seating plan, curriculum unit or lesson plans, and resources they had consulted.
The seating plan provided information on how teachers chose to arrange their students in the classroom (e.g., in small groups, circles, or rows) and also on how diverse students were placed (e.g., in gender groupings). The curriculum unit or lesson plans provided an overview on the ways each teacher planned to cover various topics throughout the year and in what sequence. It also showed whether specific conflictual or potentially controversial topics had been intentionally embedded into the implemented curriculum. The teachers’ resources included the textbook and additional materials. These resources provided information on whether teachers prepared for conflict-infused learning opportunities for diverse students.

I also collected documents at the school and board levels, primarily online, including school newsletters and mission statements. This contextual information provided a sense of how the classroom was identified within the larger school community.

**Researcher Journal**

I kept a detailed personal journal in which I kept postobservation and postinterview reflections and notes from informal conversations with teachers and students in addition to those documented in my observation notes taken during class. My personal journal reflections helped to fill in gaps from the observation notes and also guided my own continuous self-reflexivity as I positioned myself in the research. Also, at certain times I found that my role in the classroom or during an interview seemed to influence how a particular discussion or dialogue evolved. By reflecting on these incidents, I became more conscious of my own research strategies and role as a researcher. I wrote analytical memos in my research journal after each observation and
interview, as an aid to continuous reflection of what I was experiencing as a researcher and how I was interpreting the experiences of the research sites and participants.
Data Collection Procedures

I provided a research project information and consent letter to school administrators (see Appendix F) and teachers (see Appendix B) interested in participating in this study, and obtained consent from both administrators and participating teachers at each school. Before I began my classroom data collection, I orally explained my project to students (see Appendix G) and then sent information and consent letters (see Appendix A) home to parents/guardians of the students in each class. Students and teachers were reassured that their involvement and participation were completely voluntary and that they held the right to withdraw from the study at any time. None of the participants said they wanted to withdraw from the study.

I studied three different classrooms from the end of November 2010 to mid-June 2011. I intended to secure (and was successful in securing) three classroom sites in two different schools in southern Ontario. The two schools were in urban settings that included diverse immigrant students. The benefit of using different schools in the same region was that it enabled in-depth critical comparison and contrast among diverse students’ experiences in these different contexts. The only drawback was that each school and classroom carried its own unique culture and characteristics, meaning that no two (or three) sites were completely comparable.

I observed classes at each school consecutively, spending approximately five or six months in each setting, for a total of 9,245 minutes (155 hours; see Table 1 for details).
Table 1

Three Classroom Cases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aria P.S., Board A</th>
<th>Aria P.S., Board A</th>
<th>Georgetown P.S., Board A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher: Ms. Marlee</td>
<td>Teacher: Mrs. Amrita</td>
<td>Teacher: Mr. Hiroshi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4 class (23 students)</td>
<td>Grade 5 class (27 students)</td>
<td>Grade 7 class (29 students)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 classroom observations (49 hours)</td>
<td>40 classroom observations (51 hours)</td>
<td>42 classroom observations (55 hours)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At Aria P.S., in Ms. Marlee’s Grade 4 class, I conducted 35 classroom observations of language arts, social studies, art, health, mathematics, science, and technology classes. I spent between 25 and 100 minutes on each observation, for a total of 49 hours. Also at Aria, in Mrs. Amrita’s Grade 5 class, I conducted 40 observations of Mrs. Amrita’s social studies, science, language arts, health, art, and mathematics classes. Each observation ranged between 30 and 100 minutes, for a total of 51 hours.

At Georgetown, in Mr. Hiroshi’s Grade 7 class, I conducted 41 observations of Mr. Hiroshi’s language arts, history, geography, mathematics and health classes, ranging between 40 and 100 minutes for each, for a total of 55 hours.

Data Analysis

I compared and contrasted my findings with relevant cross-cultural literature, to strengthen and deepen my analysis of conflict dialogue processes in diverse classrooms. Applying my conceptual framework (based primarily on Freire, 1994a, 1994b; Apple, 1990, 2004; and Davies, 2004a, 2004b) to my research sites, I paid attention to how diverse students were included and excluded through explicit or implicit conflict learning opportunities.
Comparing and contrasting how different and similar conflict dialogue pedagogies were used by the three teachers and experienced by diverse learners in the different settings, I analyzed my data by discerning the kinds of conflict dialogue processes that were used in these settings. These included circle processes, issues discussions, debates, role plays, and simulations. In my analysis of observations I noted how students participated in these processes and which students were included or excluded. I also analyzed how teachers adapted and presented curricula in the three contexts and how teachers implicitly and explicitly addressed conflict to facilitate students’ learning.

Sometimes I wrote or typed my observation field notes while I was in the classroom, typically using a combination of handwritten and laptop computer note taking to enable me to freely move around the classroom space when the students were engaged in small group activities; I then transcribed my notes into electronic format. I used transcription conventions adapted from Wortham (2010), such as underlining speech that was stressed. I included silences, where possible (indicating a pause), and marked interruptions with an equal sign (=). Other conventions were self-explanatory; for example, laughter was recorded in brackets.

I first conducted preliminary analysis of my observation notes to reflect on my research questions, and continually compared themes found in the literature to those generated in the preliminary analysis. I looked at similarities and differences among the many diverse students represented in the class. For instance, when looking at the role of immigrant students’ apparent gender and sexual identities in my interpretation of the data, I drew on literature (such as Davies, 2004b; Hahn, 1998; Hess, 2001) to help
facilitate a critical interpretation of my observations. Questions I continuously raised included:

- Have girls or boys been participating more or less actively?
- How have immigrant girls and boys demonstrated their engagement compared to nonimmigrant girls and boys?
- Who is voicing their perspectives and opinions in relation to what, to whom, and when?
- When contesting viewpoints were voiced, who voiced them and who responded with a dissenting point of view?

In individual teacher and student group interviews, I was able to invite participants to discuss and debrief incidents I had observed in the classroom. The interviews contributed to a strengthening of my observational data, by generating insights into how students were prepared for engaging in conflict dialogue processes, and how their learning experiences were facilitated through these processes. I also provided teachers with the opportunity to review transcripts of their interviews and my observation notes of their classes, and encouraged them to provide any additional comments or contextual information. None of the teachers requested changes on the transcripts I shared with them.

I managed my field observation notes, interview transcripts, and personal journal using NVivo qualitative data analysis software and Microsoft Word. Using NVivo, I identified preliminary themes for coding my data. I also employed Word’s track changes feature to recode and analyze my data during Levels 2 and 3 of coding. I created a systematized way to work with the large amount of data I collected, by indexing
interview transcripts and observation notes. Preliminary codes broadly analyzed how cultural, ethnic, gendered, and sexual diversities of students had been represented or excluded in each classroom. I used the documents I had collected to contextualize my analysis of how these diversities were addressed in the curriculum, how diverse students understood their experiences with conflict dialogue processes, and how these processes influenced their learning. For instance, reading students’ reflective journal entries or classroom blogs informed how I interpreted their responses during interviews. In the same way, documents such as teachers’ unit plans and curricular resources clarified my understanding of their intentions for various conflict dialogue pedagogies. I continuously reviewed the themes, categories, and codes while I was collecting data at each research site, since each form of data informed how I continued to engage in each subsequent stage of data collection. I triangulated the data through constant comparison and contrast among observations, teacher and student interviews, and classroom documents.

The extensive data that this ethnography with a critical perspective set out to attain was beyond the scope of what I could analyze during the time I had available in my doctoral program. I therefore systematized the data very carefully. When reviewing my journal reflections, interviews, and the documents I collected for analysis, I paid attention to how data might have been included or excluded. I reviewed data in my research journal as soon as I began data collection, recording initial impressions and questions that I had begun to grapple with. I set the journal up online using a wiki, which sent an email to my doctoral thesis supervisor with details of each new entry. This allowed my supervisor to reply to my journal or blog entry to comment or ask probing questions. This process of ongoing formative analysis subsequently furthered my thinking and analysis.
while I was still in the field, and helped me in deciding what I paid attention to as a researcher in the classroom.

**Limitations of Study and Method**

While there was much strength to using an ethnographic method with a critical perspective for the purpose of my study, there were some obvious limitations. Any ethnography requires a considerable amount of time spent immersed in the research setting. While the literature does not point out specific minimum or maximum time requirements, five to six months at each of the three research sites was indeed quite limited, for three reasons: The amount of time I could spend at the research sites was limited by the timeline of the doctoral program. Because I gathered data concurrently at each research site, I could not be completely immersed in any one school site. Lastly, the start and end time for each site varied.

I conducted observations with the Grade 5 class at Aria in January of the school year, but in November and December for the Grades 4 and 7 classes. This meant that I observed differences in students’ behaviours and changes in interpersonal relationships differently. I noticed, for example, that after the holiday break in December many of the relationships between students and between students and their teacher in the Grades 4 and 7 classes had become more solidified, which obviously impacted communication and discussion norms in each classroom setting. I still observed the many ways of acknowledging and communicating each other’s perspectives in their classroom community at an in-depth level at all research sites, but in the Grade 5 class I did not have the opportunity to observe lessons that Mrs. Amrita might have used to prepare her students for conflict dialogue.
Also, because these particular research settings were closely connected to my own school experience, I may have inadvertently missed details because they were either so much the norm when I myself was a student in this community, or because they became commonplace through my immersion and/or own personal cultural background and history with the research settings (see Chapter 1 and “My Role As a Researcher” in this chapter).

A final limitation was that I am a novice researcher. While I set out to conduct a comprehensive ethnography with a critical perspective, the criticality and insights of the study are of course challenged and limited by the particular confines and structures I worked with in the classrooms I studied.

Nonetheless, within the parameters of the requirements for a doctoral thesis, my research plans and procedures were quite extensive. I experienced a cultural immersion in different classrooms over the course of almost an entire school year—a significant period of time. As such, while these limitations are important considerations to recognize, I believe that they did not prevent me from carrying out a comprehensive qualitative research study in the three classroom settings.

**Conclusion**

Overall, the main strengths of using ethnography with a critical perspective to study conflict dialogue processes in diverse classrooms were twofold: first, it 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 in these contexts 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 will present the different classroom cultures I observed and provide analyses and syntheses of the various themes and issues that emerged from the study.
CHAPTER 4

THREE CLASSROOM CULTURES: NORMS, PEDAGOGIES, AND PARTICIPATION PATTERNS

Pedagogies and Culture

The act of sharing with those who have been silenced and marginalized is a spiritual task that embodies a sense of humility and intimacy. Furthermore, a sense of reciprocity is fundamental from this epistemological space, a sense that the researcher and the researched are changed in this process of mutual teaching and learning the world together. (Dillard & Okpalaoka, p. 159)

Ways that teachers deal with conflict and diversity in multicultural classrooms can influence how diverse children interpret and respond to conflicts and issues of diversity in the classrooms and in the rest of their lives as citizens. The infusion of conflictual issues is an integral component of a critical pedagogical and multicultural process that can engage and include all students in the curricula content. Teachers in public, urban, and diverse classrooms are encouraged by policy documents and guidelines\(^1\) to engage in discussions about controversial issues in the classroom. When teachers are supported and encouraged by their colleagues, administration, and community, they may be better equipped to handle and respond to controversial issues embedded in the curriculum (Bickmore, 2008).

Prescriptive approaches to conflict education that do not reflect the experiences and identities of diverse students in the classroom, such as teaching a package of how-tos assumed to be neutral, often reflect societally dominant norms and behaviours. This leaves little room for diversity of experiences or perspectives. The teachers I observed

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\(^1\) In the province of Ontario, A Teaching Resource for Dealing With Controversial and Sensitive Issues in TDSB Classrooms, published by Toronto District School Board (2003), is one of the few comprehensive documents available that specifically address the inclusion of conflictual issues in the classroom.
used many pedagogical tools to guide and invite students to participate in discussions of conflicting perspectives, including issues discussions, circles, class decision-making meetings, role plays, simulations, and community-building activities. However, such inclusive pedagogy may be difficult to integrate into traditional classroom teaching that relies on defensive teaching (see McNeil, 1986). Some pedagogies prescribe specific, correct ways of handling conflict, while others rely on the diverse experiences of the participants to guide the dialogue process (Lederach, 1991). In this way, as Nieto (1992) has argued, the process of affirming diverse students’ identities “focuses on knowledge, reflection, and action (praxis) as the basis for social change” (p. 30). When divergent perspectives are voiced in the curriculum, diverse students may be better equipped to confront issues of power and inequity and to better connect with their and others’ race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and immigration experiences. But Nieto (1992) argued that teachers often refuse to engage their students in discussions about racism because it might “demoralize” them; and therefore if it is “too dangerous a topic, it is best left untouched” (p. 31). Sleeter (2004) discussed the ways in which teachers who are White perceive and understand race. She addressed the problematic preconceptions that novice teachers carry about students who are of a visible minority race: “One can read most discussions of teacher race as tacitly assuming that the system of education is basically as it should be but that it functions most effectively when there is cultural congruence between teachers and students” (Sleeter, 2004, p. 163). Like Delpit and others, Sleeter (2004) deconstructed the problem of how Other children are perceived and subsequently treated by teachers who do not attempt to connect with their students’ multiple identities and misunderstand their histories and identities.
In this chapter I outline how, in the three classroom environments, teacher-student-researcher relationships and pedagogies worked to sometimes support and at other times to impede possibilities for the inclusion of conflict and diversity and diverse students’ experiences in the curriculum. First, I outline how my relationship with each teacher shaped my perception and understanding of their identities and their pedagogical approaches. I then discuss how the classroom set-up, guidelines, and norms shaped opportunities for such classroom dialogue to occur. I also provide an overview of the different types of content that teachers covered and the different pedagogical approaches they used in their implemented curricula. In the final section of this chapter, I compare and contrast the three cases, to theorize how classroom culture shaped citizenship learning in each case.

**Aria Public School, Grade 4, Ms. Marlee**

**Class Context**

Ms. Marlee was an African-Caribbean-Canadian teacher who had taught special education in previous years. I observed her class from November 2010 to April 2011. It was her first year teaching Grade 4 students in a regular classroom. I conducted 35 classroom observations of Ms. Marlee’s literacy, art, social studies, health, mathematics, science, and technology classes, for a total of 49 hours. There were 23 students in this class; 10 boys and 13 girls. I received consent to interview 13 of the students in this class. I conducted nine group interviews (mostly in pairs) with the students. I interviewed some students twice, first at the beginning of my data collection period, in December, and again towards the end, in April. The ethnocultural makeup of the class was 34.5% Chinese, 34.5% Indian, 15% Pakistani, 15% Tamil Sri Lankan, and 0.5% Jamaican. The
one Black female student was Christian—also a minority in this class. My attention to the demographic makeup of the class allowed me to explore in detail how the curriculum related to these diverse cultural identities.

**Researcher-Student-Teacher Relationships**

Ms. Marlee was in her early 40s and lived in the neighbouring community. She was working on her PhD through an online university at the same time as I was conducting observations in her class. Ms. Marlee, at times, made assumptions about what she was or was not expecting of my research procedures. For instance, we had several clarifying conversations about the conflict and diversity I was hoping to observe in her lessons. Ms. Marlee and I developed a light-hearted friendship. She shared some things about her personal life with me and we also discussed her own research study. For instance, she showed me feedback she had received electronically from her faculty advisor. Ms. Marlee finished her online PhD during the period of my observations in her classroom. She was also absent due to illness for about two weeks. Ms. Marlee often articulated to me her desire to teach at the high school or university level.

Through interviews and casual conversations with Ms. Marlee, I discerned that her teaching philosophy included a commitment to teaching for social justice and diversity. My observations of her day-to-day classroom lessons showed that her teaching philosophy was constrained by time and curriculum expectations. Due to these constraints, she often used her computer at her desk during class time. During class time, I had the opportunity to support students who approached me, asking questions about the tasks they were doing, such as mathematics questions and worksheets. Thus, my role evolved into participant observer; there were times when I spent almost the entire period
going around to the different groups of students offering support and speaking to them about what they were doing.

While this dynamic changed my role as a researcher, it also allowed me the freedom to build strong relationships with students and to ask them questions about what they were doing and how they were experiencing particular tasks. For instance, while the students were in the library computer lab conducting online research for their different roles in a Medieval History unit, many were struggling with locating information on Google or deciphering what constituted correct information for the purposes of the exercise. During this period, Ms. Marlee remained at her computer and I went around to each student, supporting their research process, while also gaining closer insights into each student’s response to the role they had been assigned.

Two of Ms. Marlee’s students were designated English language learners (ELL) who were withdrawn from this classroom during language arts and mathematics for ELL support. One of these students, Nancy (F-EA), was known as the “class mute.” Early in my classroom observations, I noted Nancy’s silence. One of the female students noticed me observing Nancy’s behaviour, and whispered to me, “She doesn’t speak in class. Only at recess” (OBS, December 6, 2010). Ms. Marlee told me that when she called on Nancy, the class typically quieted down and waited for her to speak. Sometimes she did, but only in a whisper. I observed that Nancy did begin to speak more over the course of the time I spent in her class; she sometimes offered a response when Ms. Marlee directed questions specifically to her. However, she still did not volunteer to verbally participate in any whole-class discussions. The other ELL student, Mei-Ling (F-EA), was not typically called upon by Ms. Marlee because she spoke minimal English. When I did observe her
speaking in class, she was speaking to her peers in Cantonese. Overall, these two
different ELL students, one of whom knew relatively more English and was encouraged
by Ms. Marlee to speak aloud during whole-class, turn-taking activities, still typically
chose to remain silent within the classroom context.

One student in the class, Mabel, served as a Cantonese-English translator in a
group interview, which included Mei-Ling (SI, April 18, 2011). On the whole, I observed
both Mei-Ling and Nancy speaking more during the small group interviews than during
whole classroom discussions. Shaun, an active and sometimes aggressive student, also
participated in an interview with me. He appeared to enjoy the opportunity to speak and
have his voice heard, particularly because he was often asked to be silent in the
classroom, due to his frequent interruptions and speaking without raising his hand. I
chose to interview him as a member of a pair, rather than in a larger group, so that I could
give him sufficient attention to remain engaged in the question-and-answer process. I
modified my approach by working at a faster pace, and asking simpler, more direct
questions. He readily responded to this and excitedly ended most responses with “OK,
next question please.” Overall, the small group interview process typically allowed
students the opportunity to speak about their perspectives and experiences more than they
would have disclosed during whole-class activities or discussions.

Overall, my relationships with the students in this Grade 4 class were very
harmonious. When I entered the classroom, they would all greet me at once and inquire
whether I would be able to stay with them for the entire day. Both girls and boys would
approach me to share pictures, artefacts and personal stories—what they did on the
weekend, or to announce their family member’s imminent arrival to Canada. Before the
December holiday break, I also received several gifts and cards from students, which was another indication of the closeness of the student-researcher relationships that developed in this class.

**Environment and Groupings: Team Building and Exclusion**

Ms. Marlee had implemented a points system that gave her students extrinsic rewards for abiding by classroom rules such as being quiet and obedient, or doing homework. The students’ understanding of the system was clear: behave well and be awarded a free McDonald’s lunch. Ms. Marlee constantly rewarded proper behaviour, thereby embedding her reward system in the thought and behavioural patterns of students. For instance, in one small group interview I asked:

**CP:** What about the points system that you have in class—do you like that system? That you get points or you lose points if you do something good or bad?

**Nakaur:** We like it because it’s a way to make everyone quiet and listen. Also if you’re quiet and if your group is the quietest you get free lunch.

**CP:** OK, I didn’t know that. (pause) What don’t you really like about the points for each group?

**Shaun:** *(responding quickly)* If you’re last you-get-nothing. *(SI, April 20, 2011)*

Shaun (M-EA) and Nakaur’s (F-SA) comments demonstrated that the points system process reinforced a competitive classroom environment. Moreover, the norms represented by the points system were more visibly regulated by the students than by Ms. Marlee; peers monitored and controlled each other’s behaviour and even subsequently...
decided who would be included in different class groupings. Ms. Marlee allowed and encouraged her students to vote classmates out of their groups, if they felt that the classmates had been disrespectful, disruptive, or did not fulfill their obligations as obedient students. High and low social statuses in Ms. Marlee’s classroom were thus made visible by the ways in which small groups had been created and regulated. In a student group interview, a Chinese female student, Jade, shared her experience of this group voting process: “In my old group . . . there were three other girls and they were, like, they were going to vote me off because they didn’t like me” (SI, December 17, 2010). In contrast, when I asked Ms. Marlee to describe the voting-out process to me, she described a recent incident involving a male Muslim South Asian student, Seef:

Ms. M: He almost got voted out because apparently, and I’ve heard this from previous teachers as well, he comes from a culture where the man is above and the woman is below. So when he’s with the girls, he thinks it’s his right to bully and tell them to shut up and this and that. So, the girls are, like, “He’s been telling us mean things!” and I’m, like, “Vote him out.” (TI, April 28, 2011)

This was an instance in which Ms. Marlee showed that she wanted her students—the girls, in this case—to stand up for their rights. The voting-out process empowered the students to recognize and interpret right, wrong, fair, and inequitable. However, Ms. Marlee’s own personal preconceptions of her different students—Muslim males, in this case—shaped the ways in which she chose to address interpersonal conflict in her classroom (see Parker & Bickmore, 2012).
The group names and point system chart were posted on one bulletin board in the classroom, openly displaying the current points level for each group. There were few posters on the walls of Ms. Marlee’s classroom, although some student work was posted on the classroom door. In this classroom, success criteria and instructions for reading and writing, such as picking a good book and writing a book report, were written on chart paper posted on the wall. Overall, the voting-out process influenced the class norms for engagement, creating a competitive group dynamic amongst the students in which they were given the responsibility to manage peer conflicts and essentially to control each other’s behaviour. However, Ms. Marlee’s points system also influenced some instances of inclusion, as small groups of students encouraged each other to participate in class discussions, in order to earn points for their contributions.

**Pedagogical Patterns: Turn Taking and Teacher Authority**

Ms. Marlee used various electronic pedagogical technologies in her classroom, such as a SMART Board™, class laptops, glogsters (graphic blogs with multimedia features, such as music and images), and whole-class Google searches about issues that were raised during classroom discussions, such as the unique totem poles of Haida people in Canada. In class exercises, students took turns writing answers on the SMART Board. This technology seemed to encourage and create excitement for participation; all students wanted the opportunity to use the laptop or digital marker to write their answers on the screen. During these types of technology-based activities, students were asked to not raise their hands; instead, Ms. Marlee went from group to group in order to ensure that each student had their much sought-after turn. Slotta (2010) pointed out that classroom-rich technology integration can “scaffold complex patterns of activities and connect students
to rich, collaborative learning experiences” (p. 239). Ms. Marlee led her Grade 4s through a Technology unit, where they worked in small groups to create web pages, video games, and mind maps, which reinforced collaboration amongst students and offered an opportunity for literacy engagement. There was, however, little attention paid to issues of conflict and diversity in the Technology unit, as most of the tasks involved summarizing the content of a short story or video game.

During whole-class discussions without the SMART Board, students were not equally eager to participate. Ms. Marlee consistently reminded students to raise their hands and participate. On one occasion, a vocally dominant girl, Jade, questioned this norm for engagement: “What about Nancy, Ms. M?” (OBS, March 28, 2011). Jade’s question illustrated her understanding of nonverbal observers who might opt of participation when volunteering and hand raising were required.

In an interview with Nancy (F-EA) and Mina (F-SA), Nancy articulated how having roles assigned for particular tasks in the group helped her to feel more included and more inclined to participate, “because Ms. Marlee gives us different things for us to do, like, someone writes, and someone speaks, and stuff” (SI, April 18, 2011). Mina, however, disagreed with her quiet peer about how roles were taken up in small groups, and articulated her feelings of exclusion because she worked at a slower pace than other students. Mina was always dressed well, in fashionable clothing; however, her speech was slow and she usually needed extra support. Her mother had refused to withdraw her from this class to put her into the special education literacy class. Mina passionately articulated her experience to me and Nancy during a small-group interview:

Mina: (pause) I think some people just give me a little work when I want to
do a lot of work and learn more about it and then they tell me to do just one thing after they do all the stuff and I get bored because I’m just sitting there watching what they’re doing and it feels like I’m invisible, like, they don’t think about me. (pause) So, that’s why I feel lonely when I’m in groups, because they do all the work. Like, one day when I was in a group, they bugged me and they just told me to do one thing and I felt really bad and that made me feel like I was invisible.

CP: Oh, that’s not nice.

Mina: No, it’s not. I mean, how would you feel?

CP: I wouldn’t feel good. (SI, April 18, 2011)

While Nancy’s articulation of how teacher-assigned roles encouraged her participation and inclusion in small group settings, Mina’s comments showed that her lower social and academic statuses were barriers in mixed academic groupings.

In November 2010 and January 2011, I observed mostly the English language arts (ELA) and social studies classes. In ELA Ms. Marlee taught students about different parts of speech and went through several worksheet and SMART Board grammar exercises. In the Canada and World Connections Social Studies unit, Ms. Marlee taught about various geographic regions in Canada. Between February and April, I observed the Grade 4s studying the medieval period. Ms. Marlee acknowledged the power structures in her class by assigning roles in the medieval simulation that gave higher-status positions to some lower-status students and vice versa. For example, the normally quiet Farat was named king, a quiet girl was named princess, and a dominant girl, Swetha, was named a serf. Ms. Marlee raised questions about power hierarchies during classroom discussions about
the medieval period. I also observed some mathematics and science lessons about rock formations and simple machines. In February 2011, Black History Month, I observed a full-day classroom and school-wide initiative in which some teachers, including Ms. Marlee, opted to lead classroom activities on Black history. Students went to various classrooms throughout the day to participate in the activities. They danced to Freedom music; coloured Black leaders such as Martin Luther King Junior, Nelson Mandela, and Michael Jordan; and took part in what was referred to as a “critical thinking” writing activity on making decisions, such as “What would you do if a slave came to your door seeking food and shelter?” Ms. Marlee was one of the organizers of this event, with a Black male teacher at the school. When only about half the Aria P.S. teachers\(^2\) opted to participate in the event, Ms. Marlee expressed her concern to me that certain teachers might think that she was making “too big of a deal” of Black history because she was Black. On this day, she also passionately told me that she felt that some colleagues wanted her to conform to their teaching styles and not to bring up Black history issues. At the same time, Ms. Marlee reiterated her belief that students at Aria didn’t notice racial differences, because the school was “so multicultural.” This comment raised questions for me about how certain issues and histories may be taken up in school settings, in particular where the student demographics do not reflect that particular identity. There were very few Black or White students in the Aria school community: almost the entire student population was South Asian and East Asian. This may have contributed to Ms. Marlee’s view that many teachers overlooked Black history education, with the exception

\(^2\) The other teacher participant in this study was a Grade 5 teacher, Mrs. Amrita, who appears later in this chapter. Mrs. Amrita did not participate in the Black history one-day initiative, as she was on a field trip with her students that day. At the other school site, Georgetown P.S. in the Grade 7 class, I also did not observe any activities or lessons about Black history.
of Ms. Marlee’s one-day initiative. In this way, the process of students learning about other cultures, which is a part of peacebuilding education, did not appear to be actively present in the school context.

Overall, the various activities I observed in Ms. Marlee’s classroom illustrated many instances of students waiting for their turn to participate. For instance, they waited to be called upon or given the opportunity to respond during a teacher-led recitation. In many ways, Ms. Marlee was an authoritative teacher in her classroom; she controlled how and who spoke during lessons. While her attempts to encourage dialogue and recognize diverse perspectives were minimal, her inclusion of some role-play exercises and the use of some collaborative, technology-based activities provided opportunities that invited and encouraged all students to participate, despite being in a competitive classroom environment.

Aria Public School, Grade 5, Mrs. Amrita

Class Context

Mrs. Amrita had immigrated to Canada from India nine years previously, and had taught in Ontario for the last six years. When I observed her between early January and early June 2011, it was her first year teaching Grade 5; previously she had taught Grades 3 and 4. She worked closely with another teacher, Mrs. G, who had also made the transition to Grade 5 that year. They appeared to be very close, both professionally and personally. There were 26 Grade 5 students; 15 boys and 11 girls. I received consent to interview 20 students; the remaining six students were aggregated in the data. I conducted 11 group interviews, mostly in small groups of three or four students. I interviewed some students twice. I conducted three group interviews in February and eight in May. The
ethnocultural makeup of the class was 31% Tamil Sri Lankan, 27% Chinese, 15% Indian, and 15% Pakistani; the remaining 12% represented Vietnamese, Taiwanese, and Kenyan backgrounds. The one Black male student had recently immigrated from Kenya. I observed 40 of Mrs. Amrita’s social studies, science, language arts, health, art, and mathematics classes, for a total of 51 hours.

**Researcher-Student-Teacher Relationships**

Mrs. Amrita was in her 50s and married with two grown children. She lived in the Aria P.S. community and appeared to have a relatively high socioeconomic status. I became relatively close, professionally and personally, to her during the time I observed in her classroom. She often included me in her lessons, by calling on me during whole-class discussions to invite my opinion or to ask me to provide additional information on things such as the responsibilities of Dalton McGuinty, the Premier of Ontario, or the role of the Queen in Canada.

Mrs. Amrita spoke with her students and colleagues at the school about being a practising Hindu. In many ways, she was a traditional Indian-Canadian woman who showed pride in her heritage by sharing and celebrating Hindu religious days of worship with her students. During the months I observed her classroom, she was absent on two occasions, one for a professional development workshop and another time for Maha Shivaratri, a Hindu festival which involves a day of fasting and all-night worship in honour of the Hindu god, Lord Shiva. She later told her students about how she had spent her time in the temple. When Mrs. Amrita learned that I came from a Hindu family with a Brahmin caste lineage, she appeared to feel a deeper sense of connection to me and pointed out my ancestry to her students. Mrs. Amrita once invited me to attend a Hindu
religious ceremony at her home. When I arrived, she asked me to sit at the very front behind her family as they were conducting the puja. Many other teachers from the school, of various ethnic origins, were there as well. Mrs. Amrita’s family and friends told me that they all had heard about me and were excited to meet me. Mrs. Amrita and I each described our relationship as my simply wanting to learn about teaching; we did not share any details about the research that I was conducting in her class.

Many of the students in Mrs. Amrita’s class saw me as a mentor and were often eager for my attention to share their academic work or personal stories about their lives. I was constantly involved in the classroom activities, assisting with learning activities as I walked around to the different groups, and sometimes helping to make sure students were on task. During the student group interviews, I further developed my relationships with many of the students. During one group interview with Sobi (F-SA), Sugriva (M-SA), Jamal (M-B), and Faith (F-EA) in February 2011, Faith disclosed to me and to her peers in the group that she often felt excluded in the class because she was the last to be picked when students formed groups and would often be alone during recess. I asked her to describe why she was left out in her class. She said that no one had included her in the dance performance group that was part of a drama class activity. I asked everyone in the interview group if they would be willing to include Faith in their dance group. Sobi said that, because she was not allowed to dance, she was not in a group. Sugriva said that his group was doing a cultural (Indian-Punjabi) dance. I asked him if he could teach Faith how to do it. He then said his group were all males. I asked Jamal if he could invite Faith to join his group and he said he would, but that he still had to ask the rest of his group. I

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3 Puja is a religious ritual performed in temples or homes by Hindu priests from the Brahmin caste.
used this opportunity to wield some of the popularity power that I seemed to have obtained in the class, and told Jamal to tell his group that Miss Parker said they should invite Faith to be part of their group. He agreed. I then told everyone else in the group that they now had a new responsibility to include Faith in their groups whenever they were allowed to choose their small groups. They agreed. At the end of interview, I went around the circle and asked everyone to share their final thoughts. Sobi said she appreciated everyone’s honesty. Faith thanked me and the group for being the first people to listen to her about not being included. Sugriva said that he liked that everyone participated. And Jamal said he liked that everyone told the truth.

At first, while I was surprised that these students chose to share their stories of exclusion in the class with me, I also found that my research methodology supported my involvement in hearing and responding to these stories. My interview process had evidently engaged the critical consciousness of some marginalized students who participated in these small group discussions. The shared commitment that these four students made, responding to Faith’s revelations about feeling excluded, illustrated their desire and capability to effect social change in their classroom.

Towards the end of my data collection, I did a second set of interviews, including follow-up interviews with some students. I spoke to students in small groups, often in same-gender pairs, which allowed for all students to participate. When I followed up with Sugriva, he reflected on the earlier group interview:

Sugriva:  Remember in our last interview with Faith . . . ?

CP:  Yes.

Sugriva:  Well remember how you said that we should make efforts to be friends
with her and be her partner with her for groups?

CP: Yes.

Sugriva: Well, I’ve been doing that. And I have learned a lot from her and she’s very active, and smart. But she just can’t say some things out loud, because she is very shy. (SI, May16, 2011)

Thus, here Sugriva confirmed how his consciousness had evolved in response to the critical, engaged perspective I had taken up in this ethnography.

**Environment and Groupings: Academic Status and Participation**

Mrs. Amrita’s Grade 5 class rarely kept their hands down when their teacher posed content-based and reflective questions to them. They knew that, if they did not raise their hands, Mrs. Amrita might still call on them and inquire about their nonparticipation.

Mrs. Amrita consistently engaged her students in small-group work or paired discussions prior to sharing with the whole class. Most of the many small groups I observed were teacher-selected groupings, but students still had the opportunity to select their own groups for some activities, such as dance groups. When Mrs. Amrita selected groups, she usually put together students with similar academic achievement levels. She acknowledged, to me, her role and authority over this group formation process, pointing out that her strategy eliminated the possibility that the more advanced students would do all the work, leaving those that were less advanced still struggling. In this way, Mrs. Amrita used her authority to engage more diverse students in learning processes that she believed were reflective of students’ academic levels. I observed how Mrs. Amrita’s academic streaming arrangement worked during a mathematics activity: students were
given a task to create a family vegetable garden using fractions and decimals. The lower achieving students, grouped together, initially struggled to figure out the task, but when they did figure it out, they appeared to do it collaboratively with equal contributions to the end goal. However, research shows that, on average, such segregated and lower-academic groupings have less rich opportunities to learn (Cohen, 1994, 2004; Levin, 1987).

Mrs. Amrita organized her classroom seating arrangement in small groups of four to six students. She only changed these grouping assignments twice during the course of my observations in this class. While some groups included mixed lower and higher academic levels, most were still organized homogenously by academic level and skill. Students were not oblivious to the status element of these group dynamics. During an interview, two South Asian boys, Arun (Hindu) and Tandeep (Sikh), reflected on how groups formed when Mrs. Amrita gave students the rare choice of who to work with:

Arun: Kate and all the smart people went into one group for the project we’re doing right now. They all come together and we’re not included. It’s like we’re not there. . . . No one had a say. No, we’re just, like, a back-up plan, like, if something happens, then we’ll just go to them. (SI, May18, 2011)

Kate (EA) was an academically and socially high-status female in the class. In this instance, perceived academic status trumped gender in terms of access to power in the classroom.\(^4\)

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\(^4\) Kate’s role in Mrs. Amrita’s classroom is further discussed in Chapter 6, in which her election by the class as prime minister is described.
Mrs. Amrita’s class had many posters on the wall, including student work. There was a board with criteria for achieving a Level 4, 3, 2, or 1 across any subject.\(^5\) Inspirational posters included sayings such as “Attitudes are contagious, is yours worth catching?” and “You are valuable—don’t let anyone make you believe differently.” Posters from a local cooperative learning program also displayed classroom norms of mutual respect, participation, right to pass, appreciation, and listening. A bulletin board outlined the writing process, including a checklist for editing prepositions, transition words, and grammar.

**Pedagogical Patterns: Cultural Expectations for Participation and Expression**

In the Grade 5 Social Studies class, I observed the Heritage and Citizenship strand that focused on early and ancient civilizations, and the Canada and World Connections strand that focused on aspects of citizenship and government in Canada. Mrs. Amrita strengthened a focus on immigration to Canada throughout the latter strand, as a way to support the inclusion of her students’ background knowledge and experience in her implemented curriculum. I also observed a whole-class simulated election campaign in which students formed parties, wrote political platforms, and participated in a voting process to elect a candidate. In language arts, I observed elements of the classroom activities associated with the school board–wide initiative on critical literacy, which focused on teaching students to make inferences and connections. I also observed

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\(^5\) The Ontario curriculum mandated achievement chart defines four levels of achievement: Level 1 represents achievement that falls much below the provincial standard. Level 2 represents achievement that approaches the provincial standard. Students performing at this level need to work on identified learning gaps to ensure future success. Level 3 represents the provincial standard for achievement. Parents of students achieving at Level 3 can be confident that their children will be prepared for work in subsequent grades/courses. Level 4 identifies achievement that surpasses the provincial standard. Achievement at Level 4 does not mean that the student has achieved expectations beyond those specified for the grade/course (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 18).
students working in self-guided reading groups and writing from various points of view. In mathematics, I observed several critical inquiry initiatives in which students were given real-life problems to solve using mathematics, such as designing a garden. In science, students studied properties of matter and the human body.

I noticed a wide contrast between the mathematics and science lessons compared to the language arts and social studies lessons—the latter had a much more prominent focus on including students’ own background knowledge, personal identities, and experiences. The science lessons I observed were very content focused and teacher directed: students mostly received the information presented by Mrs. Amrita and their textbook. Mrs. Amrita had a master’s degree in science, which may have influenced her decision to present the science content in a very structured manner.

Mrs. Amrita and many of her students expressed to me the belief that they were free to openly engage with each other in conflictual discussion about social conflicts and diversity. Mrs. Amrita’s identity as a relatively recent immigrant from India, and the students’ similar East Asian and South Asian immigrant backgrounds, seemed to offer a level of comfort for inclusive discussions about diversity. Overall, the students in Mrs. Amrita’s class experienced differential opportunities to voice their perspectives on sensitive and conflictual issues in class discussions and activities. Mrs. Amrita’s norms for engagement typically encouraged students to participate; she consistently required them to raise their hands before speaking. But Mrs. Amrita also allowed students the option to pass, which was outlined as a “right” in the cooperative learning program instituted in the class. The right to pass allowed students to choose to remain silent during sensitive and identity-linked issues such as sharing personal immigration stories.
Georgetown Public School, Grade 7, Mr. Hiroshi

Class Context

Mr. Hiroshi, of mixed Japanese and European ancestry and in his mid-20s, held professional qualifications in integration of information and computer technology. In the second year of his teaching career, he was teaching Grade 7 for the second time at Georgetown P.S. when I observed his class between early December 2010 and late May 2011. There were 29 Grade 7 students; 14 boys and 15 girls. I received consent to interview 19 students. I conducted nine group interviews, mostly in pairs or groups of three. I conducted two interviews in December and seven interviews in March/April. The ethnocultural makeup of the class was 28% Tamil Sri Lankan, 28% Indian, 17% Pakistani, 7% Guyanese, 6% Trinidadian, and 6% Jamaican; the remaining 8% represented Nepalese, Egyptian, and White Canadian. The majority of students were South Asian. There were two Black boys and one half-White/half-South-Asian-Caribbean girl. I observed Mr. Hiroshi and his students during language arts, mathematics, history, geography, and health classes. I conducted 41 observations of Mr. Hiroshi’s class, for a total of 55 hours.

Researcher-Student-Teacher Relationships

Mr. Hiroshi was about my own age, and we had grown up in the same community. We did not go to the same elementary school, but had attended the same high school, although we did not know each other then, since we were in different grades in a school with a large population. Mr. Hiroshi was married and lived just outside the school community.
Mr. Hiroshi always treated me with a lot of respect, particularly around his students, which seemed to have an impact on how quickly my relationships developed with the students in his class. For instance, when I came into the classroom Mr. Hiroshi would always greet me excitedly, “Hey, there’s Miss Parker!” He would inquire about my weekend and about my family. He also made sure that a seat was always available for me and would often pull out the chair at the table where I would typically sit. On the days that I stayed over recess or lunch he would sometimes go to Tim Hortons and bring coffee back for me. Overall, we had a close, but very professional relationship. In our final interview Mr. Hiroshi shared with me his reflection on the research experience:

Mr. H: I think I’ve been telling you all along that we really appreciated having you here and I wanted you here. It was a little intimidating at first, but I wanted to know, I wanted to learn something from this and I have. . . . Everything went so much further beyond you just sitting here observing. The kids just loved having you here. Like, they loved it. . . . I think it’s just because you show them the respect that they deserve.

(TI, May 22, 2011)

I had developed close relationships with the students in Mrs. Amrita’s and Ms. Marlee’s classes, and I developed equally close relationships with most of the students in Mr. Hiroshi’s class. 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. 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.

For the group interviews, I had begun with mixed-gender groups of 5 to 7 students, but many of the students excitedly spoke over each other, making transcription challenging. I then decided to use smaller same-gender groupings of two to four students. I wanted to encourage students to speak frankly about gender dynamics and other participation patterns and to learn more about how diverse students responded to conflict and diversity, including gender. In an interview with Crystal, who was half-White and half-Trinidadian, and her best friend, Anita, Crystal disclosed to me that she was being racially targeted by Tyrone and Jerome, the two Black boys in the class who made fun of her White identity. We spoke about how she coped with this problem during class, where she and Tyrone were both frequent vocal participants. She told me she needed to ignore Tyrone, but she became progressively more silent during classroom discussions as their interpersonal conflict intensified. During one intense conflict period, I observed Crystal purposely self-silence during health class, as Mr. Hiroshi led a discussion about peer pressure, drugs, and alcohol—a topic in which Crystal had readily engaged during previous classes (OBS, April 13, 2011). I encouraged Crystal to share her experiences with Mr. Hiroshi, and consulted with Mr. Hiroshi to offer my support.

Students who were typically quiet during whole-class activities tended to surprise me during interviews with the amount they were eager to share. Madia and Aalia, in Mr. Hiroshi’s Grade 7 class, raised a critical issue for me as a researcher when they expressed their discomfort and embarrassment at not having access to the language of power during our small group interview. Madia began by saying, “My English is not very good. I hope
you’ll understand it” (SI, March 31, 2011). Cummins (2000) argued that many newcomer immigrants struggle with academic language proficiency, where they may not feel confident or competent to participate in particular classroom activities using dominant academic language. Madia and Aalia may have been concerned about whether their minoritized cultural knowledge subscribed to what Delpit (1988) referred to as the culture of power. They questioned their academic language proficiency in our interview, even when I reassured them that their English was understandable. After their first response to an interview question Madia asked, “We’re not doing well are we, are we?” What struck me further about these two girls was that they were often the first to approach me after school or at lunch to chat socially about their day and life. They didn’t question their language proficiency during this time. However, at the beginning of our interview, they illustrated how their communication confidence was influenced by formal contexts, such as the interview. As their discomfort waned, they shared many personal anecdotes that highlighted their experiences with inclusion and exclusion.

Overall, the interview process was interpreted by many Grade 7s as a time for them to share their personal thoughts and feelings about their school experiences. In a card that the students made for me when I finished data collection in May 2011, many students articulated gratitude for this opportunity to have a voice during the research process. Aalia, a quiet female student, said, “I had a lot of fun talking to you. . . . You made me feel important.” Sunita said, “You were a great role model and an amazing person to talk to. You let us feel comfortable talking to you about our problems.” Malika, a quiet, academically strong student, reflected: “In my life I will always remember that I had an excellent guide, this year! I found guidance, friendship, discipline and love and
everything in you!” Finally, Crystal offered her appreciation for how her personal issue, being targeted with racist remarks in her classroom, had been addressed: “Thanks Miss Parker, for coming to our class and thanks for helping me with my problem.” While these reflections may have been exaggerated, due to many students’ emotional responses to having someone leave whom they trusted and had developed a relationship with, they also shed some light on the closeness that developed between researcher and students during the data collection process.

**Environment and Groupings: Gender, Social Status and Power to Voice**

Mr. Hiroshi used a variety of online resources and conflictual dialogue pedagogies to connect with his students’ identities and interests. Current events and social conflicts were frequently discussed in the classroom, using social media and whole-group discussions. Mr. Hiroshi frequently incorporated technology in the classroom. For instance, when it was Chinese New Year, Mr. Hiroshi posted a message to his students on Twitter and then brought in a newspaper article the next day to further stimulate classroom discussion about this cultural event. Students used class laptops, blogs, and Twitter to share information, create documents, and do their writing electronically.

Mr. Hiroshi changed the class seating plan every two to three weeks. Students were always seated in small groups of five or six students. Frequent shifts in group membership allowed me to see how participation patterns of quiet and vocal students changed in relation to different seating arrangements. For instance, Malika, a female student known to her class to be quiet, began to speak more in whole-class discussions when she sat beside Crystal, a vocal, dominant female student in the class. Particularly
important with young adolescents, the frequent shifting of groups also reduced the potential for cliques.

Mr. Hiroshi’s desk was in a corner, off to the side of the classroom. A round table with bar stools was reserved for students working independently. The classroom was connected to a separate, pod-type workspace containing computers and additional tables, visible through a glass window from the classroom. The class had a gerbil named Hotwheels that the students cared for together, taking turns making sure food and water had been put out. Lots of student work was mounted on the wall, as well as posters about success, two Free the Children posters, and an Einstein poster. A class library, off to the side, held magazines and newspapers. A homework chart on the board contained reminders for each subject. A chart listed “Criteria for Success” for each unit they were currently working on, such as goals and expectations for the Mathematics unit on probability. On a mySpace wall, students were represented according to their hobbies, likes, and dislikes.

Mr. Hiroshi had also created a current events board in response to his and his students’ growing interest and awareness of local and global current events, many of them involving conflicts. He encouraged students to bring in newspaper articles. Articles posted included various photos and articles on the uprising in Egypt, the death of Sgt. Ryan Russell, and the earthquake and tsunami in Japan.

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6 Sergeant Ryan Russell was a Toronto police officer who died after a snow plow chase on January 12, 2011. He was 35 years old at the time and left behind a wife and a two-year-old boy. His widely publicized funeral was one of the largest in Canadian history for officers killed in the line of duty, attended by more than 10,000 police officers and emergency service workers. Mr. Hiroshi screened the funeral procession live in his classroom, while students worked on a small group assignment. Many students opted to watch and discuss the funeral procession with their peers.
Pedagogical Patterns: Open Climate—Trust, Value Sharing and Conflict

In December 2010, students met almost daily in teacher-assigned, academically streamed literature circle groups to discuss the novels they were reading. Unlike in Mrs. Amrita’s class groupings, Mr. Hiroshi’s students did not typically work in academically streamed small groups. In this instance of academic groupings, however, students met in small groups and sat in circles to discuss the novels Mr. Hiroshi assigned to them, based on their reading level. Students took on various roles: summarizer, discussion facilitator, connector, word master, and passage picker. Students changed roles for each circle meeting, so everyone was provided with the opportunity to facilitate potentially conflictual dialogue and to voice their perspectives. Mr. Hiroshi’s norms for engagement, linked to students’ role responsibilities, provided a structure for the literature circles that was consistent across the groups, although each was entirely student led. Students in each group decided how many chapters to read and how to discuss them; they gave each other feedback, and responded to each other’s questions. The authority and ownership that role responsibilities conferred in these structured conversations seemed to contribute to the students’ inclusion. They were encouraged to speak using personal examples that had an emotional connection or meaning for them. One group of four, a mix of higher and lower social status boys who were at a lower reading level, read a book that was considered by Mr. Hiroshi to be appealing for boys. Tyrone, who had a high social status in the class and was typically dominant during conversations, was in this group. On one occasion, the discussion facilitator for that day, Thanjai, decided to implement the use of a talking piece so that students would not talk over each other and would each have the opportunity to speak (OBS, December 13, 2010). This student-initiated control of the
dialogue process seemed to be a natural outgrowth of the literature circle process overall, in that students had the authority and opportunity to guide their own reading and discussion process.

In the Ontario curriculum, history as an independent subject begins in Grade 7; social studies is interdisciplinary in Grades 1 through 6. The seventh-grade curriculum mandates the histories of New France, British North America, and a unit on conflict and change. Mr. Hiroshi incorporated various activities and topics to make the lessons relevant and connected to his students, such as current events and sharing of personal experiences. He also taught geography during the second part of the year. I observed lessons on patterns in physical geography and natural resources. The magnitude 9.0 earthquake and subsequent tsunami that occurred in Japan on March 11, 2011 was a focus of study during the Geography unit.

I also observed a guest speaker, a high school student who spoke to the Grade 7s about preparing for high school. Her presentation focused on the cultural and religious divisions that she said they could face in their designated high school, in which Tamils, Indians, and Muslims were separated in the hallways and cafeteria. This information about conflictual social relations caused considerable anxiety for many of the Grade 7 students. They remained silent during her speech, but the next day they all came to school bursting with discontent and anger, which they expressed to their teacher and each other. Mr. Hiroshi had sent all the students a Twitter message the night before, acknowledging the “uncomfortable presentation” that had occurred during the last period at the end of the school day and informing the students that they would discuss the guest presentation the next morning. This instant e-communication prepared students to come in knowing they
would be welcome to voice their discomfort with what the guest speaker had presented. Anita (Indian/Muslim-Hindu) and Crystal (White-Caribbean/Christian), two higher-status female students, reflected on the fear that had been generated by this conflictual race relations “conversation” about their future high school:

Anita: Yeah! I actually didn’t even want to go to high school after hearing that.

Crystal: Yeah, it’s like she was trying to freak us out. She was, like, all the cultures stick together, but here we all get along.

Anita: Yeah, so I just got scared because I’m, like, now we’ll be separated into groups and stuff.

Crystal: Yeah, and I’m, like, well I’m cool with it now, but I don’t know.

Anita: Yeah, and my dad is Indian [Hindu] and my mom is Muslim, and last year all the Muslim girls would make fun of me because they’ll say that my dad is Indian. And it was Ramadan and I ate yogurt and they were all like “What are you doing?” and they got all mad and stuff.

(SI, April 8, 2011)

Anita’s and Crystal’s responses illustrated how confident they felt in their consensus that the guest speaker was trying to “freak them out.” However, they also noticed ways their peers from different cultural and religious groups had already begun to exclude them, for example by shunning the half-Muslim Anita for eating during Ramadan. In many ways, Mr. Hiroshi had sought to reinforce the importance of unity among religions when asking the class to discuss the conflictual information that had been presented by the guest
speaker. In an interview, a group of four Tamil Sri Lankan/Hindu females echoed a communal belief:

Jawali: It’s not like . . . *(interrupting excitedly)*

Sunita: Our class is very welcoming . . . *(interrupting excitedly)*

Jawali: Like, we’re really friendly and everything and yeah. . . . *(interrupting)*

Reshma: People don’t judge each other. *[short pause]*

Sunita: People don’t judge each other, but sometimes when someone is saying something someone might be, like, “Oh they’re racist.” *(SI, April 18, 2011)*

Even though underlying religious and cultural tensions existed among these diverse South Asian students, for example between Muslims and Hindus, these tensions were often overcome or at least hidden through Mr. Hiroshi’s constant and consistent message of unity among and across diversities. In another example, Mr. Hiroshi volunteered his class to be reading buddies for some students with severe disabilities who attended a special education program at Georgetown. One male student in the special education program used a wheelchair and a breathing tube. His speech and hearing were also impaired. This student’s personal support worker occasionally brought him to visit Mr. Hiroshi and his class. When this student was wheeled into the classroom, Mr. Hiroshi loudly shouted a welcome greeting and ran over to shake the boy’s hand, expressing joy and excitement when seeing him. Mr. Hiroshi’s Grade 7 students clearly strived to emulate their teacher’s inclusive behaviour.

In Language Arts, Mr. Hiroshi led guided-reading groups, students wrote stories and point-of-view essays, and studied inferences and connections between the curriculum
and self, texts, and the world. Mr. Hiroshi also integrated additional activities in his curriculum. For instance, when studying inferences, he organized a full-day Murder Mystery simulation activity, in which he assigned students to roles such as lawyer, police officer, murderer, actress, and child. Students acted out their roles as they tried to infer who the murderer was. Dressed in costumes and snacking on party food and drinks as they conversed with each other about who might be the murderer (who ended up being Tyrone, a high-status boy in the class), all students seemed to engage and have fun in inclusive learning activity. In another activity that aided in the healthy development of the class community and was fun, students worked in small, teacher-assigned groups to make bird houses. Roles Mr. Hiroshi assigned included woodcutter, measurer, and sander. He told them that the purpose of building something collectively with their peers was to develop important team-building skills; these included learning skills, which are graded on the Ontario report card.

In health class, students discussed choices and decision-making processes in relation to various conflictual scenarios. Examples were peer-pressuring other friends to smoke or drink, and staying out past curfew. Mr. Hiroshi spoke to the students about choices he had made when he was growing up. Many, if not all, students looked up to Mr. Hiroshi as a mentor and I believe that he impacted his students’ lives and personal growth by sharing his stories, personal values, and perspectives. Mr. Hiroshi’s care, concern, and respect for his students was evident. He played basketball with the boys on most Fridays after school and secretly bought lunches for those who didn’t have one. It is no wonder that, in this kind of classroom environment, the possibilities for learning about conflict and diversity were abundant.
Mr. Hiroshi provided his class with multiple, inclusive learning opportunities about diverse social conflicts that often reflected links to the ethnocultural identities in the room. Two male students, Tajinder (Indian/Sikh) and Akmed (Pakistani/Muslim), reflected in an interview with me on the process of sharing their perspectives in a diverse classroom:

CP: So does that [multiculturalism and diversity in the class] affect how you participate or share your thoughts and feelings in class?

Tajinder: You know, I was always in a multicultural class, so I’m used to multicultural neighbourhoods, so it doesn’t matter to me.

Akmed: Sometimes people disagree with you because you’re a different religion.

CP: Like how . . .

Tajinder: I don’t think it’s because . . .

CP: Say a little bit more about that, Akmed.

Akmed: Sometimes when they, like, whenever they . . ., well you know how some people don’t like different cultures. (SI, April 12, 2011)

In this interview, Akmed directed us to consider the internal discretion that students who view themselves as religious minorities may exercise when sharing opinions on potentially sensitive subjects, such as racism. Many other Muslim students I encountered in this study echoed beliefs similar to Akmed’s. They felt reluctant to participate, and connected their silencing to responses they anticipated from others to their religious identity. While Mr. Hiroshi consistently demonstrated skills in guiding discussions about conflict and diversity, the Muslim Akmed and the Sikh Tajinder
displayed two different perspectives. Tajinder, “used to multicultural neighbourhoods,” suggested that he was comfortable among some students. However, Akmed suggested that classroom conflicts might easily be connected to ethnic and religious disrespect when underlying and implicit racial and religious tensions are present in diverse classrooms.

Through Mr. Hiroshi’s various dialogic pedagogies about conflictual issues, such as teacher-led discussion, small-group discussions, problem-solving tasks, debates, structured academic controversies, Town Hall simulations, and the use of online learning tools, many of his ethnoculturally diverse, minoritized students consistently found their voices in whole-class and small-group activities. Encouraged by the norms for engagement, they engaged by speaking, whether in assigned roles or as themselves; they represented their various individual and cultural-group identities to engage critically in dialogue about social conflicts.

Cross-Case Comparison and Contrast:

Different Classroom Cultures and Pedagogies

In this chapter, I provided an in-depth overview of the relationships that developed between the researcher, teacher, and student participants in the three classrooms in this study. Different classroom arrangements (such as seating plans, norms for participation) and pedagogies (such as activities and discussions to facilitate inclusion and dialogue) demonstrated how diverse students were engaged in dialogue opportunities. Ultimately, the three teachers’ different pedagogies influenced how various students responded to classroom curricula about conflict and diversity. Each teacher used different pedagogies and principles in the implemented curriculum. As such, each presented content in ways that opened up spaces or impeded discussion and reflection on
conflict and diversity. The different levels and kinds of openness in the three classroom climates influenced possibilities for various students to participate and be included (or not).

I have described the students’ different types of response—dominant and vocal, less dominant, quieter, and less vocal—to classroom discussions and activities in which conflict was avoided/presented as absent, or when conflict was invited/presented. I introduced particular target students to illustrate how different groupings and social status arrangements within each classroom influenced their power to voice their perspectives during discussions. For instance, in Ms. Marlee’s class, one female student, Nancy, seldom or never spoke during whole-group discussions, while a male student, Shaun, was often disruptively eager to frequently speak up in lessons on topics such as Black history and Canada in the world. In Mr. Hiroshi’s class, two dominant-vocal students (Tyrone and Crystal) often clashed; their voices and participation often shaped whole-class discussions such as those on drugs and alcohol, Facebook, and gangs. Mrs. Amrita frequently grouped her students homogeneously by their perceived academic abilities, and required students to collaborate with assigned peers in a structured manner. Interviews with students described the tension that some students felt around their participation and inclusion in academic groupings such as gender and social status divisions during the class election simulation and the Rights and Responsibilities unit.

Overall, dialogic pedagogies, including teacher-led, whole-group, and smaller-group student dialogues, influenced the extent to which both teacher and students responded to some issues about diversity and conflict.

Tables 2, 3, 4, and 5 summarize apparent outcomes for diverse students of
particular teacher facilitation strategies across the three classroom cases. They also categorize the experiences of these students that their teachers facilitated. As discussed in Chapter 2, Apple’s (1979/2004), Freire’s (1970/1994), and Davies’ (2004a, 2004b) theories suggest that inviting students to explore conflicting perspectives on unresolved issues would facilitate education for democratization. Tables 2 and 3 identify how the three teachers enacted praxis for critical conflict-dialogue engagement in their classroom settings. Acknowledging that conflict-dialogue pedagogies may or may not be sensitive to diverse students’ identities, Table 4 illustrates how diverse ethnocultural minority students, in particular, typically responded to and said they experienced the different kinds of dialogue opportunities about diversity and conflict in their classrooms.

Diverse students engage with and experience conflict dialogue processes in multiple, differing ways. Multiple differentially identified students’ experiences crossed boundaries differently, depending on the conflictual issue and the pedagogical process that facilitated the discussion of that issue. In Table 5, I show how the teachers’ facilitation strategies influenced various students’ responses to different kinds of dialogue about conflict and diversity. These typologies summarize and categorize the three different classroom cases studied in this thesis.
Table 2
*Elements of Facilitation and Potential Outcomes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dialogue Facilitation</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Silencing</td>
<td>• Nonverbal observer takes on lesser, quiet role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• (Non)response to opportunities to engage in conflictual issues dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voicing</td>
<td>• Voicing similar and different perspectives, divergent points of view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Peer-to-peer dialogue about difference and conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Including social and</td>
<td>• Speaking from individual/group identities (ethnocultural, religious,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>individual identity</td>
<td>gender)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Drawing on personal background knowledge, history, and experience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3
*Application of Elements for Facilitation and Potential Outcomes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dialogue frequency</th>
<th>Silencing</th>
<th>Voicing</th>
<th>Including social and individual identity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>Marlee</td>
<td>Hiroshi</td>
<td>Hiroshi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Marlee, Amrita</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irregularly</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hiroshi</td>
<td>Marlee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Amrita</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4
*Students’ Responses to Dialogue About Diversity and/or Conflict*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements of Teacher Facilitation</th>
<th>Generalized Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledge conflict, power,</td>
<td>• Explicitly recognize social power structure and social conflict within curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and diversity</td>
<td>content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Raise consciousness of critical multiculturalism about conflictual issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>through dialogue about difference and conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Discuss diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher selects engagement norms</td>
<td>• Encourage self-directed responses and perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Encourage opportunities to handle conflictual issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher sets inclusive</td>
<td>• Encourage activities, strategies that increase potential for inclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and conflictual dialogue tone</td>
<td>through pedagogical tools for conflict dialogue</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5
Teacher Dialogue Facilitation Strategies About Diversity and/or Conflict

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facilitation activity/strategy</th>
<th>Acknowledge conflict, power, and diversity</th>
<th>Teacher selects engagement norms</th>
<th>Teacher sets inclusive and conflictual dialogue pedagogies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>Hiroshi Amrita</td>
<td>Hiroshi Amrita</td>
<td>Hiroshi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>Marlee</td>
<td>Amrita</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irregularly</td>
<td>Marlee</td>
<td></td>
<td>Marlee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this chapter, I have summarized the ways three teachers facilitated conflictual dialogue and other pedagogies in the context of critical multicultural education, fostering spaces for the inclusion of many diverse student voices and identities. Through various facilitation strategies, including establishing particular participation norms, the three teachers offered different kinds of opportunities for students to engage with their multiple identities. In the following chapters, I build on this foundation to illustrate how the teachers sometimes purposely drew on students’ diverse lived experiences and perspectives, in ways that seemed to contribute to students’ critical interpretation and response to various social-conflict issues.
CHAPTER 5

IDENTITY CONNECTIONS: CONFLICTUAL ISSUES
ACROSS TIME, SPACE, AND CULTURE

History is sacred because it is the only chance that you have of knowing who you are outside of what’s been rained down upon you from a hostile environment. And when you go to the documents created inside the culture, you get another story. You get another history. The history is sacred and the highest, most hallowed songs in tones are pulled into service to deliver that story. (Latta, 1992, quoted in Dillard & Okpalaoka, 2011)

In this chapter, I show how the teachers in the three classroom sites used curriculum content to connect students’ experiences and identities. They presented different—and controversial—historical, religious, political, and identity-linked issues, positioning them as conflictual in order to develop connections with students’ experiences and background knowledge. Such issues included religious identities, the meaning of democracy in home countries, immigration patterns, citizenship, social structures and power, and the dichotomy between rural and urban communities. How the teachers presented the various conflictual issues influenced how the students participated and responded during classroom discussions. Teachers’ choices of texts, activities, and discussion topics provided opportunities as well as impediments for students to critically reflect on their diverse identities and cross-cultural experiences within local, global, and historical contexts. When the curriculum connected to students’ lived experiences and cultural histories, it stimulated more opportunities for the participation and inclusion of diverse student voices.

The contentious and sometimes sensitive topics presented allowed the more confident students (and sometimes the quiet students) to voice their perspectives in the classroom. Sometimes the voices of less vocal, perhaps marginalized students were
silenced in these discussions, for example when personal, familial patterns of immigration were being discussed. However, during small group interviews in all classroom sites, students articulated their challenges and their opportunities in engaging in classroom discussion and activities, depending on how they viewed the learning material as connected or not connected to their personal experiences and identities. Diverse students articulated their experiences with learning in classroom environments where their peers, of both similar and different cultural backgrounds, influenced their learning and, at times, expanded their repertoires of cultural knowledge and understanding.

An issue (e.g., should abortion be free and legal?) is very different from a topic (e.g., abortion) or a unit of study (e.g., sex education). Issues also differ from current events. For instance, the uprising in Egypt in early 2011 was a global current event; however, the question about whether Canada should have intervened in the uprising was a controversial issue, because some minorities saw it as unsettled (i.e., not in agreement with Canada’s intervention). Hess (2009) studied and advocated teaching controversial political issues, and distinguished two basic types of issue, settled and unsettled. Settled issues are those that the dominant society is generally in agreement about; for example, racism is unacceptable (Hess, 2001). Hess argued that settled issues do not constitute pedagogically useful controversial issues, because they do not offer choices that would encourage students to practise democracy and act politically. In contrast, unsettled controversial political issues are those over which the dominant society’s views are widely split; such issues would include the death penalty, abortion, and immigration policies. Unsettled issues provide valuable democratic learning opportunities.
Contentious issues raised in school curricula include both settled and unsettled questions. Although Hess (2001, 2009) would consider racism a settled issue in most contexts, elements of this problem are unsettled issues in current and ongoing conflicts, such as whether to accept illegal immigrants or those claiming refugee status. Hess (2009) “purposely [did] not include historical issues, such as what caused a particular event in history” (p. 38). She argued that while these topics were indeed controversial, classroom curriculum where the question and answer are not settled in society should address issues that allow for more than one legitimate answer.

A wide range of questions and issues raised in classrooms may or may not be related to diverse students’ identities and their engagement. Identities help to shape the ways individuals understand and approach social and political conflict issues in classroom settings. Identity is multiple, ever-changing, and fluid and contains nuances of various social contexts (Hall, 2000). Identity is also constructed and understood through difference (Allahar, 2006; Gérin-Lajoie, 2011; Hall, 2006). Thus, discussions of conflicts and differences create opportunities for students and teachers to interpret and respond to issues through their multiple identities, which in turn are based on their diverse lived experiences and perspectives.

In the following vignettes, I illustrate how teachers embedded various types of conflicts in curriculum content and pedagogies, and how these influenced diverse students’ engagement and inclusion in each classroom. I begin with Mr. Hiroshi’s Grade 7 class. Mr. Hiroshi frequently presented conflicting perspectives and ideas in his open classroom climate, predominantly in his history and literacy lessons. Mr. Hiroshi introduced historical topics as issues, thus including conflict in his implemented
curriculum. For instance, he invited students to discern causes and outcomes of conflict, by guiding his class to compare past and present wars during classroom activities. He drew on his personal bi-ethnic Japanese and Anglo-Canadian cultural identity to connect to his immigrant students and to invite them to discuss how their allegiances to Canada could complicate their connection to their countries of ancestry, particularly if Canada were to be in conflict with their country of origin.

Next, I discuss Ms. Marlee’s Grade 4 class, showing how she addressed an interpersonal conflict about religious difference or intolerance that came up between two girls, a Muslim and a Christian, in her classroom. Ms. Marlee guided students to contextualize this conflict by asking her students to research and present stories from their various religions. By inviting these disclosures linked to the identities of diverse students in the classroom, Ms. Marlee embedded conflictual religious content in her implemented curriculum. Ms. Marlee, a Catholic turned atheist, told me in my first interview with her that she was confident in her ability to entertain beliefs from different religions, and she demonstrated this self-assurance when she led the discussion of creation stories students brought in from their various cultures.

Lastly, I discuss Mrs. Amrita’s Grade 5 class, and show how she introduced conflictual issues that directly related to students’ family experiences. She invited her students to share personal immigration experiences orally in class, and compared and contrasted these with fictitious and historical immigration stories from the textbook. Mrs. Amrita invited critique and feedback from students. In doing so, she invited conflicting narratives into the classroom in ways that apparently encouraged the engagement and
participation of all students; they felt connected to these issues, motivated by the topic, and safe to talk about their and their peers’ diverse lived experiences.

**Battling Identities in War: Deconstructing Historical and Political Issues**

In Mr. Hiroshi’s class, students frequently engaged in discussion about diversity and social conflicts. The issues discussions led by Mr. Hiroshi encouraged students to reflect individually and in small groups on connections between lesson topics and their own experiences and histories. Mr. Hiroshi taught his students about the War of 1812 as both a historical and political conflict. He did not ask “Who won the War of 1812?”¹ Instead, after stating the typical Canadian historical contention that it was a war that no one won, he asked his students to consider what the causes of the war might have been:

Mr. H: There are causes for every war, no matter what. Like, right now there is a war happening. Why is America in the Middle East?

Akmed: 9/11.

Thanjai: Is that George Bush keeps on attacking them and the gas prices are going up.

Mr. H: There’s a variety of reasons, but George Bush is not even the president anymore.

Tyrone: When do the British and the U.S. get along? *(not responded to)*

Mr. H: So the War of 1812 is considered the war that no one won, so think about why that might be. *(OBS, January 27, 2011)*

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¹ The answer to this is still contentious among many historians. Americans typically refer to themselves as the winner, while Canadians typically acknowledge the British North American colony (that would later become Canada) as the winner of this war.
Mr. Hiroshi’s open-ended questioning about causes of wars stimulated mostly male students, here, to respond. Akmed (a Muslim male) and two other Sri Lankan males said that they thought the terrorist attack on the United States on September 11th 2001 (9/11) was the cause of the war in the Middle East. Tyrone posed a controversial rhetorical question that seemed to illustrate how he understood this conflict: when countries do not get along, they go to war. Tyrone was not provided with enough information to take a side against the instigator of the conflict and appeared to make the assumption that both countries, at this point, struggled with building a peaceful relationship.

Since Mr. Hiroshi had positioned the War of 1812 as a war that no one had won, he asked the students to figure out why that might be. In small groups, students worked excitedly to discover the truth about this unresolved conflict, consulting with each other, and reviewing information online and in the classroom textbook, *Their Stories, Our History* (Aitken, Haskings-Winner, Mewhinney, & Rubenstein, 2006). Crystal and Tyrone, both outspoken students, were in the same group, along with a South Asian male and female. They all discussed the war amongst themselves. Tyrone, after interpreting what he had read in the text and heard from his teacher, articulated his beliefs against the British regime: “Yo, the British people got temper tantrums.” Tyrone, an influential male, sparked excitement in his small group, who looked to the text for evidence with which to counter Tyrone’s views on Britain’s attitude. Kadil (M-SA) and Crystal (F-W/SA) cited

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2 Published in 2006, this classroom textbook is relatively new. It is renowned for its critical and inclusive perspective on Canadian history and its critical thinking activities to promote historical literacy. The edition also includes an optional Catholic supplement for use in Catholic Schools in Canadian provinces (Ontario, Alberta, and Saskatchewan) and territories (Northwest Territories, Yukon, and Nunavut) that have separate school systems.
Tecumseh, an Indian chief, as a controversial personality who had resisted the United States and fought (and died) alongside the British during the War of 1812.

Mr. Hiroshi’s mathematics lessons were as dynamic as his social studies lessons; the engagement level and participation patterns were equally high, and many students called out answers to his mostly information-gathering questions. In social studies and language arts, Mr. Hiroshi did not spend as much time speaking and writing on the board at the front of the class as he did in mathematics class. Instead, giving lessons on debates, reflective writing, and making inferences, he consistently posed questions that provided opportunities for students to reflect on their values and to interpret content. During many history lessons, Mr. Hiroshi sat off to the side on a bar stool, sharing information and facilitating discussion about historical and present-day conflicts. He taught history through multiple stories that extended across time and space; he connected current and past conflicts in order to help students reflect more critically on the present.

One day, Mr. Hiroshi informed his students that they would be talking about the battle on the Plains of Abraham that had ended the conflict between the British and French. Doing a drumroll, he went on to say: “It [the war] ended in . . . [various guesses from students] . . . 15 minutes!” Students responded with equal enthusiasm: “15 minutes!” Mr. Hiroshi gathered students’ attention and positioned this conflict as an inquiry: “Now, we have to find out how!” (OBS, January 6, 2011). He went on to explain that the different military styles and tactics of both the British and French were indicators

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3 On September 13, 1759, the British (with 4,500 troops) led by James Wolfe and the French (with 3,000 troops) led by Montcalm engaged in an impulsive and unplanned battle over Quebec. Wolfe died as a victor on the battlefield; Montcalm, who was wounded and withdrew from battle, died later from his injuries. On each side, 650 troops died.
of warfare intellect and strength. He drew an analogy between the War of 1812 and contemporary wars:

Mr. H: It is no secret that war is still happening right here and right now.

Students: (calling out) Afghanistan, South Korea!

Mr. H: Yeah, in the Middle East. Why is war happening there?

Students: (mostly male) Because of the 9/11 attacks. (OBS, January 6, 2011)

Mr. Hiroshi received his students’ responses and acknowledged the subjective truth in them as he went on to show YouTube video clips of war footage, captured at various points in history. Many of the boys, particularly Tyrone, called out names of different weapons that they recognized from videogames. Mr. Hiroshi acknowledged the boys’ background knowledge: “A lot of you play videogames that include modern warfare. . . . See, Tyrone knows what a guillotine is.” The classroom was quiet when the YouTube video of World War II footage streamed on the screen, as students looked on attentively. Most of the boys, especially those skilled in warfare videogames, with evident interest called out names of guns and weapons and “ohh hed” and “ahhhed” at the violent attacks at different points on the clips. Many of the nondominant boys and almost all of the girls remained silent, but still actively engaged in the lesson, with their bodies leaning forward, their eyes on the video and their teacher. Many smiled, apparently entertained by the boys’ engagement and commentary about various weapons.

Mr. Hiroshi chose to present the conflict between James Wolfe⁴ and Montcalm⁵ to further discuss the context of war between the British and French. “What is Wolfe’s

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⁴ James P. Wolfe (1727-1759) was a British Army officer, also known as “The Conqueror of Quebec” as he has been commemorated in Canadian history for his victory over the French in Canada. Mr. Hiroshi used his death to illustrate bravery and heroism in warfare. The British won the battle and Wolfe died on the battlefield.
problem?” asked Mr. Hiroshi. “You’re in battle. What are you going to do?” Crystal and Anita, both vocally dominant females, raised their hands simultaneously and announced: “Get resources!” Mr. Hiroshi gathered additional responses as he prepared everyone for deeper reflection. “OK, how did they signal the troops? Email?” Students laughed at Mr. Hiroshi’s historical anomaly and began to enthusiastically raise their hands to respond:

- Nira (F-SA): A runner!
- Crystal (F-W/SA): Attacking from behind.
- Anita (F-SA): If they were signalled they would’ve been more prepared.
- Mr. H: Who?
- Anita: The French.
- Bravia (F-SA): It would’ve been a surprise to them.
- Mr. H: Yeah, for sure.
- Tajinder (M-SA): The British could’ve attacked differently if they weren’t on the Plains of Abraham. Like if they had moved their people back.
- Crystal (F-W/SA): They needed more people. (OBS, January 7, 2011)

Using this history as a conflictual issue, Mr. Hiroshi positioned students in the material, representing the reality of the battle through online visual media, photos from their textbook, and connections to warfare videogames. He went on to ask students to imagine that they had the authority and agency as decision makers, which stimulated their inclusion in the discussion:

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5 Louis Joseph de Montcalm-Gozon, Marquis de Saint-Veran (1712–1759) was a French general who defended Quebec against British invasion. He was wounded during the battle on the Plains of Abraham. He lost the battle, and later succumbed to his injuries off the battlefield.
Mr. H: I want you guys to think that you’re Montcalm and then make a
decision about what you are going to do. *You have to make the call.*

The British are on the Plains of Abraham. What are you going to do?

What do you do? Why did Montcalm make the decision that he made?

*What would you have done?*

This decision-making question encouraged the students to draw on personal background
knowledge and what they had learned from the text.

During the next history lesson, Mr. Hiroshi asked students to come back together
from their five-minute free-time chat and said: “Let’s talk about our decision-making
process.” Sitting on the bar stool, his text open and turned towards the students on the
table, he commended them for the creative choices they had made when they took on the
role of Montcalm. Everyone agreed that Montcalm had made a bad choice. He then
turned his students’ attention to an issue about tensions of aligning with one’s personal
ethnocultural identity (i.e., ancestry) and/or political (i.e., nation-state) group identity.
Mr. Hiroshi reflected on the responses of students who had argued that Montcalm, as a
French general, had wanted to protect Quebec from the British, and attempted to
characterize Montcalm:

Mr. H: I think that everyone knew that if they lose Quebec, they lose the war.

Quebec was, like, the spot. I think one of you said that he had a lot of
pride—a big, bad ego. What does that mean?

Crystal: *(raises her hand and Mr. H calls on her)* He thought he was all that
and was really cocky.

Tyrone: *(pointing to Crystal)* Like her. *(She gives him a dirty look and turns*
Mr. H: Yeah, OK, so he thinks he’s all that, but what does that mean in the setting or context that he’s in?

Thanjai: He probably wants to be recognized.

Jerome: He wanted to die on the battlefield.

Mr. H: Yeah, he thought he’d be considered a hero if he died on the battlefield. (OBS, January 7, 2011)

Many of the higher social status male students participated actively in this discussion, where decision making about this conflict was at the forefront. Tyrone, Thanjai, and Jerome consistently shared their viewpoints, often calling out their responses to share what they would have done. Lower social status males and females also demonstrated active engagement in the lesson, their eyes on Mr. Hiroshi and their peers who spoke. Crystal, however, a higher social status female, opted to state her point in what seemed to be an implicitly male-oriented discussion. Tyrone, who clearly saw the lesson and topic as his playing field, rebuked her by rolling his eyes and saying under his breath, “Awww maaann.”

Crystal’s position as an insider-outsider in this discussion was complicated by her minority-majority status; she was half-White and thus an ethnocultural minority in this class. Mr. Hiroshi had used Shaun Tan’s (2007) illustration-only picture book, The Arrival, to guide the class in a lesson on inferencing; the students had inferred that the illustrations told a story about an immigrant arriving to a new land. The character’s alien status is played out as different kinds of creatures surround him and provide challenges to his acceptance and integration. This served as an opportunity for many of the immigrant
students in the class to connect to this literature and activity, but in an interview with me Crystal reflected that when she had first arrived at Georgetown she had felt like the man depicted in *The Arrival*—an outsider. However, she moved up the social status ladder quickly as she was admired by many other female students in the class. This appeared to boost her confidence. As she put it: “I just say whatever’s on my mind” (SI, April 8, 2011).

Mr. Hiroshi posed open-ended questions to prompt diverse students’ responses. He went on to ask a provocative question, in which some students evidently felt a concerted interest: “Who won the battle?” Almost the whole class, males and females, responded: “Wolfe! Wolfe! Wolfe!” Mr. Hiroshi corrected their historical accuracy: “Wolfe didn’t win, because he died, but OK, British won and they took over so New France is now what?” Jerome responded, shouting out, “New British!” Mr. Hiroshi laughed and commended Jerome for “being close” to having guessed correctly: British North America. Mr. Hiroshi continually got his students’ attention with his questioning and repositioning of the different sides in battle:

Mr. H: Hey, wait a minute! There were still lots of French people in New France, right? They weren’t all killed. So what happened to those French people?

Thanjai: *(Sri Lankan male)* They were deported!

Mr. Hiroshi continued his storytelling, stimulating the students’ attention. He went on to explain that, while the French weren’t deported, they were told:

Mr. H: Listen to the British at all costs! Meaning that if there was ever a war again, *what do the French have to do?*
Tyrone: Suit up!

Mr. H: Yeah, they’d suit up in the British uniform and fight for the British. 

Yeah, so is that a good idea or not a good idea?

Students: (many respond, mostly males) Good idea. Good idea. Good idea.

Mr. Hiroshi further complicated the conflict between the British and French by adding the layer of identity and allegiance to one’s culture. He raised the issue of the Acadians’ disconnection to their French heritage. Consistent with his pedagogical approach and norms for engagement, Mr. Hiroshi asked open-ended questions, allowing multiple students to respond, often at the same time:

Mr. H: OK, remember how the Acadians lived in Acadia. What was their background or heritage?

Thanjai: (MS) French.

Mr. H: OK, and did they consider themselves French or Acadian?

Students: Acadian.

Mr. H: Why did the Acadians feel more identity with Acadia than with New France?

Tajinder: (MS) Because they wanted to be neutral.

Mr. H: But why? How did that happen?

Jerome: (MS) They didn’t want to be caught between [sides in] the war with the French.

Mr. Hiroshi’s questioning problematized how students understood identity. By probing how different ethnic and cultural groups had navigated their identities during times of conflict, Mr. Hiroshi invited students to explore the fluidity of their own
identities in relation to their sociopolitical context, in Canada. Mr. Hiroshi chose to illustrate his allegiance to Canada in relation to his personal identity and heritage:

Mr. H: OK, but how did that happen? OK, here’s a better example. . . . Now I hope this never ever happens, but if Japan would go to war with Canada, and I have a Japanese background, would I feel loyal to Japan?

Students: No, no, no.

Mr. H: No, right. Hopefully that’ll never happen, right, hopefully not. But yeah, the answer is No. I don’t feel loyal to Japan, even though I have a Japanese last name. And did the Acadians feel loyal to the French?

Students: Nooooo.

Mr. H: So why don’t I feel loyal to Japan?

Students: Because you live here.

Mr. H: Yeah, I was born here, my dad was born here, my grandfather was born here . . . So I don’t feel loyal to Japan, or in their case France. Were the Acadians born in France?

Students: Nooooo.

Mr. H: Yeah, so even though they had French last names, they didn’t identify with France, they were, like, “I’m not French.” So, what happened, generations after generation have gone by and so much so they don’t associate themselves with Japan. So, I’m neutral. (OBS, January 7, 2011)
Mr. Hiroshi’s representation of his own Japanese cultural heritage and identity within Canada and Canadianness had a clear influence on students, who may have experienced a sense of cultural disequilibrium in balancing their own cultural allegiances to both their countries of ancestry and to Canada. His disclosure provided these ethnocultural minority students with an opportunity to compare and contrast, and thus to reflect on, their developing identities with his own. Most students did not contest Mr. Hiroshi’s stance; they were silent, and listened with respect. Students who either shouted “Noooo” or who remained silent appeared to indicate their agreement with their teacher—that Mr. Hiroshi was loyal to Canada and would therefore be unaffected if Canada and Japan were at war because he would remain on the Canadian side.6 Mr. Hiroshi went on to discuss how the Acadians who, after generations, carried no loyalty to France. When Mr. Hiroshi asked his class to explain why the Acadians might have felt more loyalty to British North America than they did to France, Crystal announced, “Because they were like the Acadians of [British North] America and they wanted to be neutral.” In her outspoken manner, Crystal echoed her teacher’s belief: loyalty to one’s nation-state would override loyalty based on ethnocultural identification.

This classroom discussion carried complex messages about identity and cultural allegiances and maintaining loyalty when in cross-group conflict. No students shared any of their personal experiences aloud, but as an observer I noticed tension in the classroom.

A significant number of students in the class were Tamil Sri Lankan, many of whom had

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6 While Mr. Hiroshi chose to take this position of remaining loyal to Canada in front of his students, he also chose to not mention the history of the Japanese internment in Canada. His avoidance of this historical conflict was even further complicated because Mr. Hiroshi’s grandfather, who he referenced in this lesson as being born in Canada, was affected by the internment. During 1941 to 1947 all Japanese people living in Canada, regardless of whether they had even been to Japan in their lifetime, having been born in Canada, were given the choice to either go (back) to Japan or leave their home and relocate to an internment camp. Clearly, in the spirit in promoting dominant Canadian values, he opted to not share this history.
participated in recent protests in southern Ontario against current government policy, to argue for Canada’s intervention in the war in Sri Lanka. For instance, in an interview with a group of Tamil Sri Lankan females, Sunita stated: “I really hate the Canadian government right now,” to which her peer Jawali replied, “’Cause it’s our people who’re getting affected” (SI, April 18, 2011; also see Chapter 6). Unlike Crystal, Sunita and Jawali did not whole-heartedly agree with Mr. Hiroshi’s decision to remain loyal to Canada alone in times of war. The students were all in some way implicated in this discussion, by virtue of all being first- or second-generation immigrants; unlike their third-generation immigrant teacher, they perhaps felt more connected to their ethnic identity. Crystal, who was known to sometimes contest Mr. Hiroshi’s perspectives, aligned with him; the other students chose to not challenge their teacher’s authority. Mr. Hiroshi—a young, vibrant, and engaging teacher—was a great influence on his students. In this instance, it may therefore have been challenging for some students to share their alternative or conflicting narratives—in which some students may have chosen Sri Lanka over Canada.

Mr. Hiroshi’s students were aware of his practice of including current world issues in the curriculum. For instance, in an interview, Crystal and Anita (higher social status females) both said they believed that they were knowledgeable about the world and confident in their preparation for participation in society because of the ongoing world issues discussions that Mr. Hiroshi had implemented:

Crystal: It’s good to know about what’s going on in the world. . . . Mr. Hiroshi doesn’t shelter us from what’s going on in the world; he’s preparing us for high school and for university and for the world.
Anita: Like, he tells us everything. . . . And yeah, we’re lucky to be in Canada, where that’s not happening to us. (SI, April 8, 2011)

Here, Crystal and Anita showed how, for them, discussions about world issues had created awareness of global conflicts and a sense of connection to the world. At the same time, Anita’s assertion, “we’re lucky to be in Canada,” illustrated that not all students may have felt personally loyal to their ancestral country.

The following snippet illustrates how Mr. Hiroshi compared the Rebellions of 1837 (see Chapter 6) to his students’ lived experiences:

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

Mona: Yes. . . . My neighbours and my family are still there.

Mr. H: So it may not affect a lot of you now directly, but in a quest to make us think about things in our schema [here on the current events board] we want to recognize what’s happening in the world. (OBS, February 4, 2011)

While most students initially may have felt disconnected from this conflict, it seemed to become more personally relevant when Mr. Hiroshi posed the question “Does it affect us?” and their classmate, Mona, shared her personal connection to it. This is an example of how a social conflict was connected to students’ personal experiences and
identities. In an interview, Mr. Hiroshi reflected on how he had connected the Acadian expulsion\footnote{The expulsion of Acadians from the Maritime region by the British military.} to the war in Sri Lanka, as an example of how he extended prescribed curriculum to make it relevant and accessible to his diverse students, many of whom were from Sri Lanka or had family in Sri Lanka.

Mr. H: I incorporate a lot of world issues because I feel that they don’t read the news at all or watch the news. So just to try to make things a little closer to home for them. . . . We had a whole bulletin board up with stuff (about the Sri Lankan protests). Yeah we do things like that, but um, I don’t know if it’s, like, because they’re brown, but I think it’s because they’re all in Grade 7. So trying to talk to them about Acadian expulsion, well it’s hard. It’s the hardest concept for them to grasp.

CP: Yeah.

Mr. H: But, but if we can modernize it by using examples from the Tamil people in Sri Lanka. You know anyone could connect to that. Tamil people might be able to understand it a little better. (TI, December 17, 2010)

Mr. Hiroshi believed that modernizing historical conflicts (e.g., the Acadian expulsion) by relating them to the present (e.g., war in Sri Lanka) would contribute to a deeper understanding of both past and present conflicts. Through the study of current events in relation to historical events, a range of diverse students, including quiet ones and those of lower social status, were given opportunities to individually and collectively shape their perceptions of their world. Mr. Hiroshi presented issues that he found
fascinating (war-related games, facts, and news) and it appeared, from the students’ level of engagement, that most agreed with their teacher’s positions on the conflictual issues he presented. Many of the male students participated verbally more frequently during discussions about war and weapons. Most girls chimed in with whole-group responses—such as “Yeah!” or “Noooo!”—which Mr. Hiroshi encouraged. In some instances, when students’ personal identities were engaged, quiet females, including Mona, also shared their perspectives and connections.

Overall, the multitude of connections amongst students, and between students and Mr. Hiroshi, meant that there was little or no open disagreement about alternative perspectives on some conflictual issues. Mr. Hiroshi expressed this awareness himself during our interview: “The stuff I didn’t agree with, they didn’t agree with either” (TI, December 17, 2010). It is possible that some students did not concur with their teacher’s position, and their response may have been to self-silence (see Chapter 7).

**Religious Conflicts and Canadian Identities**

I observed Ms. Marlee, in her Grade 4 class, facilitating a lesson motivated by an openly expressed religious conflict she had observed erupting between two girls in her classroom: Fatima, a Muslim, and Tina, a Christian. This was the first time Ms. Marlee had experienced such an incident in her teaching career, she said in her interview. In the classroom, Ms. Marlee voiced the perspective that people should all practise acceptance and understanding of other cultures to maintain a harmonious community. Fatima and Tina, who were both usually vocally dominant in class, did not reply aloud to Ms. Marlee after she said this; they self-silenced. The topic appeared to be closed, settled.
When I arrived at Ms. Marlee’s class early that January, right after lunch break, I immediately noticed the tension in the room. Fatima was clearly upset and was crying at her desk. The lunch duty supervisor reported the incident to Ms. Marlee, who asked Fatima and Tina to speak with her privately in the hallway so she could personally hear the details of what had transpired between them.

Tina, the one Black female in the class, who Ms. Marlee told me came from an observant Christian family, had told Fatima, the only one in the class who wore a hijab, that her God was not the real God because her faith didn’t believe in Jesus. Ms. Marlee asked me whether she should talk to the whole class, to discuss this specific situation with them. I told her that, in my opinion, she should speak more generally about religious diversity rather than pinpointing the girls in the class right after this conflictual episode. This was the first and only time I observed Ms. Marlee expressing her personal beliefs passionately and with deep emotion. The classroom was silent as everyone listened to their teacher’s 15-minute speech.

Ms. Marlee, clearly upset, began by saying: “When you have conflict in the playground, it shouldn’t be over religion.” She pleaded passionately with the students to “Fight for those who don’t have food to eat, fight for those who are violated or oppressed, but don’t fight with each other about religion and about whether or not someone else’s God is better than yours.” The two girls who had been in conflict during recess were friends and both normally volunteered to speak frequently during whole-class discussions. However, in this episode they did not speak to each other, nor to the class, during this teacher-led recitation. The lecture and minimal question and answer period continued for the entire 40-minute social studies period.
Ms. M: Depending on who you ask, an innocent question like “Do you believe in Jesus?” can actually be an insult, right? People come to the public school system because we’re all different religions, we’re all different creeds, we’re all different ethnicities, and we’re all learning to be Canadian together. And it's a wonderful thing. OK. (short pause) We don’t go to the Catholic school system across the way. I was raised Catholic, but still chose to teach in a public board because I have had friends and have friends who are not Catholic. (OBS, January 10, 2011)

A few students raised their hands to ask questions, such as Who is Allah, What is Catholic, Who is Jesus. Ms. Marlee responded by offering matter-of-fact responses, such as “Allah is another word for God.” The students did not respond to each other’s questions.

Veeran: (male, Sri Lankan/Hindu) What’s Catholic?

Ms. M: Catholic is another term for Christian. I’m actually what they call a nonpractising Catholic. There are so many different religions out there and I believe that every single one has a valid point. OK. (short pause) Muslims (short pause) do not believe in Jesus as the Son of God. They do not think that Jesus is God. In Christianity, for some reason, because Jesus was born as the Son of God, all right, he became linked to God. And some Christians actually believe that Jesus was born and walked the Earth, but not everybody believes that. In the Muslim religion, they believe in one of the many prophets, Mohammed, but
God is above them all. It does not mean that if a Muslim tells you that they do not believe in Jesus as the Son of God that they do not believe in God. They do believe in God and their God is as valid as any other God. He is as valid as the God of Christianity. And as valid as the God of Judaism. What a person believes religiously is what many of them believe inherently; it is part of their being and no one has the right to question that. (OBS, January 10, 2011)

Ms. Marlee then proceeded to ask students to raise their hands if they were the religion that she called out: “Christians?” (Tina raised her hand); “Muslims?” (five or six students raised their hands); “Hindus?” (no one raised a hand, even though there were Hindu students in the class); “Jews?” (no one raised a hand); “Tamils?” (a number of students raised their hands; they hadn’t responded as Hindus, but did identify as Tamil). Some students chose not to participate.

Ms. Marlee then talked about her own identity as a second-generation immigrant, to remind her students that their engagement in conflicts over religion violated the foundational goal of their families’ choice to emigrate: to live in peaceful Canada.

Ms. M: We are all in Canada here. Religion is not worth fighting over. Your families came to this country, my family came to this country—all for a better future, all right. And some people’s families come to the country to escape the conflict of religion that was destroying their country.

Veeran: (calls out) There is a war in Sri Lanka over religion.

Ms. M: (questions him) Like with the Tamils, there’s a war?
Veeran:  *(and other Tamil males, responding together)* No, with the Hindus and Muslims.

Ms. M:  Oh, right.

Students:  *(Some male students began to then make fighting noises with their mouths, and many students began mumbling to their peers. Ms. Marlee does not respond to this)*. (OBS, January 10, 2011)

When students left to go to gym class, I noticed that the two girls in the original conflict were at opposite sides of the line formed at the door.

This religious conflict was a critical incident in this Grade 4 class. It interrupted the regular social studies program and invited an alternative implemented curriculum that stimulated the opportunity to learn through and about diversity. The next week (OBS, January 19, 2011), during the same Social Studies unit, students were reading aloud from their textbook *(Nelson Literacy 4, n.d.)* about the Arctic lowlands. In a sidebar of the book, there was an Inuit creation story. Ms. Marlee stopped the class read-aloud to reflect on this text, “The Earth and the People,” which began with the words, “The Earth was here before the people. / The very first people / Came out of the ground.” Ms. Marlee asked her students where they had heard similar kinds of stories and what kind of story it was. “A true story,” offered Tina. “A fiction story,” said Fatima. Ms. Marlee then went to the board and wrote “Creation Story.” She told the students: “Every culture in the world has a creation story. A creation story tells how man [sic] came to be on the planet.” As she said this, many students began making noises while they raised their hands, “Oh, oh, oh, I know, me, me, me,” indicating affective engagement with this idea; they wanted to speak. Ms. Marlee continued, telling students that this was an Aboriginal creation story,
and it said that people came out of the ground. She continued, saying, “The creation story I was taught in school was about Adam and Eve.” Tina enthusiastically responded, without raising her hand, “I know that one!” Ms. Marlee didn’t invite any further comment from Tina. Instead, she directed her questioning to Fatima: “Fatima, is there a creation story in the Muslim culture?” Fatima, unsure of how to answer the question right away, began to converse with another Muslim student in the class, Farat, to think of a proper response. After conferring, she announced with a quiet giggle, “We have one, but it’s too long.” Fatima’s collaboration with her Muslim peer helped her to respond to Ms. Marlee’s request. It also illustrated how other Muslim students in this class, such as Farat, had become engaged in the lesson when asked, also by the teacher, to reflect on their personal religious identity.

Swetha (F-SA), referring to the Aboriginal story, asked: “So that means that my great, great, great, grandmother came from the Earth?” To which another male student (SA) said, “My cousin told me that the first people came from Africa.” Ms. Marlee replied, “That may be true. Science shows us how far back we go, so that one may actually be based in fact.” Again, Swetha questioned this so-called fact: “So we’re all African?” Ms Marlee replied, “The oldest human bones were found in Africa,” and then questioned the students, “So how did they get from Africa to other parts of the world?” Shaun, who was becoming anxious in his seat, spoke: “They travelled!” Ms. Marlee reprimanded Shaun for speaking without raising his hand, and reminded him to remain quiet. Ms. Marlee then confirmed what he had said: Yes, she said, people immigrated from Africa to other parts of the world. Tina abruptly raised her hand, and asked: “What if you already know the creation story?” Ms. Marlee didn’t acknowledge Tina’s comment
and tried to close what was becoming a conflictual conversation, even as Tina continued, “Can we tell the real story now?!?” Ms. Marlee waved, clapped her hands, and gathered her students’ attention as she changed the subject, by announcing their homework: “Tonight, you’re going to go home and ask your parents what your creation story from your culture is, and then you’re going to write it out and bring it to class to share with all of us.”

When Ms. Marlee stopped the class lesson to extend her implemented curriculum content beyond the textbook to make it relevant to students’ diversities and conflicts, she integrated some of their perspectives and identities into the curriculum. Many students were excited to share; many simultaneously spoke over each other. At the same time, Ms. Marlee maintained her authority, by directing the questions and responding on behalf of some students. At the end of the lesson, Ms. Marlee told me privately that she purposely had not engaged Tina’s comment about her knowing the creation story, because she had wanted to make sure other voices were heard and to make sure that the recent religious conflict was not escalated into another debate. Thus, Ms. Marlee’s initial approach was somewhat conflict avoidant. However, in first addressing the conflict itself and then postponing any potential conflict dialogue, she invited her students to prepare for sharing their different religious stories during the next social studies class.

Interviews about this religious conflict conducted with Tina and Fatima separately, and with other Grade 4 students, support my interpretation that this critical incident served to identify cultural and religious difference in a way that perpetuated marginalization of some students, and increased the confidence of other students who had their identities affirmed and recognized during this discussion.
Ms. Marlee typically chose who spoke in class discussions. During our interviews, Fatima expressed discomfort at not normally feeling heard or recognized in class because of Ms. Marlee’s strict participation patterns, and because of the lack of discussion about Muslims in the curriculum content. Tina, on the other hand, was very quiet when I asked her to tell me about what had happened when she shared her Christian religious story with Fatima. While I had developed relationships with most of the students in this Grade 4 class, particularly the girls, I was left wondering whether Tina had felt that what she perceived as my own religious and cultural affiliation was a barrier to her communicating how she felt and what she had experienced. Ms. Marlee was the only other person in the class who shared Tina’s African-Canadian heritage. With her, Tina exhibited greater comfort in disclosing her personal religious beliefs, and actually demonstrated excitement in class, in raising her hand and saying, “I know that story!” and “What if you already know the creation story? Can we tell the real story now!?” Ms. Marlee told the students directly that she had been taught the Adam and Eve story, the same one that Tina had brought to share. This explicit cultural and religious alliance clearly made Tina feel affirmed and included when sharing her religious perspectives in class, with and beyond Ms. Marlee, even when Ms. Marlee had tried to impede that dominance. However, in a group interview with me and other South Asian females, she shied away from disclosing or further discussing her religious beliefs. Tina’s reticence to discuss her Christian identity with me, a South Asian researcher, in a group of her South Asian peers was evident.

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8 Tina wrote her story out on a piece of paper. In capital letters it was titled: “Creation Story!” “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. / God said let there be light, and there was light. He called the light day and the darkness night. / On the second day, God made the sky. / On the third day, God made land, plants, and trees. / On the fourth day, God made light for the day and light for the night. / On the fifth day, God made birds to fly and creatures to swim in the sea. / On the sixth day, God made land animals and made man in his image. / On the seventh day, he rested” (DOC, January 24, 2011)
Asian (mostly Hindu and Muslim) peers illustrated that she most likely did not feel as confident voicing a minority perspective without having Ms. Marlee present to affirm her identity.

This is an example of how my perceived personal identity may have influenced the kind of dialogue that emerged in small group interviews. It also strengthened my observation and inclination that Tina saw Ms. Marlee as an ally. Tina seemed to feel culturally connected to Ms. Marlee because of their shared African-Canadian heritage and because of Ms. Marlee’s acknowledgement and knowledge of the Christian faith. Ms. Marlee told me in an interview that Tina had screamed “Yesss!” and high-fived her mother on the first day of school when she found out she had a Black teacher. Presumably, Tina believed that Ms. Marlee would speak for her in this instance and would represent “their” side during the religious conflict with the “Other-Others.” In this way, Tina and Ms. Marlee became a dominant minority (i.e., Black-Christian) in this class of East and South Asian ethnic minorities.

The lesson in which students shared their different creation stories opened a discussion about diversity within and among religions. It provided opportunities for many students to share their familial beliefs, which seemed to foster a sense of social and identity inclusion for diverse students. None of the students in Ms. Marlee’s Grade 4 class identified with Aboriginal Canadian culture. However, the Aboriginal creation story had served as an example of difference, and created a space for Ms. Marlee to affirm that all students had different—and valid—cultural and religious identities. While only about eight students came prepared to tell their stories in front of the class, many others engaged in the discussion of those stories, feeling free to voice perspectives similar and
different among their peers as they asked and responded, to both their teacher and peers’ questions, about their religious beliefs. For instance, when Fatima shared her version of a Muslim creation story, the typically quiet Farat added to Fatima’s story by providing additional details about followers of Islam.

Creationism was a topic that sparked considerable interest in Ms. Marlee’s Grade 4 class, and seemed to help students develop a greater appreciation for the diversity that existed among their classmates. For example, Swetha, who had been an excited participant during the reading of the Aboriginal creation story, came prepared to tell a story from her Tamil Sri Lankan/Hindu perspective. She introduced various Hindu gods, creating considerable engagement amongst her classmates. Many, including Tina and Fatima, listened respectfully and attentively. When she finished her story, there was a murmur of voices: students made comments aloud and to their peers, some students raised their hands to ask her questions, and a few even asked if she would to tell more Hindu stories. I asked Swetha in an interview whether she thought anyone had disagreed with her story, but she felt that everyone had agreed with her because they were engaged and interested in what she was saying, noting her initial apprehension: “I was kinda nervous about sharing that kind of stuff. I was happy that the class understood what I was saying . . . and they even asked for copies of my story” (SI, April 13, 2011). It appeared that another creation story with a divergent perspective had engaged the students in wanting to learn more about diversity. These students, considerably younger than Mr.

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9 Swetha wrote this story: “This creation story people believed in my religion is that there was one god named Ganapathi. One day he was dancing. That time when Ganapathi was dancing the moon was laughing. The moon laughed because he said that Ganapathi is fat and wondered how he can dance. Ganapathi got mad. He stared at the moon. The moon was falling, falling, and falling. He ended up on Lord Shiva’s feet. Lord Shiva is Ganapathi’s dad. Lord Shiva felt sad for the moon so he put the mood on his head. So that is when ‘day’ and ‘night’ began. By Swetha” (DOC, January 24, 2011)
Hiroshi’s, embraced the opportunity to dialogue and listen to each other’s diverse perspectives. This illustrates how opportunities to dialogue about conflict can prepare students for speaking and listening amongst the diverse ethnocultural identities in the larger Canadian political community.

As part of a Social Studies unit on Canada and the World, Ms. Marlee asked her students to reflect on what they understood Canada to mean, by filling in a predesigned worksheet that had nine boxes. Ms. Marlee encouraged students to share, continually asking if anyone had anything else to add to the list generated by the whole class. In keeping with her usual norms for engagement, she called on students who were silent, including Nancy. For the most part, students named popular landmarks and characteristics of Canada such as the CN Tower, snow, and maple trees. A few students also offered freedom and peace as examples. It appeared through this discussion that most students saw Canada as different from their ancestral countries. This indicated that some students from contested settings had developed shared group identities that included “war at home” and “being safe in Canada.”

It appeared to be easier for some students to name popular Canadian places and attributes they characterized as free and at peace. But while this discussion of a peaceful Canada was taking place, some students carried a different, underlying story about violence and war. For instance, Swetha told me, in an interview, about her family’s experience with war:

Swetha: In my parents’ home country . . . in Sri Lanka nowadays there is, like, armies and . . . they’re like shooting only the Tamil people and Tamil people are dying . . . but the government of Sri Lanka is the one that’s
telling them to do it because he’s Singhalese and everything, you know. And they hate Tamil people. . . . And our side, they call them Tamil Tigers and because we fight for them. . . . They can’t find my uncle anymore and my friend’s cousin’s uncle found [people] in a cave. . . . Oh, and 2000 people came on a boat to Canada, and my parents were so happy. One of my cousins was on the boat, too. (SI, April 13, 2011)

Tamil Sri Lankans had arrived in Canada in August of 2010, some of them seeking refugee status or other Canadian government action in relation to the Sri Lankan civil war. This was a contentious issue in the news at the time of this research. The dominant Canadian rhetoric advocated for the rejection of these refugees and intervention policies. Current Sri Lankan issues were not raised in Ms. Marlee’s class. Because of Swetha’s close connection to Sri Lanka and her awareness of political unrest, she was perhaps more aware than many others in her class about what it meant to actually live in what she perceived to be a peaceful country. She knew from experience the difference between countries at war and countries at peace, but it was not something that she discussed in the whole class. Instead, she chose to show a personal sense of connection to refugees, articulating her family’s happiness about their arrival.

It appeared that in Ms. Marlee’s class, the students’ historical, political, and cultural backgrounds had influenced them to use stereotypical words in describing Canada. The images they shared were reminiscent of the dominant Canadian rhetoric that many newcomer immigrants memorize for their citizenship test (see, for instance, Gulliver, 2011). In this lesson, Ms. Marlee encouraged students to voice uncontested
narrative symbols and write out dominant Canadian rhetoric in boxes on a worksheet. This did not allow peace or no-war to be taken up for discussion. As students looked at photos of popular Canadian images on Google and in their textbook, they added to their class list, continuing to identify popular and exotic images of Canada (e.g. totem poles in BC, the parliament buildings in Ottawa, lobster in New Brunswick). These stereotypical Canadian images paved the way for low-risk (i.e., social cohesion) conversation.

Discussions about mainstreamed symbols of Others-within, such as Inuit people and totem poles, do not recognize the power inequities in dominant elite social structures. Ms. Marlee’s above activity involved little reflection on such symbols, indicating her alignment with liberal multicultural practices. This acknowledgment of diversity did not invite questioning of power and hegemony. Ms. Marlee’s noncritical approach in this lesson was consistent with most of my observations of her classes. Unlike her approach in the religious conflict discussion and subsequent creation stories dialogue mentioned above, Ms. Marlee typically adopted a fact-transmission style. In these instances, dialogue was not apparent, although the usual (i.e., more vocal) students raised their hands to offer responses to Ms. Marlee’s informational questions. Teachers such as Ms. Marlee who use noncritical pedagogical approaches may be unconscious of the political messages implicit in their teaching; in many ways it maintains the status quo (Apple, 1990).

I asked Ms. Marlee, in our first interview, how she encouraged discussion about diverse identities, experiences, histories, and power/privilege amongst the students of varied cultural backgrounds in her class. She responded with what I believe she felt was the “right” answer, and mentioned cultural exclusion, colonialism, and her own personal
identity and cultural history of oppression. However, she also articulated that as much as she wanted to tell and discuss, she felt there was a limit on how much her 9- and 10-year-olds would understand. She expressed worry that conflictual material might scar them:

Ms. M: I told them that somehow those totem poles were taken from the Haida and that some of them were actually stolen and they’re trying to get them back. . . . When the opportunity arises, I discuss people’s histories. . . . I told them that the Inuit children were taken from their homelands and put into residential schools and that’s . . . hard for Grade Fours because there’s a limit on how much they’ll understand, and it’s also hard to see how much you should tell them about it without scarring their little psyches, but you do tell them that people were stolen from their homelands and I’ve mentioned that Black people were stolen from their homelands too, and that I’m of Caribbean descent, and how that theft of identity causes people to lose their culture and lose themselves. . . . So they know that different cultures in the world have had conflict, and they know however that Canada is a safe place when it comes to cultural conflict, because we try to resolve issues and we try to get along.

CP: (interrupting) Do . . .

Ms. M: But these diversity issues, it never comes from the children, it comes from an opportunity within the curriculum, within the lesson.

CP: OK.
Ms. M: Yep, they don’t seem to have any issues, I’ve never had any issues.

(TI, December 17, 2010)

At the time of this interview, one month before the religious conflict that erupted in her classroom, Ms. Marlee reiterated the idea that all of her students got along and didn’t see conflicts amongst their ethnocultural diversities. Ms. Marlee’s conceptions of cross-cultural relations amongst her students appeared to shape how she responded to the religious conflict when it did arise: by reinforcing that “Canada is a safe place when it comes to cultural conflict” and that everyone should “try to get along.” Ms. Marlee’s personal beliefs and experiences of marginalization as an African-Canadian also evidently shaped how she interpreted and responded to this religious conflict. Her belief in maintaining peace by “getting along” also apparently contributed to her not interrogating or inviting students to dialogue about Canadian symbols and histories. Overall, while Ms. Marlee was clearly aware of the importance of discussing conflict and issues of diversity, she chose to not entertain certain conflictual topics with her Grade 4 students. Her activities about Canadian symbols and cultural stories genericized some cultural groups, opening up little spaces for some discussion about diversity.

Building Character and Strengthening Values:

Rights and Responsibilities of Global-Canadian Citizens

In mathematics, science, and social studies lessons, I observed Mrs. Amrita implementing a variety of pedagogies in her Grade 5 class, which included teacher-led recitation, whole-group and small group discussions, and paired and individual reflections. Mrs. Amrita encouraged all her students to raise their hands whenever she posed a question. Mrs. Amrita often called on students who didn’t have their hands up,
which reinforced participation of all students, by insisting that they prepare an answer as they risked being called upon. She often said things like: “Everyone, look at me, I want everyone to participate here, all hands go up,” or questioned students publicly: “Why don’t you have your hand up?” (OBS, January 5, 2011). Mrs. Amrita also used a show of hands to poll her class about their experiences. During a discussion on immigration, for example, she asked students to raise their hands if their parents were immigrants. All except three students raised their hands: Qadir, Nimi, and Jamal had themselves immigrated with their parents. Mrs. Amrita’s direct questioning invited students to share their identities (in this instance, that they all had immigrant parents).

In mid-February, Mrs. Amrita introduced the Immigration unit. She asked her class: “What are some of the reasons to move to Canada?” Jamal, who had recently immigrated from Kenya, readily responded, “War. It’s too dangerous.” Mrs. Amrita then asked, “What does ‘refugees’ mean?” Caden, a Chinese male whose mother had been initially denied entry into Canada, responded, “It means they don’t feel safe, and then decide to come here as a refugee to live here” (OBS, February 16, 2011).

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

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

Kate: War.
FS: Better job.
Sugriva: Education.
FS: Better opportunities.
Qadir: They want peace.
David: They want new things.
Jamal: Maybe the place they live in, the government is not treating them well.

(He raises his hand again right after he says this response, indicating he has more to share.)

Kate: Freedom to practise their religions.
Jamal: Canada is a free country.
Caden: They want freedom.
Uma: A multicultural country where everyone is respected.
Mrs. A: You know, boys and girls, when you come to Canada they don’t ask you to leave your religion or your culture behind: They want you to bring everything with you so that you can practise your own religion, culture and beliefs and embrace it within Canada. (OBS, February 17, 2011)

Mrs. Amrita reinforced liberal multiculturalism throughout most of this Grade 5 unit. For instance, she proudly told them: “Canada is everyone’s country” (OBS, February 17, 2011) and she encouraged students to share with each other their stories about their ancestors. None of the students raised their hands in response: perhaps they were unsure of whether they had the right answer (i.e., that Canada was “everyone’s
country”). Mrs. Amrita then called on Tandir, a Tamil Sri Lankan male, to tell his story and said, “Everyone should listen, because this is interesting.”

Tandir: My mom immigrated to Canada as a refugee from Sri Lanka. It was tough for my mom to adjust to the cold weather and to the language, but my mom came here because there was a war in Sri Lanka. (The other Sri Lankan students smile and nod in acknowledgment.)

Mrs. Amrita added more details, saying that Tandir’s mom had been “pretty young” and faced challenges when she arrived. She then shared some personal challenges she herself had experienced as a new immigrant.

Mrs. A: Do you know that most of the time the education system here in Canada doesn’t recognize other education systems of immigrants? And I’m talking from my own experience. When I came here they didn’t recognize my education degree, even though I was a teacher back home and had my master’s degree as well. I had to go back to university and do the entire teacher education program over again here in Canada for one year. So the immigrants have to face many challenges. Is there anyone else who would like to share what their family told them?

Six other students raised their hands to share their stories. All of them reinforced the idea that newcomer immigrants face challenges in Canada. One South Asian male said, “When my dad first came to Canada, he had a lot of challenges speaking English. . . . He wanted to go back.” Resonating with this idea, Jesse (FS) said: “My parents came from Vietnam and there was a war there and they came here on a boat
across the ocean. They didn’t know how to speak English and they missed home.” Nitin, whose family was wealthier than most students in this class, shared his family’s experience.

Nitin: My grandparents lived in a small town in India, and had some farm land. . . . It was a long journey. They immigrated to Canada as a family class. They arrived in Montreal and then took a long bus ride to Ontario. In the beginning it was really tough.

Near the end of this immigration story sharing, Mrs. Amrita asked Qadir to participate, pointing out his newcomer identity: “Qadir, do you want to talk? You are pretty new to the country—2007, right? Go on, go, tell us. No one is judging you here.” Qadir, already soft spoken, began speaking in an even softer voice:

Qadir: My family . . . came here to Canada in 2008. Why we came here is a whole other story. So, like, five years ago when I was in Kindergarten, my dad applied to immigrate to Canada and that was because my dad was a scientist, but Canada government gave him a better job.

Mrs. A: *(interrupting)* He must have come on the points system if he came for a job.

Qadir: But to get the job that he wanted, he had to do the job over again for two and half years as a volunteer before he could apply to do the job he was already doing in Pakistan.

Mrs. A: *(interrupting again)* And to think that he had to run and support a household as well. So do you think he could not work a regular job while also doing the practice-volunteer job for two and a half years?
No, not possible.

Qadir: *(continuing)* That’s how I have immigrated to Canada. I am a Pakistani. I was born in Pakistan. That means I’m an immigrant here.

*(OBS, February 17, 2011)*

The class was silent as everyone listened attentively to Qadir’s soft, powerful story, which highlighted the unfairness of Canada’s immigration points system. This revealed the fallacy of the common assumption that jobs were readily available for professional immigrants. Mrs. Amrita reinforced this perspective by asserting that it was “not possible” to work for free (e.g., as an intern) while also working full-time elsewhere for wages to support a family. Because Mrs. Amrita was aware of many of her students’ individual stories, she was able to guide the implemented curriculum to include their identities.

Partway through this same lesson, Jamal started to become disruptive. He showed his disengagement by doing a crossword puzzle in his book and playing with items in his desk while Mrs. Amrita was speaking. While Mrs. Amrita reprimanded him, I wondered whether Jamal’s disengagement might indicate that he had a different kind of story, one that was not being shared. When Mrs. Amrita had asked, earlier, why people immigrated to Canada, Jamal had offered (two days in a row) responses such as “war” and “corrupt governments,” but he did not share details of his personal story with the class. Jamal was the only Black student in the class. While he shared with his peers the commonality of having immigrant parents, he also spoke with an Kenyan accent, and perhaps in many ways did not have access to the cultural codes of power in the classroom (i.e., Western and Asian cultural ways of being). Also, he had arrived within the year, and as a very
recent immigrant was perhaps still attempting to conceptualize the meaning of his “immigration story,” as he and his family were currently experiencing it. Furthermore, based on my observations and personal interactions with Jamal during our small group interview, it appeared that Jamal was clearly still habituating to school practices. He was constantly asked to remain on task, stay in his seat, and not to call out answers without first raising his hand.

Mrs. Amrita adapted her usual norms for engagement, in assigning students the task of sharing their or their parents’ experiences of immigrating to Canada. She explained that she would not force anyone to share. She would give students the choice of whether to voice their experiences by calling only on those who raised their hands. Students shared and heard peers’ diverse perspectives during this sharing period, but did not ask each other questions as they usually did in this class. Instead, Mrs. Amrita provided comments and often related the students’ stories to her own experience. Mrs. Amrita asked her students to collect information from a variety of sources (family, peers, and texts), which encouraged their reflective interpretations of the immigration topic, which they found personally relevant. Overt conflict did not erupt in this class session.

The process of researching cultural histories in collaboration with students’ families and then engaging in sharing with their peers illustrated Mrs. Amrita’s views that students’ cultural resources were valuable material for discussions about citizenship and integration in Canada.

Mrs. Amrita felt the need to present prescribed content in conjunction with students’ personal narratives; she encouraged students to read the chapter in their textbook that provided the dominant narrative about immigration in Canada. During the
whole-class reading of the text, it appeared that the textbook narrative was perceived by many students to not relate to the experiences shared in the class. Mrs. Amrita responded by modelling and encouraging students to connect the textbook material to their background knowledge. She did this by frequently pausing the read-aloud to reflect aloud on her own experience of immigration, such as how she had obtained landing documents and submitted her citizenship application. For instance, as one of the students read aloud about landing in Canada, Mrs. Amrita interrupted to say:

   Mrs. A: I will bring in my landing papers and show all of you. Everyone will have a record of landing. It’s a form, and it has my name and when I became Canadian. I had to submit that and my Permanent Resident Card, and you have to surrender that when you become a Canadian citizen. (OBS, February 17, 2011).

   Mrs. Amrita did not initially introduce the topic of immigration as a controversial or political issue. But an implicit issue was raised: How does the textbook depiction represent or distort immigration histories in Canada? In an interview with two male students of Chinese origin in this class, I asked what they thought about reading about immigration from their textbook.

   Jack: I would say that the author should rewrite it just a bit, so she or he could add a bit more to it.

   Mike: Also, the sheets that Mrs. Amrita gave us didn’t talk about real people. They were fake people. So it wasn’t real.

   Jack: The book was pretty old. It was written a long time ago and we still use that textbook. (SI, May 25, 2011)
In another interview, a group of girls (mixed East and South Asian) articulated their
comfort with the more varied oral and printed texts that had been used through this unit
of study:

Uma: *(Tamil Sri Lankan)* Yeah, well, most of the people in the class, their
parents, came from a different country to Canada, so it was pretty
much easy for our homework [to write about our family] because we
could just ask our parents, who actually know and have experienced it.
And when Mrs. Amrita was teaching us, we had an idea of what it was
about, because of our parents.

CP: So you thought you understood it more?

Uma: Like one of the immigration stories [in the text] was about *an*
emergency, and that’s why my parents came because there was an
emergency, like, a war and they were refugees.

CP: Did you feel uncomfortable when Mrs. Amrita was talking about it?

Uma: No. But I had an idea of what she was talking about.

CP: So you felt connected to it.

Uma: Yeah.

Kate: *(Chinese)* It’s also good because, like, if we needed some background
knowledge, we could just ask our parents and we could understand
more about it, than someone who was born here. *(SI, May 12, 2011)*

Typically, Mrs. Amrita openly acknowledged social power structures during
classroom discussions. During one of the discussions on immigration, she encouraged the
three students in the class who had only recently immigrated to Canada to voice their
experiences. These particular newcomers all responded to her invitation. Clearly, they felt safe enough to share this part of their identity.

While many students shared personal stories with me and their peers during small group discussions in interviews, and also shared written reflective stories with their teacher, they were not always as inclined to participate aloud during whole-class discussions. For instance, for another homework activity, Mrs. Amrita asked students to fill out, with their family, a sample immigration points survey. No one in the class said aloud whether their family had “passed” this sample assessment for acceptance into Canada, but a few students whispered to me, when I was walking around the classroom, that their parents had failed the actual Canadian points test. I realized that this had been a particularly sensitive task for students. Even though it was an activity through which Mrs. Amrita intended to encourage discussion about diversity, diverse students were embarrassed to share such sensitive family information with their peers.

Mrs. Amrita also taught her Grade 5 class about the differences between rights and responsibilities of Canadian citizens: she promoted the belief that with every right comes a responsibility. During a class discussion on the role of the federal and provincial government in Canada, Arun, a typically boisterous male student, raised his hand to question whether Egypt had a government. This resulted in a brief current events discussion on the uprising in Egypt where both Mrs. Amrita and I explained that the people in Egypt wanted new leaders and were fighting to get that. The conflict was not connected to students’ experiences or perceptions, unlike the way it had been discussed in Mr. Hiroshi’s class. In an interview, one week after this discussion, I asked some students what their experience had been with this discussion.
CP: So you know when we were talking about the uprising in Egypt?

Students: Yeah.

CP: Well, I’d like to see if you can tell me if you made any self-to-text connections during that conversation we had there.

Uma: Actually, the next day, I saw it [the uprising in Egypt] on the news and I got reminded of what we were talking about. And before, when we were talking about it, I never knew it was happening.

CP: So you had a better understanding of it the next day, cool.

Nitin: They want to take down the leader [Hosni Mubarak], because he had a lot of power that he misused. It made me think of when I went to visit my grandparents in India and it was really dirty there. Half of the road is dirt and it’s an inch of dirt, you can’t even see the road. And when I heard about the Egypt thing, it reminded me of that. Like, the Indian government isn’t doing anything about all these bad roads, and when they do make roads they do a sloppy job because they’re not the ones driving on it. (SI, February 10, 2011)

Mrs. Amrita’s choice to respond to Arun’s question about a current political conflict illustrated her interest in encouraging her diverse students to think about the curriculum content in relation to their own lives and world. Uma and Nitin showed two different ways they related to learning about the uprisings in Egypt. Uma became aware of the conflict in her personal home world, where she recognized it on the television.

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10 Muhammad Hosni El Sayed Mubarak (b. 1928) was a former Egyptian military commander. He was the fourth President of Egypt from 1981 to 2011. Mubarak was forced to step down on February 11, 2011 after 18 days of violent protests and demonstration in Egypt. He is currently on trial for many charges, including the premeditated murder of protestors.
Similarly, Nitin recognized the conflict, but extended it by reflecting on his personal understanding of political unrest, where governments are unresponsive to the issues that common people raise. In this way, he related to the uprisings in Egypt by connecting to his and his family’s belief that the government of India had not been responsible in maintaining safe and modern road structures. Also, within the context of learning about rights and responsibilities, it appeared that more students, such as Uma, who didn’t typically participate as much as Nitin, became engaged in learning about how citizens exercised their rights during political unrest.

Mrs. Amrita and many of her students expressed the belief that they were free in this classroom to engage in discussion about conflictual and sensitive issues, such as immigration and current events. The commonality between Mrs. Amrita’s identity as a relatively recent immigrant from India and the students’ East and South Asian backgrounds seemed to provide a certain level of comfort during discussions about diversity. In most instances, students’ evident inclination to share and participate in such discussions illustrated their sense of social identity inclusion. Mrs. Amrita often encouraged students to voice their perspectives in classroom discussions. The norms for engagement allowed them to self-silence when the conflictual issue was sensitive or identity linked. This permission to self-silence, within a climate that consistently encouraged students’ participation, is an integral element for building an inclusive classroom environment that not only encourages diverse students to speak, but also allows them the freedom to feel safe in their silence (Davies, 2004a; Ellsworth, 1989).
**Culture and Conflict in Ancient Civilizations**

The study of ancient civilizations in Mrs. Amrita’s Grade 5 class encouraged many students to reflect on their own familial histories, particularly because two of the options were the study of ancient China and ancient India. Religion was an omnipresent issue.

Mrs. Amrita set the unit up with a whole-class study of ancient Greece and ancient Egypt, presumably to prepare students how to conduct research by gathering information in textbooks about a civilization. As a class, they studied the ancient Greek alphabet and Egyptian hieroglyphs, what life was like for children, what religious rituals were performed, and other facts about daily life.  

Mrs. Amrita put students in groups and gave them the choice of what civilization they wanted to study. In these small groups, students researched and presented on ancient India, ancient China, ancient Rome, the Aztecs, and Mesopotamia. During their small-group discussion, four out of five students in the ancient India group told me: “We get to do Hinduism, and we already know all the Gods” (OBS, April 21, 2011). Kate and Jesse expressed similar enthusiasm about being in the ancient China group. While there were some students who felt connected to the study of what they perceived as their own cultural backgrounds, others articulated their feelings about the importance of learning about civilizations different from their own. During an interview with two Indian/Hindu boys, Nitin and Sugriva, Nitin articulated his desire to not study ancient India:

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11 The class textbook, *Early Civilizations* (Waters, 2001), included two sections that were each devoted to the study of different civilizations: ancient Greece and ancient China. Students read sections from the ancient Greece section together during class read-alouds where they consistently reflected on the themes of religion, sports, art, and meeting basic needs in this civilization.
Nitin: I know about ancient India already, so ancient Greece was more fun because I got to learn something new.

In response, Sugriva said his own preference was to learn more about his own culture at school:

Sugriva: Even though I already know lots about ancient India, I could learn more. Like with all the gods, there’s so much more to know. Like Lord Shiva, Lord Ganesha . . . (OBS, May 16, 2011)

While I never observed any overt conflict about someone being better than the someone else, the responses of students in interviews helped me to better understand the importance of student-directed learning, in which they have both exposure and choice to learn about difference. The study of contrasting civilizations and cultures provided students with opportunities to build tolerance and to practise acceptance of diversity, not only within their classroom, but also within society at large.

The students learned about religious and cultural practices in ancient Egypt, such as worshipping and sacrificing animals to gods. Mrs. Amrita asked the students why people performed such rituals. Some students voiced a concern that such practices were extreme. Others, such as Caden, aware of the dominance of religious values within ancient Egyptian society, responded: “Everyone believed in it.” Mrs. Amrita affirmed that they did it “Because they feared God” (OBS, April 15, 2011).

Mrs. Amrita frequently used the think-pair-share pedagogical approach, where she asked students to independently think about their response to an issue, speak about it with a partner, and then she would invite students to share their responses with the whole class. During one lesson, Mrs. Amrita asked students to speak to the person seated next to
them about what they thought was “the most important thing about religion in ancient Egypt” (OBS, May 10, 2011). After allowing two minutes for peer-to-peer discussion, Mrs. Amrita invited whole class responses. Nine hands immediately went up and all offered similar responses about fearing God, such as Arun, who said, “If they don’t pray they won’t have any water in the Nile river.” Fear appeared to become a theme to both describe and essentialize religion in ancient Egypt, and Mrs. Amrita affirmed this stance as she said, “Yes, they thought their God would be angry.” She then went on to connect the diversity found among different ancient civilizations to the diversity within their classroom: “Different religions coexisted and had different beliefs, just like in this room there are many faiths.” By offering this connection, Mrs. Amrita acknowledged and affirmed her students’ diverse beliefs.

Mrs. Amrita opened up the space for conflict by further probing the issue of religion in ancient civilizations and present-day societies, as she asked her students: “Do you agree boys and girls that many people don’t believe in religions as much now?” Most of the students nodded their heads, which apparently indicated their agreement. Caden raised his hand to offer his perspective: “Back then they didn’t know better and they thought they’d be punished.” Arun added, “If it didn’t rain they thought it was because of God, but now with science we know better.” Mrs. Amrita, again, shared her point of view with her students: “People thought that if you pray for two or three hours a day you would be happy because they were ignorant.” Here despite Mrs. Amrita’s commitment to accepting diverse religious practices and beliefs, she also positioned some religious practices as extreme and extinct. Her personal stance apparently encouraged only one point of view, as none of the students disputed the perspective that religious practices are
just as important to some cultural groups in present-day societies. Instead, Mrs. Amrita’s potentially conflictual question encouraged Arun to rely on science to support his argument that “we know better” now, which indicated that he appeared to follow his teachers lead to agree that religious beliefs and practices do not supersede scientific knowledge. The discussion evolved when Mrs. Amrita raised the topic of evolution:

   Mrs. A: Anyone know the story of how we were once monkeys and then became humans? What does evolution mean? How did human beings arrive on Earth?

Students were silent to Mrs. Amrita’s line of questioning and to the topic of evolution. None of the students raised their hand, and Mrs. Amrita quickly decided to refocus the topic: “OK we won’t actually talk about how we got here, but what did we do when we got here?” This question invited a few students’ responses, such as from Tandir who offered the explanation of “People just moved from place to place,” to which Jamal added, “They created cultures.” Qadir raised his hand to revisit the initial topic and asked, “When did it all start?” Mrs. Amrita responded candidly: “Different religions and cultures have different things. No one really knows” (OBS, May 10, 2011). Unlike in Ms. Marlee’s class, Mrs. Amrita chose to not encourage students to research this issue and present it back to the class. Instead, Mrs. Amrita quickly refocused the topic to avoid a discussion on the unsettled issue about evolution, but it appeared that students like Qadir were interested in learning more about this conflictual topic. Mrs. Amrita’s response legitimated ignorance and reiterated the importance of accepting diverse perspectives.

   To encourage critical literacy, Mrs. Amrita asked students to respond to a reflection prompt in their journal: “I would/would not like to be an ancient Greek boy/girl
because . . . ” Many students, encouraged by this opportunity, wrote at length about their reasons for not wanting to assume a Greek identity. I collected and reviewed the students’ journal entries, and found that in this class only two students opted to be a Greek boy/girl. One female, Nimi, a quiet student and a recent immigrant from Pakistan who wore a hijab, argued: “I’d like to be an ancient Greek girl because I want to try out something new . . . and I want to compare the richness in modern Canada and ancient Greece and for once in a lifetime to wear ancient Greece clothes.” Tandir, a second-generation Sri Lankan immigrant, attuned to what he had learned about gender dynamics in ancient Greece and the privileges bestowed upon boys (e.g., access to education, freedom to play), wrote that he wanted to maintain his superiority over girls (DOC, April 20, 2011).

Other students argued that they would not want to live in ancient Greece due to its lack of advanced technology and the different culture that would prevent them from doing as they liked. Qadir, a recent immigrant from Pakistan, pointed out that he wouldn’t be able to play his favourite sport, cricket, nor would he be able to eat his favourite dish, rice and curry. Others wrote about their dissatisfaction that girls were not treated fairly, since they were not allowed to attend school; many believed that this was still the case. They voiced dissatisfaction too about ancient Greek boys being obligated to join the army. Students’ reflections indicated that they believed that ancient Greece would not be reflective of their shared and collective identities as free citizens in a democratic society. Nimi’s feeling of wanting to “try out something new” was very imaginative, in the sense that she would probably not be given the opportunity to wear another group’s cultural clothing, as she attended school clothed as an observant Muslim.
During a Language Arts unit on inferencing, Mrs. Amrita frequently asked students to pause between turns in whole-class read-alouds, in which she would guide them to reflect and infer together about various short stories they had read in the *Nelson Literacy 4* (n.d.) workbook. Her typical norms for engagement were to start the dialogue by posing a question as though she was unsure of the answer and needed students’ help to uncover it. This type of questioning strengthened students’ positions as knowers, and contributed to a feeling of equitable power relations between students and teacher. For instance:

Mrs. A: We can tell from this that she is different and they don’t like her because she is different. But *I don’t know, so tell me*—what else do we know about Lucia? (OBS, March 22, 2011)

In the discussion that ensued from Mrs. Amrita’s interpretive values questioning, many diverse students quickly identified elements of social exclusion, including bullying and discrimination, which were elements in the story, “The Woman Who Outshone the Sun,” by Alejandro Cruz Martinez (*Nelson Literacy 4*, n.d.). Mrs. Amrita then asked the class to voice their perspectives on the conflict of Lucia being excluded. To guide her students to make connections, she told them that she inferred the main character to be Mother Nature herself. She explained how she had used her own background knowledge: in Indian Hindu culture, the Mother is worshipped. Many students, who shared the same ethnocultural identity as their teacher, concurred. They also connected the River woman in the story—who had given the river back to the people—to the Hindu river goddess, known as “Maa Ganga” in Hindu folklore. Mrs. Amrita told her students that no answer was wrong, because everyone’s background knowledge would influence how they
interpreted the material. She continued to stress that everyone was different and that this was OK. However, non-Hindu students did not name alternative cultural knowledge at this time. By acknowledging difference and explicitly eliciting and integrating students’ diverse cultural knowledge, Mrs. Amrita guided her students to make connections to their identities and to their peers within their current social and cultural contexts.

**Discussion: (De)contextualizing Identity, Conflict, and Citizenship in Ethnic Enclaves**

In this chapter, I have described how three teachers, each with classes of similar demographic composition, similarly and differently implemented conflict-dialogue pedagogies about social conflicts. Their choices contributed to most students sharing their personal lived experiences at some times during open classroom discussions. Students’ identities and social statuses influenced their opportunities and choices to participate in dialogic activities. The ways in which students interpreted curricular subject matter were shaped by their personal identities, histories, and experiences (Banks, 2006; Delpit, 2006). Some instances reinforced Dull and Morrow’s (2008) finding that, like the minority students they observed in American high schools, opportunities to participate in issues discussions were limited by teachers’ choices to pose critical, interpretive questions that encouraged students to make connections and invite critical reflection. In Ms. Marlee’s Grade 4 class, there was limited discussion and reflection on Canadian symbols, even though some students, such as Swetha, a Tamil Sri Lankan, held alternative views. In Mrs. Amrita’s Grade 5 class, lower-status students chose not to share their family’s personal experience with the immigration points system because they were embarrassed that their parents had not passed the test. Similarly, in Mr. Hiroshi’s
class, some Grade 7 students chose not to share their allegiances to their home country. In other instances, such as sharing immigration stories in Mrs. Amrita’s class, writing creation stories in Ms. Marlee’s class, and discussing the conflict in Egypt in Mr. Hiroshi’s class, the possibilities for dialogue were opened up when teachers affirmed students’ identities and encouraged them to share their personal perspectives. In all three instances, the teachers shared their own personal connection and perspectives on the issues. For instance, Ms. Marlee disclosed her religious perspective, Mr. Hiroshi shared his allegiance to Canada, and Mrs. Amrita spoke about her challenges in acculturating to Canadian society. While these teacher disclosures prompted some students to participate, the sensitive and controversial topics silenced others.

Where there were differential opportunities to engage in conflict dialogue, some students, such as Tina and Fatima, might be better mobilized than others for success when discussing religious conflictual issues because of their opportunity to practise such dialogue in their classroom. Other students, such as Sunita and Jawali, might continue to not openly discuss their feelings about the conflict between Tamil Sri Lankans and Canada, because of their minority perspective within their classroom and their sociopolitical context. (Below, I further discuss the implications of these differential opportunities for dialogue about conflict and diversity among diverse students.)

Hemmings (2000) theorized that when teachers connected students’ identities to the curriculum content, it empowered minoritized students to participate in democratic dialogue processes. During the religious conflict follow-up activity on creation stories in Ms. Marlee’s class, students who evidently saw their connection to this topic volunteered to participate. Neither Fatima nor Tina shied away from getting up in front of the class to
share their different stories. Fatima’s stories illustrated her desire to connect with her cultural heritage by using opportunities to speak about Islam with her classmates; a newcomer immigrant, she had arrived from Pakistan to Canada two years previously and at nine years of age she wore a hijab to school. When newcomer immigrants are trying to integrate into mainstream society, they may dissociate themselves from their cultural identities (e.g., by not speaking their language or connecting to their racial or religious identity; Cummins, 2001; C. A. Parker, 2010). Farat, a light-skinned boy I had initially identified as White based on his physical appearance, was also from Pakistan. He presented an example of how some students initially may not volunteer on their own to share information about their personal cultural background and experience. When recruited by a peer, who shared his religious identity, he did speak up. Similar incidents occurred in Mrs. Amrita’s and Mr. Hiroshi’s classes, when they each named students and asked them to share their perspective. This illustrates how some students may need to feel explicitly invited, to contribute their personal knowledge to discussions, especially when they may be unsure of whether personal religious perspectives are respected in publicly funded, mainstream classrooms. In this way, classroom discussions have the potential to encourage diverse, tolerant, and dissenting viewpoints, but they also risk further marginalizing or silencing some diverse students (Hahn, 1998).

The inclusion of diverse identities in curriculum content becomes even more complex when students fear that outing aspects of their identity—such as what language they speak at home—could cause them to be identified as non-Canadian. Almost all of the students in Ms. Marlee’s class enthusiastically participated in the recitation activity about Canadian symbols. In this instance, students’ identification with Canadianness
seemed mandated, or at least expected. Nevertheless, their participation illustrated their familiarity with dominant Canadian narratives. Swetha and three other Tamil Sri Lankan students in Ms. Marlee’s class, for instance, chose to not share their stories of war and violence back home during this discussion—nor were they invited to do so.

On the other hand, Mrs. Amrita challenged the notion that newcomer or second-generation immigrants should shy away from speaking about their personal backgrounds: she encouraged her students by explicitly naming their experience. She was familiar with most of her students’ personal experiences, and she called on students who she felt had interesting stories that supported the narrative of newcomer struggles that she chose to implement. This critical multicultural approach seemed to also influence how students interpreted Canadian immigration. Mrs. Amrita used her position to give authority to immigration stories (such as those of Qadir’s, Nitin’s, and Tandir’s) that represented an alternative discourse of struggle and inequity. This strategy appeared to affirm many of Mrs. Amrita’s students’ experiences, and to develop their sense of inclusion in the curriculum.

In this same episode, however, Jamal (the one African-Canadian boy in the class) displayed his disengagement when Mrs. Amrita asked for students to share their personal familial stories. Although Jamal had enthusiastically offered many examples in response to the general question about why people immigrate to Canada (e.g., the government is corrupt), he never said outright that his family had moved to Canada because the government was corrupt, as this would have implicated him personally.

In similar instances in Mrs. Amrita’s class, other topics also seemed to discourage many students from sharing their perspectives, such as about the immigration points test:
Caden chose not to participate because, as he told me, he was embarrassed that his parents had not initially passed the test. Overall, these instances in both Ms. Marlee and Mrs. Amrita’s class showed that when students felt that it is was too risky, they chose not to participate verbally. Some of these same students overcame their discomfort and did speak up, after they received direct peer or teacher encouragement. Also, in Mrs. Amrita’s case, all the students had written out their reflections, so they still had had the opportunity to share their stories, although with their teacher.

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

Mr. Hiroshi used a different technique. He showed students a newspaper article about the uprising in Egypt, and encouraged students to make self-to-text connections by inviting one student, Mona, who had a personal connection to this conflict, to speak to it and make it real for the other students. Mr. Hiroshi often used current events to connect to his students’ diversities and to compare and contrast these with historical events. Mr. Hiroshi presented and played with conflicts to varying levels. In this way, he facilitated discussions about diversity and conflict to invite further opportunities for learning about divergent or conflicting perspectives. This pattern of consistent inclusion of current
events and experiences in relation to historical conflict facilitated a safe enough space for Mona to share her personal connection to a conflict. It also empowered Tyrone to provoke his peer, Crystal, by comparing her dominant identity in class with a tyrannical historical figure. While the interpersonal conflict between Tyrone and Crystal was not taken up by their teacher at this time, their ability to connect and react to each other by relating to their history lesson shows how some students interpreted conflict through their personal experiences.

Conflict is inescapably tied to diversity. In contrast to Hess (2001, 2009), this chapter has shown that any topic, settled or unsettled, can be addressed as a conflictual issue, especially by inviting recognition of diversity. As discussed above, Mrs. Amrita presented Canadian immigration as an unsettled issue, even though it appeared as settled in the text. Her invitation to compare and contrast the dominant Canadian narrative with students’ own divergent immigration stories provided opportunities for students to share the economic and cultural adaptation challenges and conflicts that come with immigration. In Mrs. Amrita’s Ancient Civilizations unit, she did not problematize or unsettle the content in the same way as it was with the study of immigration. Instead, she avoided conflictual issues such as evolution and chose, in this instance, to adopt a liberal multicultural practice by offering to legitimate various religious practices without encouraging critical reflection on what such a process of acceptance would look like.

This study of other histories in the Ancient Civilizations unit still provided students with the opportunity to reflect on their cultural identities: Nitin chose to study ancient Greece to expand his cultural repertoire, whereas Sugriva chose to learn “even more” about his own root culture, ancient India. Sugriva’s and Nitin’s choices illustrate
that teaching students from all backgrounds about diverse cultures is vital in preparing students to develop cross-cultural awareness, by learning about themselves and each other (Nieto, 1992). While the study of diverse ancient civilizations did not overtly explore conflict, it provided students with the choice to study diverse cultures, which may have conflicted with their own understanding of their cultural norms and values.

Ms. Marlee, at first, presented information as uncontested based on her perspective, which was that religious intolerance was wrong, and then asked students to research their personal stories in collaboration with their families and peers, in order to engage in a meaningful reflection and dialogue about religious difference. In this way, Ms. Marlee used the initial interpersonal conflict between Tina and Fatima as a teachable moment to create a powerful learning opportunity for diverse students. Similarly, in Mr. Hiroshi’s reflection on his personal identity, he toyed with the (presumably settled) belief that immigrants would remain loyal to their ancestral country if Canada were to go to war with that country. While he chose not to engage students in discussion about this issue, he appeared to invite students to explore their cultural allegiances. This encouraged some students, such as Crystal (from a mixed background), to reinforce her Canadian identity, while some Tamil Sri Lankan students, like Sunita and Jawali, appeared to intensify their anger towards the government in Sri Lanka. All three vignettes highlight the important role of teachers and also more confident peers who sometimes supported diverse students’ inclusion: their direct encouragement sometimes enabled quiet students to speak about their personal experiences.

In these three cases, the students’ identities and teachers’ identities played major roles, together, in how different conflictual issues were grappled with and responded to.
Like Mrs. Amrita, Ms. Marlee showed how she might be able to negotiate conflict through emergent issues in the classroom culture and the curriculum. However, overall, Ms. Marlee’s implemented curriculum typically avoided potential dialogue about conflict and diversity; she avoided potentially conflictual topics that she worried might scar their young minds.

Mr. Hiroshi’s pedagogical approach was closer to Mrs. Amrita’s: he encouraged an open climate in the classroom, by continually recognizing and affirming students’ diverse identities. However, unlike Mrs. Amrita and Ms. Marlee, Mr. Hiroshi continuously introduced historical conflicts as well as current events as unsettled topics for discussion. He illustrated how teachers can connect both historical and ongoing political and social conflicts to students’ experiences, which provided opportunities for students to draw on their cultural resources. However, when students (e.g., Jamal, Uma, and Swetha) had arrived from high-conflict settings, such as war or places where government was corrupt, their willingness to engage and share perspectives in whole-class discussions was not always easy or welcomed.

Mrs. Amrita exemplified a teacher who was clearly aware of students’ immigration histories and demonstrated an interest in her students’ lives and histories. Therefore, when she provided her students with the option to share their stories, rather than herself choosing who participated, she acknowledged her sensitivity to students’ lived experiences. Some students refused to share; another student asked her to read his story aloud on his behalf, claiming that he was too shy to do so himself. In Ms. Marlee’s classroom, the discussion about diversity and religious difference evolved out of one or two students’ initial intention to do harm to an individual (or representative of a cultural
group) by asserting the validity of their religion over another’s. This episode showed that implementing activities about students’ diverse cultural histories will not always be harmonious, particularly when it is articulated or represented in a way that is intended to provoke interpersonal conflict.

Some students, like Fatima (Grade 4) and Crystal (Grade 7), who perhaps felt marginalized, articulated their experiences with learning: their repertoires of cultural knowledge and understanding were expanded in classroom environments where their peers, of both similar and different cultural backgrounds, sometimes supported (or did not support) their learning. These experiences illustrate what Walter Parker (2011) called “wiggle room,” a process that allows for movement within institutional constraints. Wiggle room to infuse dialogue across and about difference can be found in prescribed curriculum content. The classroom teacher carries the important role of continuously mediating and leading the positioning of conflict in the classroom. However, in this study, when conflictual talk was closely attached to students’ identities, the various students’ responses in each context, and their high level of engagement when conflictual talk did closely relate to their identities, were clear indicators of how curricular content can be made to relate and connect to students’ past, present, and future experiences in their diverse world.

The three teachers in this study evidently presented issues that they felt comfortable introducing and facilitating: because of this we were able to see how various kinds of classroom discussions and activities about conflict and diversity could be approached in different ways. Teachers’ experiences and cultural histories also shaped how conflicts were and were not addressed. Ms. Marlee chose to invite conflicting
creation stories into her classroom, but not to discuss critical social issues; Mrs. Amrita chose to include her and her students’ immigration stories to contrast the dominant immigration discourse within textbooks, but not to critique power and social structures in ancient civilizations. Mr. Hiroshi opted to compare current events to other conflicts past and present, and to invite a global cross-cultural perspective among his diverse students, but not to critique their personal choices and feelings about their allegiances to Canada.

When invited, many diverse students, even the typically quiet ones, appeared to want to discuss conflictual issues, both by sharing their experiences and by expressing their desire to learn and talk more about current events occurring around the world. The processes of navigating between the multiple worlds of home, school, and community were softened when the relationships among teachers and peers, and between content and pedagogy, were closely interconnected and related (Phelan et al., 1991). Teachers need to integrate culturally relevant pedagogies in their practice, in order to better support and navigate diverse ethnocultural minority students’ identities and citizenship, critical multicultural education programs, and discussion-based teaching about conflict and diversity (Delpit, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2004). Teaching explicitly about conflict and diversity through a critical multicultural program invites quiet and diverse students in the classroom to speak.

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

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

Thus far, I have showed how the three teachers connected the students’ identities to emergent curriculum content through various pedagogical processes that shaped the ways in which students responded and participated in discussions and activities. In Chapter 6, I explore how these teachers used implicit and hidden curriculum embedded in education to both challenge and sometimes to maintain traditional (i.e., elite) power structures in the milieu of Canadian culture.
CHAPTER 6

IMPLICIT AND EXPLICIT CONFLICT
AND DIVERSITY LEARNING EXPERIENCES

The treatment of conflict in the school curriculum can lead to political quiescence and the acceptance by students of a perspective on social and intellectual conflict that acts to maintain the existing distribution of power and rationality in a society. (Apple, 1979/1990, p. 84)

In many ways, processes of schooling are designed for social control: students are immersed in a system that encourages the reproduction of particular knowledges and norms through a socialization process known as the hidden curriculum (Apple, 1979/1990; Jackson, 1968). The hidden curriculum, a term first coined by Jackson (1968), means teaching through implicit models, practices, rewards, and sanctions. It teaches “appropriate” ways for students to reason, believe, and interact, often as if these ways were neutral, commonsensical, and based on consensus. However, the process perpetuates inequality and silences dissenting voices. Instead of any presumed consensus, making conflict an explicit component of the curriculum could challenge hegemonic ideology (Apple, 1979/1990). The explicit curriculum is the mandated curriculum and outlines formal procedures for implementation. The absent or null curriculum are expectations present in the explicit curriculum, but excluded intentionally or unintentionally and in this way become the “options students are not afforded, the perspectives they may never know about, much less be able to use” (Eisner, 2002, p. 107). For instance, cultural examples that may be relevant to students’ lives and potentially increase their learning opportunity are not used. The null curriculum silences conflictual issues (Bickmore, 1999). The implemented curriculum are the choices teachers make to enact various learning experiences and achieve curricula goals; such
choices invariably contribute to better enabling or impeding diverse students’ opportunities for social inclusion and academic engagement. In this chapter I show how implicit and explicit curriculum that included discussion about conflict and diversity provided opportunities for diverse students to learn about patriarchal and colonial power relations.

Explicitly teaching diverse students to confront conflict can allow all students, particularly those from lower socioeconomic ethnic urban enclaves, to secure a “sense of the legitimate means of gaining recourse within unequal societies” (Apple, 1979/1990, p. 84). A positive perspective on conflict and change might encourage diverse students to engage with and perhaps even challenge political repression and inequality. In what follows, I discuss critical incidents in three classrooms to show how three teachers taught students to relate to the hierarchal structures they belonged to (namely, school and Canadian society). These cases illustrate how conflict was and was not taken up, and how different pedagogical approaches to conflict within the implemented curriculum influenced opportunities for political engagement.

Dialogic pedagogies invite opportunities for constructive expression and consideration of conflict, and support students’ understandings of democracy and citizenship (Haas, 2008; Hahn, 1998; Hess & Posselt, 2002). I observed all three teachers teaching about civic rights and responsibilities within the context of differential power relations and diversity. They used pedagogies such as role play, simulation, and discussion to further opportunities to learn about Canadian society and develop so-called Canadian values.
In this study, Mr. Hiroshi’s Grade 7 students participated in a Town Hall simulation of the Rebellions of 1837, which represented differential social status groups within Canadian society at that time. Many students made connections between these issues and objections against governments in their home countries, and in relation to the contemporary Canadian government. Others were invited by this learning activity to express their experiences with marginalization—while playing fictitious, simulated roles. Through these dialogic conflict education simulation activities, some students found ways to enact and develop their own power and identity.

In the Grade 4 class, Ms. Marlee also conducted a kind of simulation, placing students in an inverted hierarchy based on medieval European roles. She assigned higher power roles such as king or princess to quiet students, and lower-status roles such as peasant or townsperson to vocal students. However, Ms. Marlee did not ask students to engage in conflict or dialogue with each other. This absence of opportunity to discuss conflict, as Apple (1979/1990) has argued, reinforced power positions within this constructed medieval society, because many students subscribed to the roles, rather than challenging them.

Mrs. Amrita’s Grade 5 students studied Canadian government and citizenship, identifying how their wants and needs sometimes conflicted with their rights in what Mrs. Amrita termed a free and peaceful Canada. Within the context of a fictional election campaign, Mrs. Amrita taught students about voting rights while also encouraging them

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1 These were uprisings in Lower and Upper Canada in 1837 and 1838. In the Lower Canada Rebellion, French and English settlers rebelled against British colonial government. The Upper Canada Rebellion, led by William Lyon Mackenzie, who in 1834 was Toronto’s first mayor, focused on the oligarchy known as the Family Compact. The rebels who led the uprisings stimulated governmental and political reform.
to master their responsibilities as new Canadians. The students worked in roles with unequal power (e.g., candidate, media, citizen). She asked the students to reflect on their political beliefs, engaging them in exploring how their diverse voices could make a difference when conflict between governmental parties was enacted. However, in contrast to Mr. Hiroshi’s political simulation, Mrs. Amrita, like Ms. Marlee, masked conflict by presenting Canadian government as responsible although it offered little or no room for opposition parties (i.e., dissenting voices).

**Kings, Queens, and Other Peasants:**

**Hidden and Explicit Curriculum About Social Hierarchies**

In Ms. Marlee’s Medieval Times unit, which lasted three months, she attempted to transform the power structures in her class by assigning different roles to her students. Lower-status students were given higher-status positions (e.g., the normally quiet Farat was named king, while a quiet girl, Greta, was named princess), while the higher-status students were given lower-status positions (e.g., Jade, a dominant girl, was named serf). Ms. Marlee did not tell her students that she had purposely inverted their roles based on her perception of their usual classroom hierarchy. Ms. Marlee told me privately how she had assigned her students roles based on their individual personality, perceived social status, and body type. For instance, she had assigned Hussain the role of serf because he was “bigger in size.” In this way, Ms. Marlee’s role assignment did not uniformly reverse the classroom status hierarchy: this quiet student remained in a lower position, because Ms. Marlee thought it would be “good for him to see how it feels to be someone smaller” (J, March 31, 2011). This is an example of how Ms. Marlee intentionally planned some
of her implicit curriculum: she planned for her students to experience having more or less power, without ever explicitly telling them her intention.

Ms. Marlee told me that she understood Farat to be calm and quiet and in need of more “class power.” For instance, during one observation as I took notes, Ms. Marlee came to stand beside me, and told me to take a look at Farat and Fatima: “Fatima is bossing him around as they work on their health project and Farat’s just sitting there and not responding to her” (OBS, March 23, 2011). To her, this was an indication of his compliance and unflappability—behaviours that marked Farat’s suitability for the role of king. She went on to say that she felt she had made the right decision in assigning him this important role, because “he doesn’t talk back and he’s just calm and usually quiet” (OBS/J, March 23, 2011). Ms. Marlee’s view of Farat as quiet was consistent with my observations. However, I disagreed with her analysis that Farat was calm and subordinate. Throughout my observations, I took note of how Farat sometimes engaged in quiet disruptive activity, such as poking his neighbour with his pencil, kicking someone underneath the desk, or being off-task (e.g., colouring or reading under his desk) during teacher-led lessons. During a student group interview, Farat confirmed my suspicion that he enjoyed the power he held in the class as king:

CP: And what did you like about being the king?
Farat: It was fun and I got to rule over everybody.
CP: Is that something that you’re used to doing?
Farat: No.
CP: Is that why it made it fun? Because it gave you power?
Farat: Yeah.
CP: What kinds of things did you do?

Farat: I told people what to do. (SI, April 26, 2011)

Farat’s “No” was an indication that he agreed with Ms. Marlee’s analysis, at least verbally. Farat was not used to having overt power in class when he had been just Farat, but this changed when he was assigned the role of king. Farat’s acceptance of the role did appear to build his confidence in wielding power over others. With the opportunity to “rule over everybody,” he enjoyed the privilege of his role.

Ms. Marlee did not discuss constructive or positive power; instead, she focused on teaching her students about traditional, normative hierarchal structures. Overall, her students seemed to find their assigned medieval simulation roles fun and engaging. For instance, Navpreet, a traditionally dressed Sikh girl, was assigned the role of lady and as such was married to a male fellow student. After researching the duties of her role as a lady she jokingly told me that she was in the process of requesting a divorce. Navpreet’s personal recognition of her power, as a woman capable of requesting a divorce, illustrated how she interpreted history at that time—which contradicted the normative and hierarchal structures of medieval Europe that Ms. Marlee explicitly taught. While Ms. Marlee echoed traditional beliefs that women served men and had no voice, Navpreet chose to enact what she believed she was able to do in her present-day world: divorce without fear of social reprisal. Ms. Marlee’s purposeful inversion of power was an example of how students were taught to explore historical and present-day perspectives, based on their interpretations of the actions, behaviours, and histories of their assigned roles.
The study of medieval times is a customary unit of study for Grade 4 in Ontario. Because of this, Ms. Marlee had many teaching resources available to her, including lesson plans, teacher guides, books, and online resources. When students were initially assigned their roles, they spent time learning to describe who they were factually by conducting individual Google searches. Many students were also interested in their peers’ roles and often asked, “What are you?” Sometimes, on hearing their peers’ role, students would respond, “Well, I’m higher than you.” Clearly, this assignment of roles reinforced a competitive dynamic. This was not unfamiliar to the students in the class, where having power (e.g., points) over others reigned supreme. Almost two months into the unit, in late March, Ms. Marlee asked the students to think about how their individual, assigned roles had fit into the established hierarchy of the time. In their textbook, Nelson Literacy 4 (n.d.), they read a four-page article called “Knights.” Students took summary notes on the content, which described and reinforced ideals about how knights should treat others, particularly women who expected chivalry from them. While this article could have provided the opportunity to reflect on social power structures, Ms. Marlee did not prompt any critical reflection on these unequal social roles, nor on their relevance to contemporary Canadian life. Thus, the implicit message was to accept and not challenge social inequality.

Ms. Marlee tested students’ knowledge through a game: asking them to determine what places their assigned roles held in medieval society. Ms. Marlee asked students to go to different areas of the room if they thought their role a “noble,” “worker in the field,” or “townsperson”:

Ms. M: There is actually a hierarchy in medieval times.
Shaun: Am I a noble?

Ms. M: Shaun, stop talking!

Ms. M: So, we’re going to look at the hierarchy. If you believe you are noble, line up [here]. *Students get up and line up, all the while calling out to tell each other who they think belongs to a noble position."

Ms. M: If you work in the castle go [here].

Swetha: *(to Farat)* You don’t work in the castle—go back there! You’re the king! *(OBS, March 31, 2011)*

Students with roles such as king, lady, baron, and baroness immediately went to their nobles corner. The many students assigned roles as workers and townspeople—such as the alchemist, herald, scullery maid, and mason—appeared a little confused. They ended up in another group, all together. Ms. Marlee instructed the rest of the students to find their places either in the town or out in the field. This was another example of how social inequality was normalized: Ms Marlee did not extend the activity by asking the students to do something in their particular groupings, which left little or no opportunity for dialogue. However, the physical divisions in which Ms. Marlee placed the students allowed them to see that there was a strict social class hierarchy at that time *(OBS/J, March 31, 2011)*. I observed students as they researched their different medieval period roles. The students independently researched their individual roles online, responding to worksheet questions such as “Who are you?” and “What do you do?” and “Who works for you?” As I walked around the classroom, Farat asked me, “Who serves me directly?” I responded, going along with the mandate of the exercise, “You’re the king, so everyone serves you during this period in time” *(OBS, March 25, 2011)*. Ms. Marlee reminded all
students, as they responded to this question: “Everyone has someone who works for them.” A male student, Veeran, clarified this medieval social structure: “Like your family or children?” Ms. Marlee commended him for understanding the hierarchal roles and reiterated the gender norms that she embedded into this history: “Yes, your wife works under you, for example. There will always be someone who serves you—it could be your children, even” (OBS, March 25, 2011). This was an example of how Ms. Marlee strengthened gender social structure stereotypes and perpetuated competitive social dynamics.

My interviews with the Grade 4 students confirmed that many students had readily subscribed to what they believed was an irrefutable and predetermined hierarchy within their society. For instance, Swetha said: “Ms Marlee will call us up in groups, in order, and everybody will take turns and she will say ‘How would they use these words now today, compared to medieval times?’ So, like, a king would be a prime minister” (SI, April 13, 2011). In other interviews, students also identified social class structures. For instance, one male student said, “I’m a merchant, so I’m above a peasant” (SI, April 8, 2011)—again echoing the competitive power dynamics within this classroom space.

While some students, like Navpreet, saw possibilities for pushing role boundaries, most students uncritically subscribed to their roles, reinforcing contemporary hierarchy of power and privilege, the idea that each has a predefined place within society. Overall, this class of culturally diverse students embraced the opportunity to learn about the medieval period, even though the implemented lessons were limited to mostly factual knowledge. For instance, in an interview, I asked Navpreet, a quiet female, what she felt she was
learning from the Medieval Times unit. She responded that she appreciated the opportunity to learn about other cultures:

Navpreet: I actually think it would make me happy to learn about other people and their languages... But I like learning about medieval times because now I know what happened in the past. (SI, April 20, 2011)

Navpreet said that she would like to “learn about other people,” and commented, “now I know what happened,” indicating she considered knowing about the medieval period to be neutral cultural knowledge. To her, the past in social studies class did not include learning about diverse Other cultures—such as her own, as a Sikh girl who was born in India.

Apple (1979/1990) theorized that schools prepare young people for acting their roles within an already defined, unequal, hierarchal social and economic system. Ms. Marlee’s implementation of the medieval system hierarchy is an example of how easily dominant discourses about hierarchy could be uncritically taught to diverse students. The implications were that these diverse students were taught to accept unequal access to power, without the opportunity to practise dissent from their unequal positions in the world. For young, diverse, newcomer immigrant students, such teaching may contribute to a belief that people such as themselves could not possibly be agents of social change in their new society.

In one class discussion, Ms. Marlee encouraged Tina, who as a Christian was in the minority in this classroom context, to relate her medieval role to her actual religious identity:

Ms. M: Very few people read, but among the top people who could read were
the clergy. Tina, you should know this. What position were you assigned?

Tina: Abbess.

Ms. M: What are you a part of?

Tina: Clergy.

Ms. M: The church controlled a lot of the knowledge and it was to their benefit to have the other people be illiterate, because reading is power and the church just educated people within the clergy. When the Renaissance happened they had access to the printing press and there were more people reading. If you were rich, what are you doing?

Amit: (a knight) Get the minstrels to make music.

Tina: (an abbess) Write poetry.

Swetha: (a lady) Make dinner.

Ms. M: Yep, the ladies would plan the meals. (OBS, March 28, 2011)

As argued by Hemmings (2000) and as I argue in Chapter 5, connecting to students’ identities can be a strategy for opening up the possibilities for inclusion and engagement. Ms. Marlee reminded Tina that she “should know” about the church systems and structures, thereby acknowledging Tina as a practising Christian, and affirming her identity and inclusion in this classroom space. This dialogue about the church was also an instance of the way Christianity operated as a dominant discourse in this classroom context; it was implicitly constructed as settled and powerful curriculum content. By stimulating Tina to explore the idea that the medieval church controlled knowledge, the lesson presented the idea that unequal social structures were preserved in medieval
societies. This was an effort to examine how power operated and how the church controlled that knowledge.

Nonetheless, while this moment provided students with some exposure to the role of the medieval church, I did not observe the issue being raised again by Ms. Marlee or by Tina in the remainder of the unit. As mentioned earlier, Tina had specifically asked her teacher to assign her a role within the church in the medieval simulation. This demonstrated Tina’s comfort in speaking in class about her Christian religious identity, which was continuously acknowledged by Ms. Marlee—she often used Tina as an example linked to the Christian church. For the most part, however, in Ms. Marlee’s lessons and activities about power positions during the medieval period, her efforts to foster connections to students’ ethnocultural identities were otherwise minimal. And, as in Ms. Marlee’s study of Canadian symbols (see Chapter 5), she implicitly taught her Grade 4 students not to critique hierarchies in this historical period.

The interpersonal religious conflict that had erupted between two girls earlier in the school year (see Chapter 5) appeared to demonstrate that different religions were open topics for discussion. Students seemed to be comfortable accepting that religious differences coexisted in their diverse class. Speaking about “God,” for instance, was not censored, as might otherwise be expected in a public school system. During a literacy class, Ms. Marlee displayed a picture of Joan of Arc on the SMART Board and told students that Joan of Arc had gone to war, won lots of battles, and claimed to “hear God.” She went on to say that the story didn’t end well; that Joan of Arc didn’t go home because she was “tried by the church and burned at the stake” (OBS, March 8, 2011). In an example of a kind of conflict, over how gender expectations influenced equity and
justice, Swetha and Shaun reflected about women’s roles and how social class intersects with gender:

Swetha: Why do you think they burned her?

Ms. M: Why do you think that?

Students: I don’t know.

Ms. M: The charge against her was that she was wearing men’s clothes.

Swetha: Well some girls wear guys’ clothes now and girls wear guys’ clothes.

Ms. M: (with rising intonation) But we [women] were their shadow and owned by them.

Swetha: (and other girls) WHAT!?! (some boys laugh, mocking some girls)

Ms. M: You’ll see it more [in] medieval times.

Shaun: (interrupts) What happens if they’re a queen?

Ms. M: If you’re a queen you’re lucky.

Swetha: I’m happy I’m not living there, then.

Ms. M: OK, we’re supposed to be linking this to inferring. (transitions). (OBS, March 8, 2011)

In this dialogue, Swetha drew upon her own cultural knowledge and viewpoint, to interpret this social studies lesson about medieval gender expectations and Joan of Arc. This illustrates Swetha’s identity with self and her sense of agency as a young Tamil Sri Lankan girl, whose family had immigrated to Canada because of the civil war. This discussion about history provided Swetha with the opportunity to affirm her sense of self, saying she was happy “not living there” as she enjoyed the right to wear what she wanted. Shaun also drew upon his sociocultural knowledge, and actually deepened the
dialogue, by asking an interpretive question: “What happens if they’re a queen?” This was important, first because Ms. Marlee used the opportunity to respond to Shaun’s question, which she did not always do, and secondly it showed how Shaun critically interpreted gender and social class. Even though Ms. Marlee taught many uncritical lessons across her curriculum, she provided the opportunity for this brief critical dialogue before reminding students that their discussion was constrained by mandated curriculum expectations.

In an interview, Ms. Marlee told me that she wanted to speak in class about the role of Muslims, particularly because Fatima’s father had told her he was concerned about how this Muslim history would be presented in class. She described her choice to incorporate Muslims by including a mosque in the medieval village that students built at the end of the unit:

Ms. M: Well yeah, there was a Muslim influence and I told them that . . . they were fighting back and forth. . . . Muslims had land that the Christians wanted. . . . It was all about the land, money, and power.

CP: And they agreed with you?

Ms. M: Fatima’s father was very uncomfortable that we were doing medieval times. . . . I told him that we would never shut the kids down or teach them a program that wasn’t in the curriculum.

CP: So, he didn’t want her to learn about it?

Ms. M: No, I think he thought it would present Muslims in a bad light. But it [the unit] didn’t have a focus on Muslims whatsoever. . . . It’s in the curriculum document. You’re supposed to talk about it but I’m sure a
lot of teachers skim it over. . . . But we’re building a mosque, so
[laughter] that’s probably where Fatima will come in handy, because we don’t have any pictures of mosques. . . . I think they called them Moors at the time. . . . some adults are just afraid to discuss these things with them, and I’m not. (TI, April 20, 2011)

Here, Ms. Marlee appeared to view her implementation of conflict and diversity education somewhat differently than I did in interpreting her lessons: she felt that she had overcome her fear of discussing potentially controversial issues such as religious conflicts. Her students engaged in these conflicts and raised them as issues, and Ms. Marlee sometimes used the opportunity to respond to them. Overall, Ms. Marlee’s acknowledgement of conflict and diversity during the medieval period was limited to content and activities that asked students to reproduce the cultural and gender norms of this time in history. Where possible, these young students tried to find their own ways to critically engage with their roles, by sometimes self-analyzing and reflecting with each other—thereby resisting the silencing of critique in this curriculum.

**Building Character and Strengthening Values:**

**Rights and Responsibilities of Canadian Citizens**

Mrs. Amrita’s approach to teaching about conflict and diversity was somewhat similar to Ms. Marlee’s, in that she also controlled which students were given the opportunity to pose critical questions during her recitation lessons. However, Mrs. Amrita provided much more structured time for individual and small-group activities, which gave students many more opportunities to make their own decisions and come to their own conclusions. In a Social Studies unit, Mrs. Amrita taught her Grade 5s about rights
and responsibilities of Canadian citizens, which culminated in a whole-class, simulated election. Mrs. Amrita explicitly acknowledged social power structures as she guided students to take on their electoral roles and positions. As we saw in Chapter 5, while Mrs. Amrita’s study of ancient civilizations had offered many opportunities for students to find cultural and religious connections amongst themselves, she also taught about social hierarchies within and across cultures. She challenged gender dynamics in ancient Greece: “In democracies today, both men and women are citizens and they’re not slaves. Democracy in ancient Greece was in many ways similar to democracy today, but it was limited because only people who were citizens could vote. Women were not citizens” (OBS, April 20, 2011). Many of the girls and boys in this Grade 5 class were surprised by this historical fact. Their surprise was further complicated by the ways they interpreted inequity and democracy. Many students came from families and countries where female oppression was the norm. However, almost all of their families believed they had migrated to a free, democratic country. The study of ancient Greece appeared to provide students with the opportunity to see how inequity was historically constructed in other parts of the world, and not limited to their home countries.

Mrs. Amrita illustrated her patriotism to Canada as she enthusiastically taught her Grade 5s about the Canadian federal, provincial, and municipal governmental systems. First, students read from their textbook and from various worksheets that she provided, describing the different levels of government in Canada. Similar to what she had done in her Immigration Studies unit, Mrs. Amrita then attempted to connect this knowledge to students’ realities by engaging students in a simulated class election in which she encouraged students to participate, reminding them that everyone would have a role in
the election since they would all be citizens capable of making decisions. She solicited leaders for each political party, asking students to raise their hands if they were interested in being a leader. In response, five boys and one girl, Kate (a high-status, academically strong Chinese girl), volunteered. Mrs. Amrita saw this as a gender disparity and aired the possible conflict of having too many male candidates to the entire class, hoping that they would find a resolution together. She asked the boys to line up in front of the classroom, and she and the boys’ peers waited to see who would back down. One boy, Arun (a middle-status, academically low Indian boy) decided to go back to his seat. The remaining four stood strong: Nitin (a high-status, academically strong Indian-Hindu boy), Sugriva (a lower-status, academically moderate Indian-Hindu boy), Irtal (a middle-status, academically low Pakistani-Muslim boy), and Qadir (a lower-status, academically low Pakistani-Muslim boy). The diversity among these volunteers’ social and academic statuses showed that all (or at least many male) students believed they had the opportunity to volunteer for these potentially powerful roles. Also in front of the class, Mrs. Amrita informed Kate that she would automatically be included as a candidate because she was female (OBS, March 5, 2011).

Mrs. Amrita’s prefatory remarks, stating her expectations that all students would participate, appeared to embody the gender equity she believed in: fair representation of both males and females. A few days before the volunteers came forward, Mrs. Amrita described to the class her vision for the class election and reminded students of the importance of emulating Canadian principles and values. She also modelled her patriotism when she praised Canada for having “equal representation” from diverse groups within Canadian political regimes:
Mrs. A: Our election will be the same way as it is in Canadian elections—there is equal representation, so all the ethnic groups, cultural groups and . . . the different genders are all allowed to run in the elections. And they [Canadian officials] make sure that people from every community are represented and serve in the government. Sometimes they [ethnic minority candidates] want their own community people there too, so they make sure there is equality. (OBS, March 5, 2011)

Mrs. Amrita did what she saw as her duty as a virtuous social studies teacher: she explicitly taught patriotic values and Canadian cultural norms. At the same time, as shown in Chapter 5, she also echoed and affirmed the false beliefs that many newcomer immigrants and second-generation immigrants carry: that there is equality in Canada among all cultures, genders, and sexes. This clearly illustrates how the rhetoric of liberal Canadian multiculturalism may be filtered through the school system in ways that support dominant ideologies (Gérin-Lajoie, 2008b). As the many diverse students in the class listened to their visible minority teacher, who spoke with a heavy Indian accent, it appeared that they forgot the numerous stories they had recently shared about their struggles for cultural inclusion in Canada—where equality had not been honoured upon their arrival (see Chapter 5). Thus, Mrs. Amrita’s emergent implemented curriculum (i.e., sharing of personal narratives) contrasted with the prescribed textbook, in which patriotism and equality were uncontested.

Despite Mrs. Amrita’s effort to achieve gender equality among the candidates in her class, she decided that she would let all of the five volunteers act in the simulated election campaign as party leaders. Subsequently, students formed five parties under
these leaders. Mrs. Amrita later told me privately that she had not been sure if she should have let Qadir and Irtal be political leaders, because they were lower achievers and sometimes disruptive in class. As she reflected with me, she rethought her concern and said, “Well why not? If they want to participate, then I should let them” (J, March 5, 2011). I concurred with her. The inclusion of Qadir and Irtal, both of Muslim-Pakistani origin and both struggling with the academic curriculum, meant that they had the opportunity to practise their skills for democracy and communication. Also, the process of engaging in a class election had the potential to support positive conflict-learning opportunities, in which students would learn to discuss issues and to state their perspectives. Critical dialogic activities such as this are even more important for students who are marginalized (e.g., through academic or immigration status), and who might not be given the opportunity to hone their communication and conflict skills.

In the class elections, at first Mrs. Amrita offered the student-citizens a choice—to either independently join one of the different parties, or to be assigned to a party. She received these overwhelming cries: “You do it, Mrs. Amrita!” “People will just choose their friends!” “You choose!” As a result, Mrs. Amrita numbered the class off from one through to five to assign each student-citizen to a random political party. This left students with little or no agency in their political decisions—by their own choice. Students in this class appreciated the teacher’s assignment of groups. They saw that this ensured equity and offered an opportunity to work outside of the typical academic groupings to which they were usually assigned. Mrs. Amrita also asked for volunteer media representatives, who would be in charge of advertising. Two East Asian males, Jack and Mike, confident students with middle to higher social status in the class,
volunteered for these positions. They appeared to take on neutral roles within the campaign. And Uma, a Tamil Sri Lankan female, volunteered to be the elections officer. There was no discussion about maintaining gender equity in these additional roles. Because Mrs. Amrita had been so vocal about gender equity when selecting the candidates, her silence in regards to the gender take-up in these nonleadership roles implied the importance of maintaining equitable relations among leadership candidates of public governing bodies.

When students experience what advocacy looks and feels like, such as through councils and diverse student representation on governing bodies, they may be empowered to address inequalities or injustices in their society (Davies, 2004b). Mrs. Amrita’s organized opportunities for student decision-making potentially served as a pathway for diverse students to challenge hegemonic assumptions. The five parties engaged in many student-centred decision-making processes. In their groups, the students decided upon and crafted their agendas, named their parties, and decided upon their mandates. The student parties, for the most part, advocated greater student autonomy: have a longer recess, and have the opportunity to self-select lunch seats, stay in for recess when it was cold, self-select gym activities, have healthier foods for snacks, use paper less, and not be subject to wearing uniforms.\(^2\) The task of working together to write mandates and agendas provided students with the opportunity to identify conflictual issues that were meaningful to them. This sense of autonomy appeared to increase student engagement.

\(^2\) At the time of my data collection, the school council had voted to implement simple uniforms for students to wear to school. Like Georgetown, Aria’s choice in implementing uniforms was a response to the poorer families who had recently immigrated to the neighbourhood and could not afford to buy their children clothes for school. Students were not told that this was the reason that motivated the decision to have uniforms and they spoke up against it when they were given the opportunity (e.g., through the class election and when they wrote speeches).
For instance, Faith, typically a quiet girl, assisted her campaign leader in crafting posters and marketing slogans. Many of the posters reflected slogans and images that the students believed were representative of Canadian electoral campaigns, based on what was depicted in their class textbook. Mrs. Amrita reminded students to take their participation in an election very seriously; she said that if they did not, her alternate assignment would be for them to read the textbook chapter on elections. Throughout my observations of this simulated election campaign, all students remained on task during the various steps and activities. They were clearly engaged in this experience, enacting newfound autonomy in their varying roles.

Mrs. Amrita encouraged students to pay attention to everyone else’s platforms, as they would all have the opportunity to vote. Mrs. Amrita asked students to be individual decision makers, as voters in the election, rather than simply voting for the political alliances they had been assigned to work for. By encouraging students to independently reflect about which party had presented the best agenda through the campaign process, Mrs. Amrita explicitly reinforced their right to vote for whomever they chose:

Mrs. A: I want you to pay attention to the different platforms and agendas that each group presents, including your own, and then make a choice about who you would like to represent you.

Qadir, a newcomer from Pakistan, was concerned about his personal social status amongst the competing candidates. He inquired further about the process: “But how do people not vote for their friends?” Mrs. Amrita, also concerned about this possibility, added: “I may ask you all to explain why you are voting for that person” (OBS, March 5, 2011). Mrs. Amrita’s decision to ask students to prepare for the possibility of disclosing
their choice in their private ballot for particular candidates is an example of how the Canadian democratic voting process was misrepresented, where there are private anonymous votes. She did not in actuality ask for their choices to be shared in the end, but because Mrs. Amrita typically asked students to explain their answers during most class discussions, across subject areas, her request was taken seriously. Qadir’s slight nod of his head appeared to indicate that Mrs. Amrita’s decision satisfied Qadir’s political concerns. Qadir’s interest in winning the election also illustrates that he believed that he had the potential to win—based on his campaign, and not on his social, immigration, or lower academic status.

During literacy class, the morning after candidates had been approved to run their campaigns, students worked in small groups reading and responding to a variety of short stories. As I walked around to the different tables, I heard Kate encouraging her peers to vote for her, using a hard-bargaining technique that illustrated the personal power she felt in the classroom as the sole female candidate. The following discussion ensued among the small group of male and female students and myself:

 Kate: *(Chinese female; to her group)* If you vote for me, I’ll bring candy for you on Monday.

 CP: *(intervenes)* That is bribery, though, Kate.

 Kate: OK, I won’t bring it then.

 CP: Well you could think of other reasons people should vote for you. You are the only female-led political party. Why do you think none of the other girls volunteered?

 Kate: I *told* Jesse to do it, but she didn’t. *(Jesse looks up and smiles)*
Uma: (Tamil Sri Lankan female; pointing out her leadership position) I’m the elections officer.

CP: Do you think politics would be different if more women were involved?

Kate: Yeah, there was only one female prime minister—we learned that in our textbook.

CP: Yes, and she was only in power for about three months.

Caden: (Chinese male) If women were in politics, there would be no war, only peace. Men only want to fight and women would talk it out.

Kate: (agrees with Caden) Women would only promote peace; they don’t want to go to war. I’m going to say that in my speech to get people to vote for me. (OBS, March 6, 2011)

This glimpse of behind-the-scenes dialogue during a class period sheds light on how students engaged with the election process. Kate was used to winning academically in her class; she was popular and was also a member of the girls’ basketball team. While she resorted to suggesting bribery to secure her votes, she and her peers also showed their confidence in her potential as a female leader, who, as Caden pointed out, “would talk it out” and “there would be no war, only peace.” This assertion helped to show how some students interpreted the meaning of differently gendered leadership and its relationship to conflict. Kate’s candidacy as a female may have stimulated students to reflect on how gender was socially constructed. It also shows a classroom experience that was reminiscent of typical Canadian politics, where there are also not as many females in leadership positions.
In campaigning, the candidates approached all of the student-citizens to tell them about their platforms. Mrs. Amrita reminded the student-citizens to think open mindedly, and “just listen.” She also reminded the candidates to speak positively and with respect (OBS, March 10, 2011). Uma, the elections officer, and I counted the votes and the media representatives announced the winner:

Media: And the winner is (all students participate in doing drumroll) 3–2–1

... Kate!!!! (All scream and clap, and some whisper to each other, “I knew it would be her!”)

Upon hearing that she won, Kate made her way to the front of the classroom, announcing to her citizens: “I’m very happy to represent you all. I will work hard for all of you!” I asked, during small group interviews after the election, about this issue of leadership:

CP: Kate, could you tell me a little bit about your experience with being the leader?

Kate: Well first of all, it was really fun because I beat the guys.

Girls: (giggling)

Kate: Because they underestimated me. So, um, like . . .

CP: Do you feel you had support from all the other girls in your class?

Kate: Yeah.

CP: More the girls than the guys?

Kate: Yeah, because um, like, we’re friends and all that. So then, like, usually we support other people, like, our friends on it. And, like, it was really fun, so yeah.
Uma: The guys started talking about Kate in our group. They were, like, “She’s the only girl and she’s not going to win.” (SI, May 12, 2011)

As an already popular girl in the class, Kate’s win reinforced the status hierarchy in the class, and it also challenged traditional Canadian politics in which female leaders are few. Many of the other girls in the class appeared to feel empowered by Kate’s win. According to Kate, the other girls supported her. The females in this class revelled in what became a sense of shared victory.

After the winning candidate was announced, Mrs. Amrita engaged the students in an open discussion about the electoral process:

Mrs. A: Can you tell me one thing that you learned?
Caden: Attract the audience who you think will vote for you.
Mrs. A: Yes, what people thought you would bring through with your agenda is what made people vote for you, yes.
Uma: You have to be very prepared to get everything ready.
Mrs. A: Yes, and then it is your responsibility to keep your promises as well.

What else?
Sugriva: (a former candidate) You have to vote based on your agenda.
Kate: You have to work really hard to keep your promises.
Qadir: (a former candidate) When you do the hard work and then you don’t win all the time. (OBS, March 11, 2011)

Mrs. Amrita’s guided reflection on the election process is an example of how she explicitly encouraged students to be responsible citizens. As a result, diverse students, including those who had served as candidates, described characteristics of good
citizenship and governance. Overall, while Mrs. Amrita guided students to compete and to engage in constructive conflict over the various issues their parties advocated, she also held high expectations for students to do so with respect. Mrs. Amrita explicitly taught students about the importance of respecting Canadian values and to responsibly enact their rights to vote.

In contrast to this simulated Canadian election, many students in the class had witnessed first-hand the violence that comes with election campaigns in different parts of the world. Jamal, for instance, shared that his family had moved from Kenya to Canada due to political uprising and government corruption. Many of the Sri Lankan students spoke both in class and in small group interviews about the civil war violence in their home country, criticizing that government on many levels. With their knowledge that Canada was not at war and their apparent view that Canada represented peace, they seemed to accept the representation of Canadian elections as peaceful processes. For instance, Arun described how his group supported Kate’s platform:

Arun: So we tried to put down the competition and bring others over to our side. . . . We had to do it carefully. . . . Well, not, like [saying things like] “Oh you guys suck” kinda thing, but we just came up with arguments against them. Like, we used questions, like, “Would you actually do that? How would you do that? How is that possible? Can you do that?” All that stuff, you know. (SI, May 18, 2011)

Arun’s reflection on the election campaign process clearly demonstrated that in Mrs. Amrita’s class, students had the opportunity to have their voices heard and to ask critical and reflection questions.
At the end of the unit, Mrs. Amrita asked students to consider what it would mean for Canada if people did not vote. She passionately told a personal story, to relate to students the importance of contributing to society as responsible citizens:

Mrs. A: My dad used to tell me this story: A king in a village decided that he would like to have milk in the well. He announced to all of his citizens that everyone had to pour a bowl of milk in that well during the nighttime. . . . Everyone said, “OK, well, I’m not going to do it, they wouldn’t know. If one thousand people are going to go and put milk, then why should I go in the middle of the night to go and put milk there? . . . Do you think the king would know?” No, because he cannot measure it, the milk mixes with the water, right? So, in the morning, when the king went to check the well, there was absolutely no milk—not even a drop. Each and every one of them, thought that well, “If I don’t do it, then no one else would know.”

So, boys and girls, there are many people like that, and maybe I am one of them too. If I told you that I’m not going to vote, what would that tell you? It is our responsibility, and we must go out and vote for the right person. We don’t go and vote for that person because they are your friend or because they belong to your ethnic group or maybe because you think he looks cool—no. No, just look at his agenda and then decide why you want to vote for him or her. . . . Because when you think, “Oh, it won’t matter if I don’t do it,” well, we see that it does matter. (OBS, March 11, 2011)
As she explained the seriousness of the voting process, students were silent and appeared to be listening attentively. Evidently, this personal anecdote had an impact on the students. Sharing personal narratives was part of Mrs. Amrita’s implemented curriculum. Using narratives also reflected Mrs. Amrita’s South Asian and Indian heritage, in which narratives usually carried deeper cultural meanings. In this story, she implicitly taught students about their important roles as new Canadians, about how their political participation and engagement was needed. Her political awareness appeared to increase as she taught this unit to her diverse students; she acknowledged her responsibility, as a new Canadian, to vote. Mrs. Amrita previously had told me privately that she felt embarrassed that hadn’t voted in the recent, actual Canadian election. As a new Canadian citizen herself, she appeared to realize that this had been a missed opportunity to participate in a democratic election process. She chose to share with her students that she had not voted in the recent election and then promised them that she would be a responsible citizen and vote in the next election. She expressed her hope that the students’ parents would do the same. By saying this, she sent a message to both her diverse students and their immigrant parents about their responsibilities as new Canadians in a democracy.

Mrs. Amrita also told me privately that she had expected Nitin to win the mock election. Both Kate and Nitin were popular and their peers looked up to them as role models and leaders in the class. They also had used similar campaigning tactics (coloured photocopied signs, eloquent speeches, and constant reminders to their peers to vote for their parties). The two apparently less popular boys, Qadir and Irtal, did not gather as many votes. Sugriva only received one vote.
Within this diverse classroom, where many students were of similar (East Asian and South Asian) ancestry, factors other than ethnocultural origins influenced students’ various social status and identity markers. The four male candidates were all South Asian—two Hindu, and two Muslim. However, there was no indication that their religious or cultural identities were seen by their peers as relevant to the election process. Rather, academic status and personal popularity seemed to play a larger role in this campaign: the two top vote-getters were Kate and Nitin. Their academic achievement also appeared to have enabled Kate and Nitin to create stronger campaigns, as they drafted powerful and convincing speeches, and were confident in defending their positions on the issues they raised in their campaigns. During an interview, the two lower-status, typically quiet male candidates expressed their appreciation for having had the opportunity to lead, in a class where they were usually the ones behind:

CP: I just want you to tell me a little bit about what your experience was like being a candidate.

Irtal: It felt really good. And I felt like I was really part of the election and I felt I was getting more of the people [on my side]. *Like that day I unlocked my confidence.*

CP: So you felt very confident. What about you, Qadir?

Qadir: Like I wanted to be the boss of the class.

CP: What was your responsibility of being a leader?

Irtal: To make posters and to make an agenda and tell [people] blah, blah, blah, and why you should vote for me and stuff.

CP: OK, so what was your responsibility, like, your overall purpose?
Qadir: To help the country.

CP: So, when the election was happening, what were you thinking?

Irtal: I thought I would get elected. (SI, May 25, 2011)

This interview provided a glimpse into how Irtal and Qadir understood their role as responsible citizens: that they were capable of “help[ing] the country.”

The class election process appeared to provide a variety of opportunities for various students, both with lower and higher academic and social status, to participate and have their voices heard. Within the campaign groups, all of the students excitedly worked together to develop neoliberal platforms. The activity allowed for students to reflect on what they felt they could change and what they wanted to change. However, after Kate was elected, there was little or no discussion on what would happen next, such as whether Kate actually planned on putting any of her promises into action. Nonetheless, within weeks of her win, Kate independently gathered some of her peers to put up posters around the school to encourage the use of less paper. This was one of the more easily implementable goals for which she had advocated during her campaign.

All of the students demonstrated active participation in the election campaign. While this may have been because of Mrs. Amrita’s threat to impose textbook reading in lieu of this simulation activity, it may have also been because at that same time, May of 2011, a federal election campaign was also underway. The actual contemporary Canadian federal election campaign seemed to stir the interest of many students. For instance, in small group interviews some students asked me who I had voted for, and others shared whom their parents had voted for; Janu told me: “My mom voted Liberal. I told her to” (SI, May 10, 2011). To further engage her students’ interest, Mrs. Amrita took them on a
field trip to their school gymnasium, where one of the polling stations was set up. I asked students how their participation in the class election and visit to the polling station had informed their understanding of the Canadian government. Sophi shared her excitement about seeing what an actual voting process looked like: “It helped us to see what’s going on” and Malika added, “We got to see how it all looks. . . . I wanted the NDP to win” (SI, May 10, 2011). The election simulation appeared to engage students in wanting to contribute to Canadian democracy and it provided them with some necessary skills and understanding to do so. Mike shared that his participation in the simulated election as a citizen media representative had encouraged him to plan to vote when he turns 18:

Mike: Now we know how to vote . . . and [when] we get to 18, we get to see the agendas and what they do for us and see who is the best person to vote for. (SI, May 25, 2011)

Thus, the class election stimulated diverse students’ interest and potential for active, engaged citizenship within the actual governing bodies in their communities. While the names of actual Canadian political parties were not assigned to the class’s simulated election (e.g., NDP, Conservative, Liberal, Green3), students, like Janu and Malika, began referring to these political organizations when discussing the Canadian government. This showed how the class activity had stimulated their interest to seek out the different parties in the Canadian election occurring at that time. It also encouraged students to develop their communication skills for dialoguing across differences within their democratic society.

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3 These are examples of the different political parties that students referred to in class. The New Democratic Party (NDP) and Green Party have very leftist political orientations. The Liberals are also considered left-wing, but not as left as the NDP and Green Party. Conservatives are right-wing. Liberals and Conservatives have historically dominated politics in Canada.
Mrs. Amrita did not explicitly reflect on power and the responsibilities that come with having particular unequal or powerful status. Instead, as in Ms. Marlee’s class, such hierarchies were accepted as the norm. Such socialization limits the potential for students to develop activist or social justice–oriented citizenship identities (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). For diverse students, especially those new to Canada, dialogic activities that invite discussion without critical reflection about conflictual issues such as campaign issues may implicitly invite marginalized students to accept “often repressive political realities and dynamics of power of their society” (Apple, 1979/1990, p. 84).

**Rebellions and Arab Spring in a Canadian Multicultural Context**

Mr. Hiroshi introduced the Grade 7s to the Rebellions of 1837 and to various political figures who had shaped the escalation of this conflict in the British North American colonies of Upper Canada (Ontario) and Lower Canada (Québec). The historical leaders he explicitly taught about were all White males, typical for most traditional, Eurocentric social studies curricula. Mr. Hiroshi attempted to connect this history to his diverse students by dividing them into three political groups, representing how people with different social and political allegiances had reacted at the time to governmental rules and restrictions. He named these groups as the “rebellious” radicals, the “passive” moderates, and the “really pompous” government-supporting group known as the Family Compact (OBS, February 3, 2011). In these historical roles, students engaged in a structured debate they called the Town Hall Meeting of 1837.

Nevertheless, Mr. Hiroshi assigned them to argue about an issue of contemporary relevance to them in the Town Hall: the question of mandatory uniforms.⁴ The next day,

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⁴ See fn 2 in this chapter.
he led a discussion on the current political uprising in Egypt. Mr. Hiroshi told students that he wanted to show them how various groups of people might respond to conflictual issues in different contexts through rebellion (OBS, February 4, 2011). He invited students to reflect on the uprising in Egypt and asked them to acknowledge different levels of power in this social conflict, compared to the Rebellions of 1837. He posted a newspaper article that had “Arab Awakening” in big letters on the class Twitter account and brought the hard copy of the article in for discussion, placing it on the current events bulletin board. Upon seeing a photo of a boy picking up a rock in Tahrir Square, in Cairo, Egypt, one of the students, Thanjai, pointed out that in the 1837 Upper Canada Rebellion, rebels also had picked up whatever was available to fight the British colonial government:

Mr. H: If you’re at all concerned about what’s going to Egypt, here’s an image from the paper.

MS: Is that a little kid?

Mr. H: Actually no, it’s a person, but there’s rubble and debris all around.

This is Tahrir Square in Cairo. This is a really beautiful place. But here is a guy walking through and he’s picking up a rock. Now, it’s unfortunate, but we have to connect this back to what we’re doing right now. They didn’t have photography then. . . . In the painting of the Rebellions of 1837 [in the textbook], what were they doing? What were the men doing? What did they have in their hands?

Tyrone: Guns?

Thanjai: Anything they could have picked up.
Mr. H: Look at this guy in this picture; he doesn’t have a rifle or anything in his hands. He’s just picking up what’s around him. . . . It’s years and years later, but here, look, we may think that the Rebellions of 1837 are done and over, but no it’s not. Here, the exact same thing is happening on the other side of the world right now. There’s a phrase that goes like this: “History repeats itself,” and unfortunately it’s true.

(OBS, February 4, 2011)

Thus, Mr. Hiroshi guided his students to reflect on historical conflicts by connecting them to current events, explicitly inviting students’ perspectives on Arab Spring.

Mr. Hiroshi initially attempted to assign students to one of the three different political groups he had set up by posing what he believed were unsettled, conflictual questions, such as whether teachers should tell students what to do, whether summer vacation should be longer, and whether students should be forced to wear uniforms. He asked them to respond to these questions, on a three-point opinion spectrum—strongly agree, somewhat agree, disagree—believing that he would be able to divide up the students based on these choices. However, the students generally shared the same opinions on these questions, and thus Mr. Hiroshi had to resort to Plan B: he asked students to volunteer to be part of a group of their choice. He shared his dilemma:

Mr. H: OK, heads up. So, what became evident is that you guys were all radical reformers. And you’re somewhat divided between radicals and moderates. So from this it looks like none of you would be the government. None of you are the arrogant, pompous, “I should have everything” dictator type. And that’s OK, but we do need to have a
group that is going to be like that. And it is strictly drama. Strictly drama. (OBS, February 4, 2011)

Telling the class that he needed volunteers to be part of the government group, despite their overwhelmingly radical attitudes, Mr. Hiroshi pointed out that he already knew “some people are not as likely to be as aggressive as some of the other people here” (OBS, February 4, 2011). He sent the message that students should choose a political group somewhat reflective of their own personal approaches to conflict, expressing that the exercise was “strictly drama.” He then asked for volunteers to represent the Family Compact. Five boys and one girl, Saba, one of two girls in the class who wore a hijab, raised their hands. However, when Saba saw that she was the only girl, she decided to not join. Mr. Hiroshi commented aloud on her decision, saying,

Mr. H: OK, OK, so Saba has decided not to join. Well, let’s make this as accurate as possible—were women allowed in the government in 1837?

Students: (multiple, mostly males) Nooo.

Mr. H: Yeah, actually no way. You (Saba) were not allowed to be in the government because women were at home cooking and cleaning.

Students: (multiple, mostly males) Oh yeahhhhh!!

Mr. Hiroshi’s Grade 7 boys did exactly what Ms. Marlee’s Grade 4 boys did when they learned that “women were below men”: they cheered. In both instances, the teachers said nothing. Thus disrespecting women’s rights, male students were implicitly given the message that it was acceptable for men to retain more power than women. Different from Ms. Marlee’s class, however, the intersection of gender and social class was not raised
explicitly in Mr. Hiroshi’s class. Instead, another message was conveyed: women would be in the less powerful groups, the moderates or the radicals.

With the all-male Family Compact secured, Mr. Hiroshi went on to recruit the radical reformer and moderate groups, reminding them of who these groups were in 1837:

Mr. H: So remember, radical reformers are the ones that oppose the government! They’re the ones that would pick up the rocks and throw it at the government. Now are you the type of person that would pick up the rock, and throw it or are you the type of person who would be the ones on the sidelines and be, like, “Yeah! Good throw!” and stand by and watch?

He asked students to move to one side of the room if they wanted to get up and fight as radical reformers: the majority of students raised their hands. Before asking students to volunteer as moderates, Mr. Hiroshi shared his own political allegiance to the moderate category: “Moderates are the group that opposes, but doesn’t actually fight or get involved. That would actually be me. I don’t want to get involved. I’m not a violent person.” For Mr. Hiroshi, it seemed that dissent involved violence. Six quiet female students raised their hands, aligning themselves with their teacher. He calmly supported their choice, saying to them, “OK, we’re going to be the moderates” and then went on, “How fitting! They are very moderate!” in response to the fact that all of the quiet girls had volunteered for this role. While the rest of the students waited to be confirmed as radical reformers, Mr. Hiroshi spoke out to one of his students: “I know you, Crystal: I know you definitely want to pick up a rock!” Crystal smiled confidently, in response to
this attention, and quickly assumed her role as a radical. Some students cheered her on, yelling “Woooo!” Mr. Hiroshi, impressed by what was then mostly female students’ engagement, continued to egg them on: “We need that group that will get up and fight, fight, fight!” (OBS, February 4, 2011). Like Mrs. Amrita, Mr. Hiroshi saw the importance of gender equity and wanted to encourage both his male and female students to volunteer for positions of their choice. However, Mr. Hiroshi also wanted to continuously affirm students’ choices, so when the group of quiet girls chose their position as moderates, he chose to align himself with them, which implied that they were not a weaker group. Crystal, like Kate in Mrs. Amrita’s Grade 5 class, served as a voice for other girls, who may have been reluctant to “get up and fight, fight, fight!” especially in a context where the boys had already been told that they were in charge in the powerful Family Compact. The remaining boys and girls in the class all got up and went to the radical reformers corner of the room, making it the biggest group.

In the end, Plan B gave students their choice of social party alignment and thus appeared to provide them with a sense of autonomy; each student seemed to feel connected to choices they had made themselves. In Ms. Marlee’s class, where the Grade 4s had had no control over their roles, students passively accepted their positions. Perhaps more importantly, with the exception of Farat the King and Tina the Abbess, most students did not seem to feel personally connected to their medieval simulation roles. Mrs. Amrita also chose groups, but by her students’ request, and then Mrs. Amrita assigned a task similar to Mr. Hiroshi: create an argument to support your group’s mandate. Comparison among these cases indicates that providing student autonomy for working in roles or groups seemed to increase the students’ engagement, especially when
they had the opportunity to make their own decisions, regardless of whether teachers assigned certain students to certain groups.

Mr. Hiroshi encouraged tension between the three simulated social divisions of 1837. He wanted students to engage in a dialogue and come to a decision to rebel, oppose, or agree with the proposition to wear uniforms in the school. These students did wear simple uniforms to school and sometimes expressed their frustrations about having to do so. Mr. Hiroshi met with all three groups (while not playing his moderate role), and offered encouragement for each of their positions.

Teachers, even those clearly skilled at managing conflict, may continue to reinforce the power of those students who already hold a lot of power (Hemmings, 2000; Ellsworth, 1989). An example of this can be seen in how he told Tyrone, who had readily volunteered to be part of the Family Compact, that he was in charge. This seemed to give Tyrone an incentive similar to the one Mr. Hiroshi had earlier bestowed upon Crystal. The only problem was that Tyrone and Crystal were already dominant, vocal students. As such, Mr. Hiroshi encouraged these already strong voices in the classroom to lead against their opposing groups.

Mr. Hiroshi told the moderates that they were “the wishy-washy people,” and that while they were being told what to do by the government, the radicals were also opposing them for not participating. In this way, Mr. Hiroshi guided the moderates to argue for and against both sides. As I observed the moderate group preparing their arguments, Malika, an academically strong but quiet girl, recommended to her fellow moderates a position of “We neither agree or disagree.” Remaining silent, they all seemed to concur (OBS, February 7, 2011).
The radicals and the Family Compact group tended to be the most vocal and engaged in the conflict, and often positioned themselves against each other, shouting put-downs across the room to affirm their position: “We’re the government and we’re in charge!” to which the radicals would respond: “We’re going to bring you down!” When things got heated, Mr. Hiroshi reminded students that they were all friends and that they were simply doing an activity. However, he also continuously stirred them up by asking them to align with their conflicting mandates—comparing this to the way the Rebellions had been enacted in 1837:

Mr. H: You know that we’re all friends, but imagine that you hate someone so much that you’re willing to take their life. And that’s something that everyone, the government, radicals, and moderates feel. The government hated the reformers. You guys [the moderates] would probably not admit it, but you hated them too. You probably didn’t agree with what they were going to do either. But you guys [radicals] were the insane group. You were going to make decisions to not only take someone’s life, but you could lose your own life and this would force you to have to leave your family and all your friends behind because you were hunted by these guys. Hunted. (OBS, February 7, 2011)

This rather violent incentive appeared to resonate with many of the boys in particular, who cheered and began arguing again, engaging in a debate rather than a dialogue. This occurred while students were still in their initial preparation phase, meeting individually in their small groups.
In conjunction with the preparation for the Town Hall meeting, Mr. Hiroshi taught more formal, content-based lessons, using both lecture and classroom discussion. For instance, he spoke about key spokespersons of the 1837 radicals, moderates, and Family Compact. He explained that Sir Francis Bond Head, who led the Family Compact, had originally been a radical reformer. Mr. Hiroshi and many of his students glorified William Lyon Mackenzie (1795–1861), a radical reformer who was presented as a political figure who had stimulated progressive change, a value that was implied in Mr. Hiroshi’s implemented curriculum. Another radical Mr. Hiroshi spoke about with great reverence was Robert Gourlay, a Scottish immigrant who settled in Upper Canada in 1817. When Gourlay realized that a small elite group (the Family Compact) controlled the best land, he began to speak up against the government and wrote a book to help new immigrants understand the challenges of settling in Upper Canada. Moderate reformers included William Baldwin and his son Robert. During the preparation for the Town Hall meeting, Mr. Hiroshi assigned various less-outspoken students to play the roles of these historical figures. Using his authority this way (assigning roles to provide more diverse students’ voice in the classroom) appeared to tone down the typical dominance of Tyrone and Crystal. Anita (a Muslim-Hindu girl) and Hartol (a quiet Sikh boy) represented Mackenzie and Gourlay. Sunita (another moderately higher social status Hindu girl) was

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5 William Lyon Mackenzie (March 12, 1795–August 28, 1861) was a Scottish immigrant who led the 1837 Upper Canada Rebellion. He had worked in both the United States and Upper Canada, first as a journalist and then as a politician; he was the first mayor of Toronto. His political perspective was known to be radical.

6 Robert Gourlay (March 24, 1778–August 1, 1863) studied agriculture and worked as both an agriculturist and a political reform writer. He was a strong leader in the 1837 Upper Canada Rebellion.

7 William Baldwin (April 25, 1775–January 8, 1844), a doctor and lawyer, immigrated from Ireland in 1798. He represented York and Simcoe in the 8th Parliament of Upper Canada. His son, Robert Baldwin (May 12, 1804–December 9, 1858), was born in Toronto (then York), and was a moderate reformer who did not support the 1837 Upper Canada Rebellion.
Baldwin and Akmed (a typically quiet and middle social status Muslim boy) was Bond Head. While these students might not have volunteered for these leadership positions, Mr. Hiroshi’s assignment of these historical roles gave them power to lead and speak for their conflicting groups.

Based on the above historical information and Tyrone’s persistent invitation to all of his classmates to join him “on the dark side,” two female students from the moderate group (Smira and Nira) asked Mr. Hiroshi if they could switch to the Family Compact group. Despite Mr. Hiroshi’s earlier intention to make the government group representative of historical times (male only), he agreed to let them “move up” to the Family Compact. For Smira, who was already known to be quiet, even quieter than her friend Nira, her transfer to this more dominant role provided an opportunity to enact a higher-status position. In the actual Town Hall simulation, students came prepared to engage in structured debate with speeches, props, and attire that they believed represented the characters or groups at the time: the Family Compact representative wore suits, the moderates dressed conservatively, and the radicals wore torn jeans and baggy clothing; some of the girls wore excessive makeup.  

During the Town Hall, Smira approached the podium with Nira, her friend/supporter, standing staunchly beside her and presented her Family Compact speech:

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8 Mr. Hiroshi obtained permission from the school principal for students to not wear their school uniforms on the day of the Town Hall simulation. The principal was very strict with the uniform policy; I often observed him visiting classrooms specifically to conduct uniform checks. Therefore, this was a special day for students, as they were given the freedom to dress as well as speak as they pleased, in role.
Smira: Everyone here knows that the government is working hard to make sure that we hear your voices... but we also want to be treated fairly with respect. (OBS, February 17, 2011)

Smira appeared to surprise her peers with her powerful voice, as all the different groups listened to her attentively. In contrast, when many of the other Family Compact representatives spoke at the podium, the radicals made noise with noisemakers, and booed them. Unlike some of the other Family Compact members, who started their speeches with “You rascal radicals, listen to me,” Smira presented an amicable speech that illustrated her desire to open a space for dialogue.

Students’ thorough preparation for participation in the Town Hall simulation demonstrated their evident engagement in this conflict dialogue activity, where they had the opportunity to take on and act out roles, which they may or may not have identified with. The moderates asked the radicals, “Why is it that you feel that everyone here needs to be in uniform, but you guys don’t?” Akmed retorted: “Because we’re rich. We can wear whatever we want.” Tyrone added: “Rich people buy nice things. Nice clothes, nice things, nice shoes.” This discussion about economic class showed that students attributed power to having money. This spoke to a sensitive issue within the school community: the school council initially had put in place a modest uniform policy at Georgetown to make it easier for the children of poor and working-class families to feel included amongst their peers.

Some students supported their personal arguments with content knowledge, as Mr. Hiroshi had asked students to read various articles that illustrated the contrasting points of view of the Family Compact, the moderates, and the radicals. He encouraged
these readings so that students would better understand the bias against the Family
Compact, and “why the Family Compact was hated” after learning how badly they had
treated common civilians in Upper and Lower Canada. Typical of Mr. Hiroshi’s style, he
further related this historical conflict to the students’ lives:

Mr. H: The Family Compact has all the money; they were the popular group
that everyone wanted to be like: “I want to be like them, but if I can’t
then I’m going to join the radicals.” . . . Just think about it, though. I
mean, I hope that none of you ever experienced this before, where you
have one person (and this happened to me when I was in school),
where one kid is strutting their stuff and acting like they’re all that and
some people were outnumbered. And some people really want to be
their friends for a little while, but soon enough their heads get so big
that they don’t have very many friends anymore and they end up
bullying people. . . . So that’s what happened here. (OBS, February 7,
2011)

Mr. Hiroshi modelled how to connect historical issues to current social issues
such as bullying, by sharing his personal experience with “one kid strutting their stuff.”
He asked students to reflect independently, making notes about their personal
experiences, and then brought them together for a discussion. This allowed students to
personally and critically reflect on their roles, while also preparing them to participate in
the whole-class discussion. Mr. Hiroshi pleaded with the students to “be a little
empathetic” for the other side’s positions (OBS, February 17, 2011). He videotaped the
Town Hall meeting and, one week after the simulation, he showed scenes from their
reenactment, pausing the film occasionally to invite students to reflect on what had been happening and what they had been feeling. Thus, Mr. Hiroshi encouraged student to think about the implications of the choices they had made during their conflictual dialogue. He began with an open-ended question to the whole class: “Did you guys have a good time with it?” All of the students cheered, shouting, “Yeahhhh! Yahhhh! It was so much fun!” (OBS, February 17, 2011). Then, moving the discussion deeper, building empathy for the opposition, he asked:

Mr. H: OK, so here’s a Family Compact member. *(displaying an image with a male student standing at the podium)* How do you think he’s feeling right now? *(Radicals are in the background playing cards, throwing things and overpowering his voice with noisemakers.)*

Sunita: *(FS)* Nervous.

Akmed: *(MS)* Humiliated.

Anita: *(FS)* Horrible.

Crystal: *(FS)* Badly.

Tyrone: *(MS)* Dumb.

Tajinder: *(MS)* Defeated.

Mr. Hiroshi agreed with Tajinder, arguing that the Family Compact speaker could have felt defeated due to the loud, rowdy, and somewhat disrespectful audience. Mr. Hiroshi explicitly guided students to consider what respectful norms for interaction would look like:

Mr. H: Imagine he was just trying to talk to people: how do you think the moderates feel? Put it in context . . . that’s why I don’t talk when you
guys are talking. It’s so hard to talk over people, especially when you’re trying to say something important, so that’s something to keep in mind.

Mr. Hiroshi encouraged students to identify the variety of emotions they had felt when they observed intense political conflict that appeared to align with some of the identities students ascribed to themselves (e.g., aggressive, quiet, powerful). He asked students to pay attention to the different choices they had made, in and out of role, and to what extent they felt that their conflict dialogue strategies, such as disrespectful behaviour, had been appropriate. He paused the video each time there was another instance of disrespectful dialogue to ask students to consider how the other side had felt when they were disrespected:

Student: It has come to my attention that the people of Upper Canada are just filthy, dirty and in need of attention!

Mr. H:  *(pauses and asks students)* What was that again? “Filthy . . .”

Students:  *(many)* “Unclean,” “Dirty,” “Like a dog.”

The students responded to Mr. Hiroshi’s question by describing the literal meaning for filthy, as opposed to identifying what was wrong with using such a harsh label. Mr. Hiroshi explained that the use of disrespectful language had escalated the conflict and thus encouraged the radicals to protest. As Mr. Hiroshi encouraged students to reflect on their vocabulary choices when in conflict, he was teaching them to speak with civility instead of harsh or violent words. In this way, Mr. Hiroshi transmitted Canadian values and national ideals to his students. Like Mrs. Amrita, Mr. Hiroshi saw the importance of teaching beyond the prescribed curriculum, and making use of such
critical incidents to teach cultural values and morals. Similarly (see Chapter 5), Ms. Marlee had seen the need to intercede in a religious conflict and used the opportunity to explicitly teach students how to behave in cross-cultural settings. These teachings have important ramifications for diverse immigrant students who are being acculturated to Canadian norms. It also shows that spaces do exist in curriculum to pause and reflect on how different values and beliefs stimulate or escalate conflict, and how alternative processes for approaching conflict may facilitate respect and peace.

Overall, Mr. Hiroshi’s student-centred debriefing of the Town Hall lasted for over 90 minutes and seemed to engage students in deep critical reflection on their roles and positions in the reenactment. Towards the end of the debriefing, and in keeping with the expectations of a debate, students attempted to decide who won. Mr. Hiroshi argued that the winners would be those who had made consistent, valid, and respectful points that enhanced the dialogue and moved the issues forward. Many students responded to these reflection questions from perspectives favouring the roles they had played. Extending the discussion, Mr. Hiroshi asked students to compare the simulation to their own lives, asking, “Have any of you ever been part of anything like this before?” Various students responded with, “G20!” “Judge Judy!” “The Sri Lankan protests!” Through this connection to students’ personal lives, Mr. Hiroshi again affirmed respectful activism and dialogue. At the same time he shared his personal viewpoint on the G20 protests that had occurred in Toronto in 2011:  

Mr. H: OK, the G20 summit: we had cop cars being burned, we had windows being broken, we had the riot police out. There’s been three or four

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9 The G20 summit is a yearly meeting of international representatives of the world’s economically most powerful countries. In 2011 the summit was held in Toronto.
different charges against police, for police brutality. And . . . it’s important to acknowledge that this stuff does happen in real life. Now, I’m not calling the cause of why people were protesting or marching wrong, but some of the things that happened out of anger and frustration, that’s what’s wrong.

In an interview, a Tamil Sri Lankan girl, Reshma, told me that if she and her peers engaged in this kind of conflict in real life that they “wouldn’t go that far, . . . like, we wouldn’t be fighting. . . . We’d talk it out.” Jawali confirmed: “No, It wouldn’t be like that,” referring to the violence that Mr. Hiroshi had showed them in newspaper clippings (SI, April 18, 2011). Clearly, Mr. Hiroshi’s message of nonviolence in speech and action had filtered through to at least some students. Overall, the values that Mr. Hiroshi taught through this activity were the importance of peaceful protest and respectful dialogue. He went on to describe that, because in 1837 the Upper Canada radicals had stood up and fought for people who were being treated unfairly (e.g., farmers and newcomer immigrants, mostly from Ireland and Scotland), a more responsible government had been formed. This discussion about historical conflict and contemporary life, such as the civil war in Sri Lanka and the G20 summit, encouraged students to reflect on how violent conflict could be overcome through peaceful and respectful protest.

The teachers in this study used various real or role-played conflicts to encourage dialogue learning opportunities. As I argued in Chapter 5, comparing past historical conflict to present-day conflict sometimes encouraged diverse student voices, by fostering connections to students’ own experiences and identities. I spoke to two quiet
boys, Akmed and Tajinder, in Grade 7, about their experiences of performing conflict while in role:

CP: So . . . can you talk a little bit about what it was like being on the government side?

Akmed: It was sorta cool because you get to learn about what the government actually does and how they get to boss around people and how other people don’t agree with them sometimes and how it feels to them. Sometimes the government makes decisions and sometimes people don’t like those decisions so people come together and try to get rid of it. Like the radicals.

Tajinder: Well you know they’re always talking about the election, right, you know, everything is about the election now. And they have this family plan, saying that they’re going to do more for seniors, but they don’t actually do it and then after they get elected they boss people around. I don’t think that [Prime Minister] Stephen Harper does that much.

Akmed: Yeah, he just takes our taxes. (SI, April 12, 2011)

Akmed highlights how his role had helped him understand “what the government actually does” and more importantly how it felt to make decisions when different groups, with different levels of power, disagree. Tajinder, an academically high, quiet male student, immediately connected this simulation to current politics in the Canadian federal election and the Conservative Prime Minister, Stephen Harper. Mr. Hiroshi had introduced the Family Compact in 1837 as the “arrogant, pompous . . . dictator type” and Akmed and Tajinder appeared to align with the notion that “they
[the government] just bosses people around” and “take our taxes.” Akmed and Tajinder’s experience with being part of the Family Compact influenced their interpretation and perceptions of modern Canadian politics. At the same time, Akmed shared how his being in a powerful role had boosted his confidence as a marginalized individual:

Akmed: I know that sometimes we disagree with people who are in charge and I know that I have never been one of those people that can be in charge, so I thought I can just take a chance and see what it feels like.

CP: To be in charge?

Akmed: Yeah.

CP: And how did it feel?

Akmed: It felt great! (laughing)

Through the role-play experience, both Akmed and Tajinder had realized that with such power came the responsibility to make decisions that could create conflict with the masses or radicals who don’t always agree with choices made by government bodies. The exercise also roused their interest in the federal elections that were occurring at that time. In the teacher-led reflection, Mr. Hiroshi pointed out what he believed were appropriate (nonviolent) and inappropriate (violent) ways to respond to conflict, such as through nonviolent protest—Town Hall meetings and debates versus violence. The class exploration of these alternate responses to conflict created opportunities for students to practise conflict through debate and then to reflect on how their choices in that conflict had affected others.

While Akmed and Tajinder illustrated their awareness of how conflict operated in democracies, other students showed how their perceptions of government and power
influenced how they chose to participate in their larger civic community. In an interview, a group of all the Tamil Sri Lankan/Hindu girls in Mr. Hiroshi’s class reflected on why they had chosen to stay within their particular moderate or radical roles. It became clear that, through the Town Hall simulation and the open classroom discussions about the Arab Spring rebellions, these students had felt more confident and critically aware of the power that governmental bodies had over local and global conflict:

Jawali: I was a radical and . . . [as a radical] you can fight for certain things.

Sunita: (a moderate; to Jawali) But would you risk your life?

Jawali: I would risk my life. I would. It is for my own good and for my country’s [Canada’s] good. (laughter) But I would. I’m trying to help my country and make it a better place. (The other girls laugh at her enthusiastic speech and Jawali responds to the muffled giggles) I would! That’s not bad. ’Cause you know if you were a Family Compact, you wouldn’t think of those things [social issues] because you have a good life already, you are selfish. (SI, April 18, 2011)

Here Jawali spoke directly to how she understood her democratic rights in Canada; she believed she could speak back to the government and “fight for certain things.” Her peer, Sunita, who had played the role of a moderate, questioned whether she would risk her life fighting for social and political issues. Sunita’s question is similar to the one that Mr. Hiroshi had posed to his class earlier in the term when he asked whether he would fight for Canada or Japan, if they were to go to war (see Chapter 5). Jawali may have been influenced by Mr. Hiroshi and by her experience with playing the role of an activist against the government. She confidently defended why she would risk her life for
Canada: “I’m trying to help my country and make it a better place.” As I continued with this interview, it became apparent that students’ experiences with the Town Hall meeting had provided them with language to understand personally relevant political conflicts that affected their lives. The simulation stimulated political and civic engagement:

Sunita: Me, Mona, and Jawali . . . had to write a letter and complain to somebody, and so we decided to write a letter to [the Canadian government] to complain about Egypt and about the whole problem.

CP: Really?

Sunita: Yeah, and for that Mona made a lot of connections because [it’s] her background.

As they spoke along these Canadian-national lines, it was interesting that they took the conversation next to the war in their home country, Sri Lanka. The girls related their experience with the simulated rebellion to the conflict in Sri Lanka, and went even further, to describe Canada’s present-day role in relation to Sri Lanka as characteristic of the Family Compact in 1837. While Jawali would “risk her life” for Canada, she also was angry at the Canadian government for refusing to intervene and provide aid to people in Sri Lanka:


Sunita: Yeah, and a lot of my friends, they didn’t know about it [the war in Sri Lanka] and then they learned a lot in that too.

CP: What kinds of things did you write in your letter?

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10 During an increase in the civil war and intense conflict in Sri Lanka in 2009 and 2010, the Canadian government was called upon by a large group of the Sri Lankan diaspora in Canada to intervene and when the government refused, large protests were held by the Sri Lanka diaspora across Canada to draw attention to the rampant and escalating violence in Sri Lanka’s 25-year civil war. Protests were concentrated in major southern Ontario cities, where a large percentage of the Sri Lankan diaspora resides.
Jawali: Well the Sri Lankan government is *selfish* and I can tell you that.

Sunita: But I really hate the Canadian government right now.

Jawali: ’Cause it’s our people who’s getting affected.

Students: *(females all enthusiastically talking at once)*

Sunita: Yeah, and if you’re Christian or whatever, you just won’t know about it.

Jawali: Well, they’re like the Family Compact.

Sunita: Like, the Sri Lankan government killed almost 3,000 people, and some of these people were, like, my family.

Jawali: [But because we are in] Canada . . . I noticed that [even though] . . .

the Singhalese people are the ones that are killing them

[Tamils] . . . that doesn’t mean that I have the right to hate every single

Singhalese person.

Sunita: Like, some are nice.

These Tamil Sri Lankan/Hindu girls realized their potential for activism: Malika had written a letter to the government in Sri Lanka. Sunita and Jawali described their “hate” and anger at the Canadian government for not intervening for “our people.” This dialogue that occurred in this interview was a critical incident. The girls represented the Sri Lankan and Canadian government as both selfish. The focus of this interview was to reflect on the Town Hall simulation. However, they used the opportunity to excitedly share their (new) political views and the steps they knew they could take towards activism. As first- and second-generation immigrants they showed a strong sense of connection to politics in both Canada and their homeland. Sunita felt that the mainstream
population in Canada (the “Christians”) wouldn’t be aware of the Sri Lankan conflict. However, in their classroom context, in which nearly all students were non-Christian South Asians, they did openly discuss these cross-cultural conflicts. The girls’ growing awareness of their Canadian context seemed to change their perspective, to allow them to not “hate every single Singhalese” as they might have done if they were in Sri Lanka. Their empathy for the Singhalese echoed Mr. Hiroshi’s plea: to “be a little empathetic” to the other side. While the Town Hall explicitly taught about rebellions and uprisings, it also implicitly stimulated students’ understandings of their agency to act in democratic peace.

Following the 1837 Town Hall simulation, the Canadian federal elections took place. Mr. Hiroshi engaged his students in a parallel campaign, in which they researched the actual candidates and evaluated their mandates. He put up posters on the board that encouraged young people to vote, and statistics that highlighted the low turn-out rate for young voters. He positioned these low voting rates as a problem and encouraged his Grade 7 students to “speak up and be heard.” Following his lead, students created posters to encourage young people to vote for the best candidate. On the day of the Canadian election, Mr. Hiroshi’s class held their own class vote. The NDP, led by Jack Layton, won by an overwhelming majority over the Conservatives, led by Stephen Harper. Different from Mrs. Amrita’s class, Mr. Hiroshi’s students (who were older) spoke knowledgeably about the mandates of the different party leaders. At the time, Jack Layton’s campaign had been making a strong effort to connect with young people through his Twitter account. Mr. Hiroshi shared his political preference for the NDP

11 In the actual Canadian election in 2011, the Conservative party, led by Stephen Harper, won.
leader and pointed out that Layton “spoke their language.” As students researched the different candidates, they became excited about encouraging youth to become involved with politics. This was another example of how students’ activism and interest in politics flourished when they were given the opportunity to practise what it looked like and felt like to make decisions and play roles that perpetuated or fought against oppressive political regimes.

**Cross-Case Discussion:**

**Conflict in Learning Democracy in Multicultural Contexts**

Comparing these three cases illustrates how inclusive and democratic classroom activities that encouraged authentic dialogue allowed for the opportunity to share conflictual political viewpoints, typically without fear of teacher or student reprisal. Schools are “powerful places to give young people the very opportunity that we know many adults do not have—to engage in ‘cross-cutting’ political talk. More importantly, schools are places in which young people can be taught *how* to engage in such talk wisely and well” (Hess, 2009, p. 22). Opportunities to practise conflict allow students to practise roles in democracies—vital for young new Canadians. This process of representing how systems of power are enacted is especially important when students are new to Canada, or children of recent immigrants to Canada. The teachers in these classrooms implemented activities that provided opportunities for students to learn about how society is constructed and how their assigned roles shaped how conflict is taken up and how decisions are made at various social and political power levels. My findings are reflective of previous studies, which showed how students who express divergent viewpoints
through a character or role feel safer to participate (Bickmore et al., 2011; Fain, 2008; DeNicolo & Franquiz, 2006).

Mrs. Amrita and Mr. Hiroshi both engaged their students in whole-class, reflective discussion on how they had experienced the dialogic activities. Mr. Hiroshi extended this reflection by asking students to reflect on their emotions and to empathize with the opposition parties. Emotions are directly connected to power relations. Thus, in dominant societal norms, “in Western cultures we learn to fear and control emotions” (Boler, 1999, p. 4). But Mr. Hiroshi’s simulation opened up possibilities for dissent and nonconformity. When students engaged in processes of dissent in these classrooms, they appeared to become more engaged. In contrast, during lessons where there were minimal opportunities to voice divergent perspectives, there was less engagement and participation.

All three teachers engaged students in reflection on their values, through varying kinds of conflictual discussions. Such reflection may teach students about how positive democratic values may apply to their lives. Hess (2009) argued that discussing controversial political issues in school affects students in three dimensions: democratic values, content knowledge, and political and civic engagement (p. 30). Through dialogic activities about power and conflict, and through whole-class discussions, all three teachers introduced social studies content and activities that offered opportunities for students to develop their conflict communication and critical reflection skills. Dialogic activities that engaged conflict encouraged diverse students to further reflect on how they may fit or be placed within their respective democracies. Mrs. Amrita’s lessons on citizenship and government explored responsible social conduct. Like Ms. Marlee, she
did this by supporting the reproduction and “continual maintenance of an unequal social order” (Apple, 1979/1990, p. 48); by legitimizing the dominant discourse. Working within the mandate of preserving and maintaining neutrality, the school curriculum often teaches consensus-based political and social values (Apple, 1979/1990). Ms. Marlee’s case shows how the absence of explicit conflict in the curriculum reinforced consensus-based homogeneous ideologies.

Canadian values were embedded in all three classrooms. This influenced how conflictual issues were raised and discussed, and how students learned, both implicitly and explicitly, about power relations. One teacher of the three encouraged political dissent. Mr. Hiroshi’s class was a more inclusive and open climate, encouraging free speech and democratic decision making, than the other two. Even there, some students told me they had felt the need to self-censor their potentially cross-cutting political talk. Mr. Hiroshi used classroom discussions to encourage understanding of contentious topics. At the same time, he typically represented one “right” response (in keeping with dominant Canadian values and norms). Mrs. Amrita’s implemented curriculum also embedded cultural values. For instance, when teaching about Canadian rights and responsibilities, she represented dominant Canadian norms and values, such as discussing her own responsibility to vote as a new Canadian citizen. Mrs. Amrita’s personal identity and cultural background visibly influenced the ways in which she presented and discussed conflictual issues. Conversely, Ms. Marlee’s interactions with her diverse students allowed only minimal spaces for conflictual dialogue. Ms. Marlee’s case illustrates how rigid and exclusionary classroom rules and a strict adherence to the prescribed curriculum could limit opportunities for connections to students’ cultural
identities and seemed to reinforce (or help reproduce) existing patterns of dominance in Canadian society.

In all three classrooms, the teachers were unafraid to voice the differences among the identities represented by students in the class. Through dialogue about difference and conflict, Mrs. Amrita encouraged her students to engage with the Canadian political system. Ms. Marlee affirmed Tina’s religious identity, a minority in this context, but dominant in society. By addressing Mona’s anxiety about her family in Egypt, linking her experience to the class discussion, Mr. Hiroshi encouraged the other students to also form connections to this international conflict. Because Mr. Hiroshi acknowledged power and explicitly elicited and integrated students’ diverse cultural knowledges, some of his students were able to reflect on their personal identities in relation to their current sociopolitical context. Such explicit connections were rare in Ms. Marlee and Mrs. Amrita’s classes. These three teachers, with classes of similar demographic compositions, implemented pedagogies about social conflicts in both implicit and explicit curricula. Their choices contributed to most students sharing their personal lived experiences and playing the roles and positions assigned to them.

Mr. Hiroshi’s choice to use multiple texts, such as newspaper articles about current conflicts, provided opportunities for students to critically reflect on the history provided in the textbook. These multiple texts also provided opportunities for his students to reflect on their diverse identities, as they deconstructed various cross-cultural experiences and values within texts, classroom activities, and discussions (Cummins, 2009). Teachers’ explicit inclusion of critical historical thinking, such as reflecting on wars and other historical conflicts, prepared students to respond to social and political
changes in society (Osborne, 1995; Tupper, 2012). Different forms of critical classroom discussions, including teacher-led, whole-group, and smaller student group discussions, encouraged students—such as Mona, in Mr. Hiroshi’s class—to respond to identity-linked conflict, for example by writing a letter to the government about Egypt. Such individual and small-group reflection tasks created spaces for supporting multiple and diverse identities in these multicultural school contexts; other students later joined in the letter writing campaign. Students’ personal interest and enthusiasm about this issue also facilitated critical literacy engagement as they reflected on power structures while pursuing their writing task (Cummins, 2009, 2011; Guthrie, 2004).

In Ms. Marlee’s Grade 4 Medieval Times unit, some students were assigned roles as kings or queens, while others were peasants. In Mrs. Amrita’s Grade 5 class, only student volunteers ran as candidates in the class election. In Mr. Hiroshi’s Grade 7 Town Hall simulation, the class was divided into upper class government officials, moderates, and a rebellious group, which students assumed to be from the lower class. While the assignments of various social identities contributed to both the inclusion and exclusion of diverse students, the way conflict was situated also influenced diverse students’ engagement in these various learning experiences.

All three teachers employed pedagogies of discussion about diversity that allowed students to try out different statuses and roles from their usual social power structures. Higher- and lower-status students responded differently to different pedagogical approaches. Ms. Marlee’s medieval simulation inverted some students’ social status roles within her classroom. In this way, she provided an opportunity for students to reflect on power and hierarchies, but she did not explicitly make the connection for them. Mr.
Hiroshi’s students’ choices of roles in the 1837 simulation seemed to resonate with the ways students perceived their social identities. Smira and Nira, who switched roles, responded to the implicit curriculum and in the simulation showed that their identities were fluid.

Whole-class discussions about diversity and social conflicts sometimes encouraged quiet students to participate. While some students (such as Nancy, in Ms. Marlee’s class) remained relatively quiet, the assigned roles still provided them with the opportunity to participate, and even, in Akmed’s case, to feel powerful. The social studies and language arts curricula in all three classrooms offered various opportunities for explicitly recognizing social power structures and social conflicts; in discussions, connections were made between various cultural, historical, and social issues. The three cases illustrate various ways that ethnocultural minority students grappled with norms for engagement when volunteering or being selected to speak about conflicts (such as wars, religions, and social exclusion). Some, like Jawali and Sunita in Mr. Hiroshi’s class, became politically aware and wanted to speak up about global injustices. Others, such as Swetha in Ms. Marlee’s class, chose to not speak about personal familial experiences (in her case, during the war in Sri Lanka). All three teachers used a variety of pedagogies to encourage their diverse students to study how conflicts could be resolved peacefully by exploring and including multiple perspectives.

The three teachers used various pedagogies to encourage and include students’ diverse perspectives. Mr. Hiroshi stimulated critical consciousness about power and inequity through a critical comparison of power relations. In this context, however, many students appeared to express consensus about social issues, despite their differences in
social identity. In instances where conflict was masked, student opportunities to question or to embody different and conflicting beliefs were reduced. Opportunities for students to embody conflict in either preassigned roles or volunteer roles came more easily when students made personal, autonomous decisions in their roles. In contrast, when dialogue about difference was explicitly required, conflict was made explicit and thus provided greater opportunities to engage in conflictual talk. Furthermore, the invitation to engage in conflict through different power roles and to make conflictual decisions based on historical and socially constructed roles and positions gave students a sense of autonomy as they took ownership of shared decision-making processes through conflict and dialogue.

In this chapter, I have explored how each teacher used implicit and hidden curricula to challenge, and sometimes to maintain, existing dominant hegemonic power structures within Canadian culture. Reinforcing the theories of Apple (1979/1990) and Davies (2004a), these cases illustrate how making hidden power and social structures explicit may encourage students to politically engage in their society at large. This chapter has shown that there are powerful ways to teach values, which embody cultural ways of being and knowing. Through implementing various dialogic exercises (such as electoral simulations, role playing, and reflective discussions), many students engaged in representing particular characters and value-laden traits that emulated or challenged their identities across their differences. In the next chapter, I discuss how the role of silence, voice, and groupings influenced students’ opportunities for active participation and engagement in their diverse classrooms. I discuss the comparisons of themes across these
three classroom cases and conclude with a discussion on the significance of this study and recommendations for further study.
CHAPTER 7

CONFLICT, DIVERSITY AND THE INCLUSION OF STUDENT VOICES

Discussion and Conclusion

To understand an event, not to mention a phenomenon, we must encompass the varying experiences of that event, even though we must understand that what we understand is only an approximation. That the approximation departs from the experience of the actors is not a problem; it is the point. How experience is experienced is one topic of importance. But how that experience is formulated, remembered, and retold tells the hearer something beyond “what happened,” which we cannot in any case know and which did not in any case happen, since what happened, happened to many different people differently. (Roy, 1994, p. 24)

In this qualitative study, I investigated how three teachers, using dialogic pedagogies, addressed diversity and conflictual issues with their classes of ethnoculturally diverse, minority immigrant students. I examined international research on controversial issues discussions and their value for democratic citizenship and peacebuilding learning. I also observed how the three teachers facilitated connections between classroom content and students’ identities, and how different types of students responded when their identities were and were not reflected in the curriculum. In this final chapter, I synthesize how the three teachers’ implemented curriculum provided opportunities for conflict dialogue, and how diverse students responded to these opportunities.

In essence, the study showed that conflict can be educational when the inclusion of differing points of view offers opportunities for critical reflection about social issues (Bickmore, 2005, 2011b). In the case studies, critical reflection offered empowering possibilities for diverse ethnocultural minority students to practise democracy and strengthen their skills for civic engagement (Bickmore, 2007; Kahne & Sporte, 2008). It was possible for the students to learn from conflict dialogue. There were some
commonalities and also many differences among these teachers in how they chose to implement issues of conflict and diversity in their curriculum. This chapter will explore these moments of divergence.

To speak to my research questions and the conceptual framework that informed this study I present four discussion themes: First, I discuss the inclusion of diverse students’ voices in relation to opportunities to practise conflict dialogue. Second, I discuss how students’ voices and social identifications influenced their opportunities for autonomy during dialogic activities. Third, I complicate how teachers facilitated identity-linked conflicts in multicultural settings, and then I compare how teachers taught for critical consciousness within their different contexts. I note the apparent consequences of their implicit and explicit curriculum in educating diverse students for democracy. Lastly, I present implications of this study, reflect on the strengths and limitations of the study design and methodology, discuss recommendations for further research, and conclude by reviewing the significance of this research.

**Problematizing Participation:**

**Including Diverse Voices in Dialogic Activities**

My immersion in each research site allowed me to become aware of voices I did not customarily hear during classroom discussions. My evolved understanding of less vocal students contradicted the usual beliefs about those who do not speak in class. I made efforts to develop relationships with all the students in the classes I studied, and found that many of the quiet students actually had a lot to say. During small-group interviews, quiet students, such as Madia and Aalia in Mr. Hiroshi’s Grade 7 class, at first passed the talking piece without speaking but later expressed their delight in participating
in a circle process. They helped me see how quiet students’ silence was sometimes a form of participation.

During small group interviews, I asked various students, both vocal and quiet, what they thought about their quiet peers:

Jade: *(F-EA, Grade 4, vocal)* Maybe they don’t know English.

Nitin: *(M-SA, Grade 5, vocal)* Maybe they don’t have the right answer.

Veeran: *(M-SA, Grade 4, sometimes vocal)* They just don’t know.

Aalia: *(F-SA, Grade 7, quiet)* They’re afraid.

Caden: *(M-EA, Grade 5, sometimes quiet)* They’re immigrants.

Vocal and quiet students alike were obviously aware of their peers’ silence. In small and large group activities, it was evident how the more vocal students silenced others, and how the less vocal students self-silenced or chose to participate through silence.

Interviews with less vocal and more vocal students shed light on how these diverse students conceptualized classroom discussions and culturally relevant learning activities. For example, Nitin, a vocally dominant student in Mrs. Amrita’s class, was clearly aware of his consistent participation during classroom discussions; but he was also aware of his quiet peers. He provided suggestions for how they could be better engaged: “Maybe we [vocal people] could help them out. Like, they can stay in for recess and ask the teacher and get help or the teacher could ask them more [directly]” *(SI, February 10, 2011).* Most probably, Nitin empathized with some of his quiet peers because Mrs. Amrita held significant power over classroom participation, in controlling who spoke and who was silent. In this classroom, vocal students could therefore experience what it felt like to be silent. In my findings, quiet students appeared to be more confident in vocally
participating when they were helped out through peer or teacher support; Nitin’s recommendations strengthened this finding.

Aalia, a Grade 7 newcomer that year, said that she was quiet not because she “didn’t know,” but because she felt she just couldn’t speak aloud using appropriate academic discourse: “I did research on it [the Rebellions of 1837], but I couldn’t just go up and talk. But I knew about it” (SI, March 31, 2011). Aalia was representative of many quiet students, across these three cases, who independently carried out research on social and conflictual issues and despite being prepared academically felt less confident sharing aloud. In this study I found that silence, for some students, was a purposeful response. Gordon (2006) wrote:

Silence often masks pain and disappointments, but can also provide an enabling space where girls can concentrate for example on educational achievement or on their own fantasies. We have used the concept of mental space to refer to this process and have suggested that an apparently passive, immobile girl may exercise agency in her mind, and thus inhabit far wider vistas then the confines of the classroom. (p. 7)

I observed many instances of silence in the three classrooms; many of the most silent students were female. There were students who chose to not speak during particular (conflictual and identity-linked) classroom discussions. For example, Tina and Fatima remained silent when Ms. Marlee first spoke to the whole class about their religious conflict. Typically vocal Crystal (W/SA) self-silenced during health class when two Black boys racially targeted her and made fun of the knowledge she had displayed about various drugs in a previous health class. Caden chose not to respond publically in class to Mrs. Amrita’s request to share his parents’ migration story: it was too embarrassing, as his mother was initially denied entry to Canada.
There were students who chose not to speak at all in the classroom, such as Nancy in Grade 4, who Jade, a classmate, told me was the girl “who doesn’t speak in class, only at recess.” (SI, April 13, 2011). There were those who wanted to speak, but were too shy, like Smira and Malika in Mr. Hiroshi’s Grade 7 class. They relied on others to speak for them: “They just tell me and I say it for them,” said the typically vocal Crystal. Others waited for a turn to speak that never came: “When I have a good idea and I raise my hand, I really don’t get picked,” said Sonya, a typically quiet female, in Grade 4.

Generally speaking, students are rewarded for keeping quiet (Jackson, 1968; McNeil, 1986). In Ms. Marlee’s class, students’ silence earned them power (i.e., they got points): “The group has to do their homework, bring home their tests . . . and they have to be silent,” Jade said (SI, April 13, 2011). Then there were those who spoke a lot:

CP: So who talks the most?

Swetha: Ms. Marlee!

Jade: The smartest. (laughter)

In dialogic methods of teaching, teachers may learn and relearn with their students (Ellsworth, 1989; Freire, 1970/1994b). If the teacher speaks the most, the possibilities for diverse students’ viewpoints to surface and for critical dialogue among peers are limited. When oral participation is graded (or otherwise extrinsically rewarded), dialogue may be forced. Swetha and Jade were among many students, both vocal and quiet, who told me that, aside from their teacher who spoke the most, the typically vocal students were “the smartest” ones.

Dewey (1916/1966) believed that a productive, responsible, and democratic society was founded on an effective educational system. Such a system would support
students’ learning, doing, and critical thinking. “Consensus,” Dewey (1916/2005) said, “demands communication” (p. 6). He concluded:

> The use of language to convey and acquire ideas is an extension and refinement of the principle that things gain meaning by being used in a shared experience or joint action. . . . When words do not enter as factors into a shared situation, either overtly or imaginatively, they operate as pure physical stimuli, not as having a meaning or intellectual value. (Dewey, 1916/2005, pp. 12–13)

Through authentic dialogue, meanings may be uncovered and the possibilities for putting words into action, through the connections of thoughts and ideas to (concrete) experiences, are doable.

Building connections to students’ personal experiences was one way these teachers invited quiet voices to participate. However, not all students felt comfortable sharing their personal, political stands on sensitive, identity-linked issues. During discussions in Mr. Hiroshi’s Grade 7 class about the War of 1812 and about the expulsion of particular ethnic groups, such as the Acadians (see Chapter 5), particular groups of students who connected to these discussions through personal experience (e.g., civil war in Sri Lanka) chose to not disclose their perspectives. Their silence apparently was planned and purposeful. After Mr. Hiroshi passionately explained why he would align himself with Canada in a hypothetical war with Japan, Tamil Sri Lankan girls, Sunita and Jawali, privately articulated their resentment towards Canada in relation to the war in Sri Lanka in an interview, but did not share this view in class. Zembylas and Michaelides (2004) explored how students experienced silence and the “silencing of silence” in classrooms, and questioned how teachers know whether “a student is keeping silent as a political stand or as a result of shyness” (p. 193). Consistent with the results of my study, Bekerman and Zembylas (2011) found that students’ silence sometimes reflected their choice to keep their identities silent or to not attract attention, particularly when they felt
emotionally connected or personally identified with the conflictual issue being discussed (see also Schultz, 2010; Wortham, 2010). Sunita and Jawali’s silence may have reflected this.

The nonvocal participation of minority students during class discussions does not necessarily reflect those students’ “lack of interest, knowledge, or desire to participate” (White, 2011, p. 262). White (2011) argued, based on his study of undergraduates, that minority “students’ voices were largely silenced or, more appropriately, these students censored themselves, because they recognized that their own culturally significant ways of talking were incongruent with the official discourse of the academy” (p. 257). My study shows that for some diverse students, like Mina (Grade 4), and Madia and Aalia (Grade 7), self-consciousness about participating in academic discourse in the culture of power (Delpit, 1995) begins at a young age. However, my study also suggests promising possibilities for challenging this barrier at an early age, as I found that lower-status students, like Smira and Akmed (Grade 7) and Qadir and Irtal (Grade 5), participated more frequently and confidently in activities about conflict and diversity when they had peer support or teacher encouragement to share their perspectives.

In Freire’s (1970/1994b) notion of critical consciousness, the world is understood from the contrasting perspective of a marginalized position. This is made possible when people engage in reflection and dialogue about their own social position and also take action on it; Freire calls this praxis. Freire’s (1970/1994b) theory reinforces my argument, that if teachers assumed that all individuals agreed, the dominant voices tended to be empowered. When a teacher’s program aimed at critical consciousness and praxis (e.g., reflecting on day-to-day activities and lessons), students’ silence could take
different shapes and carry different meanings. In my study, for example, teachers may have invited marginalized voices to speak, but this did not necessarily ensure that all divergent perspectives were aired.

Through his lessons on conflictual content in current and historical events, Mr. Hiroshi provided opportunities for a range of diverse students, including quiet ones and those of lower social status, to collectively shape their perceptions and understandings of their world (see Chapter 5). However, some students still chose to not share their divergent perspectives aloud. He presented issues that he found fascinating (war-related games, facts, news articles), and it appeared, from most students’ level of engagement, that they agreed with their teacher’s position on these issues. All of Mr. Hiroshi’s students appeared to look up to him as a role model. For the most part, there was little or no open disagreement about plausible alternative perspectives on some conflictual issues. Mr. Hiroshi expressed this sentiment himself during our interview when he said, “The stuff I didn’t agree with, they didn’t agree with either” (TI, December 17, 2010). Mr. Hiroshi appeared to interpret students’ silence as agreement.

Some pedagogical processes engaged quiet voices, especially when those students viewed the content as relevant. For example, more diverse students participated more openly in the dialogic class election campaign process in Mrs. Amrita’s class (see Chapter 6). Different norms for engagement prevailed in the classrooms. Ms. Marlee’s norms for interaction discouraged open participation, in a dynamic similar to Mrs. Amrita’s typical pedagogy. In contrast, Mr. Hiroshi’s students were rarely told to not speak, and typically provided responses without raising their hands. These different norms may be connected to Mrs. Amrita’s and Ms. Marlee’s traditional, defensive
teaching beliefs that obedient students should not speak until spoken to (Jackson, 1968; McNeil, 1986).

Most students appeared to feel safer and more comfortable about voicing dissent during dialogic activities, when they participated in role plays. While some quiet students may have found their voices this way, there still existed silent and silenced students in all the classroom spaces. In the same way, while some team-building activities (including role plays, debates, and simulations) facilitated the inclusion of some students, some students still experienced exclusion from active participation in these citizenship learning opportunities.

All three teacher participants said that they viewed their pedagogical processes—including preparation, planning, and subsequent delivery of lessons, ideas, and topics—as responsive to the cultural backgrounds of the students in their class. For example, Ms. Marlee invited Fatima and other Muslim students in her Grade 4 class to build a mosque in their medieval model village (see Chapter 6). Fatima’s father, who approached Ms. Marlee about how she planned on representing Muslims in her Medieval Times unit, obviously had a particular perspective on this history. Fatima, in an interview, wanted to speak more about Islam; however, other than providing instructions on how to build a mosque, the opportunity for such a discussion did not occur during the Medieval Times unit.

This study shows how diverse voices may be included within various classroom spaces and it reinforces the previous research, showing how silence carries hidden meanings that can be made explicit when teachers integrate dialogic pedagogies supporting students’ diverse positions and locations (Bekerman & Zembylas, 2011;
Wortham, 2010). Overall, classroom discussions usually involved the voices of a handful of dominant and confident students. Sometimes, these more comfortable students helped others to add their voices to discussions, such as when Fatima encouraged Farat to share his perspective on Islam. Based on my interviews with various quiet and vocal students, I found that students’ silences were not typically based on their intellectual capacities. Consistent with Schultz’s (2010) study, students’ silences sometimes indicated their perceived sense of exclusion and other times, reflected real agreement with their peers and/or teacher.

My observations and interviews illustrated some of the challenges presented in the class when students refused (or were too shy) to participate in whole-class discussions. Small-group activities were an obvious alternative, as most students felt more comfortable speaking in smaller groups. The teacher’s assignment of particular roles for students also encouraged participation in small group and whole-class activities.

How dialogues took place and who got to talk intersected with the kinds of conflictual topics teachers presented for dialogue. I observed students’ body language when they were engaged, and also how some highly emotional topics influenced some students’ willingness to articulate contrasting perspectives. Silence, most often, was not an indicator of disengagement. Engaging in talk about conflict can be empowering, if safe spaces for such risks are opened and nurtured. Newcomer immigrants and students with lower social status appeared to develop a greater inclination to participate when dialogic activities allowed them to enact particular roles. Such opportunities also appeared to strengthen students’ confidence; for instance, Irtal, in Mrs. Amrita’s Grade 5 class, pointed out that when given the opportunity to be a candidate in the election, he
“unlocked his confidence.” Dialogic pedagogies, overall, supported many quiet students to participate and share their initially tacit beliefs and perspectives.

**Power and Social Status:**

**Small and Large Group Pedagogical Structures for Inclusion**

In this research, students were predominantly from working-class families, and were relatively homogenous, culturally and socioeconomically. However, students’ social and academic statuses differed within each class; this appeared to influence their participation patterns. Every classroom carries with it routines (Jackson, 1968). Routines are organizational patterns that structure students’ learning experiences and interactions. In this way, norms for interaction (such as who speaks, who speaks first, who remains silent) are linked to unequal status and sustained by particular conversational routines. Often, the vocal students in the three classrooms carried on what Horn and Little (2010) called “conversational routines.” This term applies to students’ interactions and participation in the small- and whole-group discussions I observed, because participation patterns in all three classrooms were influenced by socially constructed groups of dominant speakers. Based on their social identities, some students’ perspectives (such as Crystal in Grade 7 or Nitin in Grade 5) carried greater power over others.

In all three classrooms, teachers organized their students in small groups of four to six. As described in Chapter 4, Ms. Marlee’s groups were competitive and constantly changing, as students had the power to vote their peers out of their groups. Mrs. Amrita assigned students with similar academic levels to sit and work together. She only changed the groups twice during the six months I spent in her classroom. Mr. Hiroshi changed the groupings and seating every two weeks, usually upon students’ request. This frequent
change in groups reflected Mr. Hiroshi’s understanding of how students’ fluid identities and social statuses influenced their vocal participation. In addition, he took students’ social statuses into greater consideration than their academic achievement when formulating his groupings.

As a researcher who occupied these classroom spaces over time, I was able to identify many different social status groups. This included popular class leaders (e.g., Crystal, Anita, and Tyrone) and academically strong, quiet students (e.g., Malika, Smira, Tajinder, and Akmed). Towards the end of the year, Mr. Hiroshi placed Malika in a group with Crystal. My observation notes confirmed what Mr. Hiroshi told me in a personal interview: group dynamics varied, and Malika started to speak more in class during whole-group discussions when she was sitting beside Crystal, who encouraged her to raise her hand and speak:

Mr. H: I know sometimes they’re [Tyrone and Crystal] overwhelming, you know, because they are so willing to speak up and it’s great, like I encourage them to do that. . . . When Crystal’s sitting with a group of quieter people, she forces them to talk. That’s why she’s sitting with Madia and Malika right now and she talks to them all the time and forces them to talk back [in whole-class discussions] and it’s amazing. Especially during math, you could see the difference. (TI, May 22, 2010)

Mr. Hiroshi’s conscious attention to breaking social barriers and cliques when crafting his seating plan allowed for other voices be to heard. In Ms. Marlee’s class, the competitive atmosphere appeared to reinforce unequal social statuses; there, students
consistently voted lower-status, frequently disruptive students, like Shaun, out of their
groups. Mixed groupings, such as in Mrs. Amrita’s elections campaign, hindered
groupthink decision-making processes and changed the conversational routines. In the
range of activities I observed in these three classrooms, the choices teachers made to
assign various active roles for students’ participation in dialogic activities (e.g., literature
circles, role plays, and simulations), increased opportunities for diverse students to
participate. Unlike Ms. Marlee, Mr. Hiroshi explicitly named inequitable group dynamics
by “paying attention to the dynamics in the classroom” (TI, May 22, 2010). Like Mrs.
Amrita, Mr. Hiroshi used groupings based on academic criteria, but most often he mixed
academic and social groupings. He believed there was greater potential for inclusion of
diverse students when he mixed students’ groupings in various ways, thus increasing
possibilities for constructing healthier, more equitable groups.

In the Town Hall simulation, Mr. Hiroshi gave students the choice to volunteer
for different political groups, which provided them with a sense of agency and an
opportunity to enact a certain political identity. However, in other instances, students
preferred when their teacher made choices for them. For instance, when Mrs. Amrita
gave her students the choice to choose their own groups for the election campaigns, many
students moaned in displeasure, mumbling, “People will just choose their friends.” Many
marginalized or lower-status students told me in interviews that they preferred when
teachers maintained their authority by creating groups. I observed academic-achievement
level groupings, in both Mr. Hiroshi’s and Mrs. Amrita’s classes, in which students made
efforts to collaborate on the assigned tasks. For instance, during literature circles in Mr.
Hiroshi’s class, the lower-academic group of boys passed a talking piece to facilitate their
lively discussion about the novel they had read. This ensured that no one dominated their
discussion: each had an equitable opportunity to participate. In other types of dialogic
activates, such the Town Hall simulation and structured academic controversy on rural
and urban communities, all students actively participated while in mixed academic and
social status groups. In these instances, students collaboratively drafted and presented
their conflictual points for dialogue. Giving students choices encourages them to
participate in democratic decision making (Davies, 2004a). At the same time, teachers’
technological intervention in group formations often helps to ensure inclusive and equitable
participation, thus providing students with opportunities to work with a variety of diverse
peers and perspectives.

Small-group activities and role-play simulations, in contrast to whole-class
discussions where the more vocal students dominated, contributed to a wider range of
students’ engagement and inclusion. Mr. Hiroshi’s Town Hall simulation and Mrs.
Amita’s election campaigns allowed students from different social and academic statuses
to work together, which facilitated the inclusion of lower-status students, such as Qadir
and Iral who volunteered to be candidates. In contrast, Ms. Marlee’s frequent “defensive
teaching” (McNeil, 1986) limited the potential for dialogue and reduced students’
opportunities for agency. Overall, marginalized students appeared more confident and
included in dialogic classroom activities when they had peers to support their
participation, teachers assigned particular roles, and they had the opportunity to speak.

Educating for Democracy Through Diverse Conflictual Issues

Teaching, especially at the elementary school level, includes showing young
students how to enact good, moral behaviour that reflects national ideals (W. Parker,
In line with the results of my study, Simon (2001) observed students in three high schools and found that when teachers evaded students’ curiosities and desires for discussion about issues of religion, morals, and values, possibilities for diverse student engagement and inclusion were limited. In the three public school classrooms I observed, it was clear that religion was not censored. Rather, when it was presented as an unsettled conflictual issue, diverse students became engaged. The saliency of religious beliefs in these classrooms supported the teachers to implement culturally relevant pedagogies that reflected students’ diversities.

I recall the religious conflict between Tina and Fatima, two female students who initially chose to self-silence when confronted by their teacher about their interpersonal conflict. They later found their voices through a pedagogically inclusive activity, sharing creation stories which encouraged them to speak from their ethnocultural and religious identities. The way Ms. Marlee handled this religious conflict was akin to what Haroutunian-Gordon (2010) would call an “interruptive discussion,” as it sparked an opportunity for students’ initial perspectives to be interrupted when peers shared their divergent perspectives about religion and diversity. For instance, typically quiet Irene (EA), whose voice was virtually absent in whole-class discussions, told me in an interview: “[Ms. Marlee] said that it doesn’t matter what country or culture you come from . . . as long as you don’t make fun of anyone else’s culture” (SI, April 20, 2011). Irene’s new belief about cultural sensitivity appeared to connect with how Ms. Marlee took up the religious conflict with her entire Grade 4 class: she modelled interruptive democracy (Davies, 2004a) by challenging her diverse students’ preconceptions of religious diversity. While Tina and Fatima’s conflict and subsequent engagement in
discussion about their religions may have changed their perspectives on diversity, the class discussion may also have influenced others, like Irene, who observed it as a process of conflict and reconciliation.

The inclusion of religious practices and beliefs in the classroom and school community reflected the diverse student population in the three classrooms. The teachers in my study chose to include religious perspectives and religious education that did not always reinforce the dominance of Christian beliefs. Mrs. Amrita’s personal Hindu beliefs were implicitly, and at times, explicitly, integrated into the curriculum. Ms. Marlee, a Catholic-turned-atheist, invited students of different religions into curriculum exercises. At the same time, she shared with her students that her personal frame of reference was Christianity. Ms. Marlee did not appear to have the same role-model influence over her students as Mr. Hiroshi. There were a number of Muslim students in Mr. Hiroshi’s class. Mr. Hiroshi, a practising Christian, explicitly invited students to acknowledge diverse religions, wishing students Happy Diwali and discussing in class why Muslims go to Mecca. He never appeared to highlight Christianity as the dominant religion. One teacher at the school, dressed in religious Muslim attire, regularly led students through prayers in a designated space in the school. The schools I studied welcomed the integration of religious beliefs and practices within the community and classroom context.

Dialogue about diverse religious beliefs was normal in these diverse spaces, and religious education was an integral component of the implicit and explicit curriculum in all three of these public school classrooms. Acknowledging religious diversity facilitated connections to curriculum for the diverse students. In one of Ms. Marlee’s classes, such
inclusion allowed for dialogue across religious differences, and may have encouraged students to change their perceived beliefs about other religions. Mrs. Amrita’s inclusion of religious beliefs and practices, through her personal anecdotes and the comparative study of different religions in ancient civilizations, allowed for inclusion of diverse religious perspectives that affirmed most students’ individual beliefs and practices (see Chapter 5). Mr. Hiroshi drew on students’ diverse religions and on dominant Canadian discourse to teach the value of a sense of being together in the world across differences. Tajinder, an academically strong Sikh male, described himself as “lonely” and “quiet,” and yet as feeling included in Mr. Hiroshi’s Grade 7 class: “This is a multicultural class and we can actually talk about things about our different cultures and religions in our class” (SI, April 12, 2011). The case studies show that developing such acceptance and openness to difference can be explicitly taught in public schools. When the three teachers facilitated discussions about religious practices, using culturally sensitive pedagogy, they provided greater opportunities for students to develop civically engaged, democratic, and culturally sensitive perspectives.

However, some students, especially the Muslim students in all three classes, revealed during small group interviews that they feared peer reprisal if they voiced dissenting perspectives. Fatima, a vocal newcomer immigrant student in Grade 4, pointed out that because there were only six Muslims in her class out of 23, much of the discussion led by Ms. Marlee was “about other religions . . . like Catholics.” When I asked her what she did in those circumstances, she replied, in an uncharacteristically quiet voice: “I just be quiet” (SI, April 20, 2011). Muslim students in Mr. Hiroshi’s Grade 7 class told me similar things. Madia, Aalia, and Akmed described an “internal
Muslim-Muslim” dialogue they had in their heads when material they didn’t agree with was discussed. Madia and Aalia, quiet students and recent immigrants, felt included when they participated through their roles as moderates in the Town Hall simulation. The two girls exclaimed in the interview, almost simultaneously, that “it felt great!” to give their simulation role speeches to their peers. They also reflected on moments when they felt their religion had been excluded. They said they felt that Muslims had to internalize their beliefs: “Yeah, because . . . internally, Muslims-Muslims, talk about ‘oh they’re wrong’ and stuff, but we can’t talk like that in this class . . . ’cause they’re [Hindus and Christians] worshipping this and that and stuff. . . . We believe in different things, yeah, you know” (SI, March 31, 2011). Madia and Aalia illustrated two challenges: First, their lack of confidence with English sometimes impeded them, to some degree, from participating in academic discussions (described in Chapter 4). Secondly, their beliefs that they could not “talk like that” about Islam in a class of predominantly Hindus and some Christians contributed to their choices to self-silence when they disagreed with alternative beliefs linked to religious identity expressed by peers or the teacher. Their perspectives are important evidence of the mixed impact of Mr. Hiroshi’s Grade 7 Town Hall simulation pedagogy: while most students (including Madia and Aalia) actively took up and enjoyed their roles, they and others were sometimes timid about sharing their personal beliefs or about participation in academic discourse. When students’ perspectives are delegitimized, their inclusion is compromised, especially in discussion of identity-linked narratives (Bekerman & Zembylas, 2011). Students across all three classrooms confirmed in small group interviews that not all voices and perspectives had
been aired in their classrooms; some perspectives were only spoken internally, in students’ own “silenced dialogue” (Delpit, 1988).

The results of this research show the feasibility and importance of inviting discussion of diverse religious beliefs in public schools. Culturally sensitive classroom discussions and interactions amongst peers and teachers helped teach students about morals and values. Reinforcing previous research, this study found that culturally relevant pedagogy closely connected to character education is integral to building healthy classroom environments (Brown, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1995). It also adds to the growing body of research that shows how diverse students’ inclusion relies on the engagement of their diverse identities and conflictual perspectives (Cummins, 2001; Delpit, 2006; Howard, 2001).

The ways in which the three teachers encouraged and facilitated sensitive conflicts that related to students’ identities were reflective of the cooperative or competitive dynamics in each classroom. Cooperative contexts seemed to ensure the safety and inclusivity of all students’ diverse experiences. Fatima and Tina, who initially self-silenced in the class discussion that had evolved from their interpersonal conflict, later talked about how their interpretations of curricular subject matter (e.g., creation stories, symbols in Canada) were shaped by their personal identities, histories, and experiences. When Mrs. Amrita acknowledged unequal power and social structures in her implemented curriculum content on immigration and citizenship, some students, like Qadir and Jamal, appeared to experience a strengthened inclination to participate in the whole-class discussion. Such moments supported both Canadian group identities and students’ individual cultural identities.
Overall, the diversity of identities among students motivated these three teachers to use the diverse histories, perspectives, and experiences of students as resources for critical reflection about social conflicts; this contributed to students’ inclusion in the classroom. For instance, in Mr. Hiroshi’s class of predominantly South Asian students, he asked students to look up natural disasters around the world that were of interest to them and together they engaged in discussion about these events. A number of students in his class were Sri Lankan and so Mr. Hiroshi encouraged his students to research the 2004 tsunami in Sri Lanka. They also researched the tsunami of March 2011 in Japan; they watched newscasts and posted articles on a designated class bulletin board, making connections about migration of people in relation to natural disasters. In both instances, the research process involved reading various news articles, which stimulated students’ engagement in critical reading and literacy and also affirmed students’ histories and identities.

**Discussion of Conflictual Issues in Multicultural Contexts:**

**Teacher Authority and Student Agency**

Literature cited in Chapter 2 shows that teachers are generally uncomfortable when addressing conflictual subject material in diverse classrooms (Bickmore, 1999, 2005; Torney-Purta et al., 2001; Yamashita, 2006). Most often, teachers attempt to avoid conflicting perspectives, rather than inviting critical reflection on contesting beliefs (Houser, 1996). However, the three teachers in this study contradicted this reticence to engage in controversial or sensitive subject matter.

Some students in my study feared stating their personal point of view in the classroom, especially when the issues were reflective of their cultural identities. Hahn
(1998) found that adolescent students often fear voicing potentially unpopular views aloud in their classrooms. Traditionally, academic discourse encourages a discursive style of speaking in which personal opinions are extracted from content knowledge and presented as incontestably factual. Hence, it is no wonder that students who hold alternative or dissenting points of view so often feel excluded from some academic discussions (Dei, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Kelly and Brooks (2009) found that it was common for teachers to censor or limit conflictual discussions with young children and, like Houser (1996), believed that students are too young to engage in conflict dialogue. Ms. Marlee’s pedagogy reflected these findings. With young children, she said, “there’s a limit on how much they’ll understand and it’s also hard to see how much you should tell them about it without scarring their little psyches” (TI, December17, 2010).

None of the three teachers consistently nurtured the many opportunities to contest curriculum topics that I observed, in which students could have drawn on their personal identities and experiences. More frequently, text-to-self and text-to-teacher connections furthered discussions about current contentious cultural, historical, and political issues, but they were not always positioned as conflictual. When teachers demonstrate interest in learning, understanding, and empathizing with their students’ social realities, like Mr. Hiroshi did, their pedagogies better engage diverse students in critical learning opportunities.

While the three teachers I studied were all visible minorities, I am in no way arguing that only visible minority teachers are capable of doing this kind of work. In fact, Mrs. Amrita was the only teacher who actually shared an ethnocultural identity (SA) with the majority of her students. Mr. Hiroshi was the only Japanese person in his class of
South Asian students; he shared his half-White heritage with one student, Crystal (W/SA). Similarly, Ms. Marlee shared her ethnocultural identity (B) with only one student in her class, Tina. These ethnocultural minority teachers each carried their own experiences of marginalization and discrimination. Ms. Marlee and Mrs. Amrita spoke to me personally about their experiences with discrimination: Ms. Marlee felt marginalized as one of the few Black teachers at her school. As such, she carried the responsibility of advocating for the inclusion of Black History Month. Mrs. Amrita spoke about how challenging it had been for her to find work when she arrived in Canada and how, when she repeated her teacher education in Canada, White students openly made fun of her Indian accent in practicum schools. Mr. Hiroshi spoke to his students about his Japanese grandfather, but as we saw in Chapter 5, he also modelled his loyalty to Canada.

Kincheloe, McLaren, and Steinberg (2011) argued that for “critical pedagogy to work, teachers must understand what is happening in the minds of their students” (p. 166). Some students in my study appeared to identify with the historical oppression and marginalization of particular cultural groups, such as the experiences of Japanese-Canadians, whereas others did not appear to have deep feelings about how this history was represented in Canadian textbooks. Some students were aware of perspectives from their own familial histories of the conflict that were different from what was represented in their textbooks. For instance, if students’ ethnic origins were Japanese, they might have felt silenced in classrooms that addressed such issues (see also Epstein, 2000). Overall, the teachers in this study had an awareness of what it meant to be marginalized, because of their own cultural-religious-ethnic identities: this may have better prepared
them or increased their confidence to respond to issues of marginalization in their implemented pedagogies.

The teachers in this study implemented varying levels of critical teaching based on their personal interpretations of social and identity conflicts. Teachers with a noncritical pedagogical approach may be unconscious of the political messages embedded in their teaching. Transferring facts through defensive teaching (McNeil, 1986) maintains the status quo (Apple, 1979/1990; Freire, 1970/1994b). In most instances, Ms. Marlee chose a less critical pedagogical approach because she felt constrained by covering curriculum mandates and the young age of her students. Fact-based, teacher-centred approaches do not open spaces for conflict and dialogue about diversity, and allow dominant power to act in hidden ways. In contrast, comparing diverse interpretations and experiences, as Mrs. Amrita consistently did in her Citizenship and Immigration units, gave her students the opportunity to critically reflect on their knowledge. Mrs. Amrita’s students collectively constructed new knowledge about Canadian immigration that conflicted with the dominant narratives in the textbook. Critical teaching that integrates students’ diverse identities encourages self-directed responses and perspectives. By examining the ways identities were represented and treated in three classroom curricula, this study provides insights into how inclusive opportunities for critical reflection can be offered, such as encouraging exploration of thoughts, feelings, and meanings. Positioning curriculum material as conflictual clearly offered teachers and students opportunities to discern and express diverse, plausible interpretations of social issues.
The opportunity for role playing in Mr. Hiroshi’s Town Hall simulation, and to some extent in Mrs. Amrita’s and Ms. Marlee’s simulations, built upon students’ individual personalities. Ms. Marlee attempted to assign her students to roles based on her interpretation of their social status in the classroom. Mrs. Amrita, like Mr. Hiroshi, provided her students with some decision-making opportunities that connected the various assigned positions they held to their personal comfort level and strengthened their opportunities for developing communication skills in the context of conflict.

With children who are curiously minded and socially and intellectually stimulated, teaching about democratic decision making and dissent is necessary for developing students’ skills for civic engagement (Rubin, 2012; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). While the various simulation activities in each of these classes encouraged students to stand up and defend diverse positions, they also represented democracy in particular ways. In both Mrs. Amrita’s and Mr. Hiroshi’s classes, the simulations provided what Davies (2004a) and Bickmore (2008a) would characterize as opportunities for agency and peacebuilding; students made decisions and raised conflictual issues that were important to them. The preparation students received in researching their various roles supported them in understanding how various societal positions operated in relation to power and hierarchy. In Mr. Hiroshi’s Grade 7 class, Akmed chose to be part of the progovernment Family Compact group, not because he believed in their agenda, but because he wanted to experience what it felt like “to be in charge” (SI, April 12, 2011). Akmed’s choice to enact a particular role during this simulated conflictual debate illustrated one of the ways students were enabled to perceive their identities.
Students who performed conflicts in role sometimes related their experiences to actual conflicts in their lives or in the world. Mr. Hiroshi modernized historical conflicts such as the Acadian Expulsion and the Rebellions of 1837 by relating them to present conflicts such as the G20 summit protests of 2010 in Toronto and the war in Sri Lanka. Both observations and interviews showed that in doing so, he facilitated opportunities for deeper student understanding of both past and present conflicts. In the preparation, reenactment, and debriefing of the Town Hall meeting, Mr. Hiroshi encouraged students to self-reflect on how they had chosen to enact their different roles. Viewing the video of their simulation, many students laughed at their disrespectful behaviour, while acknowledging that their “silliness” had been permitted within the simulation. Through this structured reflection process, the radicals who had rebelled against the progovernment Family Compact in 1837 discerned a comparison some found personally relevant between their own behaviour and that of protesters during the G20 meetings in Toronto. Mr. Hiroshi guided this reflection in a way that encouraged many students to identify ways their actions and inactions might stimulate and escalate conflict. Some students in Mrs. Amrita’s and Ms. Marlee’s classes loosely connected their roles to political figures, but did not discuss how their roles or behaviours might be implicated in the larger society.

These thesis findings build on prior theory and research that shows that discussion of conflictual issues in open classroom climates engages and informs diverse students (Hess, 2009; Barton & Levstik, 2003). My study reinforces a few prior studies (cited in Bickmore, 2008a; Bickmore, Parker, & Larsen, 2011; Davies, 2004a; Harwood & Hahn, 1990; Hess & Avery 2008; Rubin, 2012), and takes this research a step further, to show
that opportunities for dialogue about the relevance of such conflicts to diverse students’ identities further engages and includes them in democratic peacebuilding education—equipping them to make choices and to reflect on their personal and political consequences.

Observations and interviews with students and teachers showed how connecting curriculum to diverse students’ identities was an integral component of developing inclusive pedagogical and curricular interventions. To varying extents, all three teachers explicitly taught about dominant, Western ways of knowing, in conjunction with diverse multicultural ways of knowing, by taking up and exploring various cultures, some represented in the students’ own identities. When teachers connected conflicts to students’ identities, many students responded by critically reflecting on themselves and those around them. Such critical reflection is an important component for developing tolerant, accepting, and democratic citizenship among diverse students, particularly when their own identities are marginalized in the society (Davies, 2004a; Gérin-Lajoie, 2011; Hahn, 1998; Kumashiro, 2000).

Scaffolding and preparing diverse students for conflict dialogue learning can better equip them to engage in a world where coexistence among diverse people is expected (Bickmore et al., 2011; King, 2009). Through the study of diverse cultures, in conjunction with self-study of their own cultural practices and beliefs, diverse students learned to strengthen their cultural competency, a necessary skill for democratic citizenship.

In sum, diverse students generally welcomed opportunities to participate in discussions about diversity and conflictual issues, even when those issues were directly
connected to their personal identities. The students and teachers in the study were all members of Canadian ethnic minorities. Apart from ethnic similarities, many differences emerged, not only in aspects such as immigration history and social status, but also in experiences and interpretations of conflict and diversity within the sociopolitical contexts of their respective classrooms. Students who were quiet in classroom activities such as recitation or lecture-style teaching were apt to participate in dialogic activities when they were assigned roles that allowed them to develop agency over their perspectives. Students who did not have access to the classroom’s language of power and conversational routines relied on support and encouragement from peers and/or teachers to participate in whole-group classroom discussions and other dialogic activities. Finally, all students’ inclusion was accomplished through culturally relevant pedagogy and practices that connected and reflected students’ diversities in their local, global, and historical contexts.

Towards an Integrative Approach to Peacebuilding Education:

Implications of This Study

In this ethnography with a critical perspective, I have studied how diverse students, particularly ethnocultural minority newcomer immigrants, experienced and responded to content, pedagogy, and conflict in three classrooms in relation to their own perspectives, histories, and identities. The strength of ethnography with a critical perspective for this particular study was its aim of studying cultures through immersion in a particular space for an extended amount of time. Because of my extensive classroom observations, I was able to capture conflict dialogue and unplanned curricula learning
opportunities that occurred unexpectedly, as seen in the religious conflict in Ms. Marlee’s Grade 4 class and the discussions about diversity that ensued.

This study showed how conflict and diversity can serve as resources for critical social and academic engagement in classrooms. Furthermore, it adds to the extant body of literature on peacebuilding, inclusion, culturally relevant pedagogy, and conflict dialogue literature, while also providing practical support for teachers’ learning and pedagogy. The cases of these three classrooms illustrate how conflict dialogue may engage all students in democratic citizenship learning.

The three teachers used a range of conflict dialogue processes. Through studying them and the diverse students who participated in these processes, this study revealed how conflictual issues discussions were understood and experienced by diverse students, and the kinds of pedagogies that supported and impeded their learning and inclusion in these processes. The social and cultural locations of diverse newcomer and second-generation immigrant students in these Canadian public school classrooms influenced their learning, participation, and engagement at school. The findings from this research illustrate how these implemented curricula intersected with diverse students’ social identities and differential power locations. When teachers implemented various dialogic pedagogies that integrated the immigrant students’ cultural and linguistic identities, they supported those students’ civic and literacy engagement and facilitated an inclusive space where all students had the opportunity to participate and have their voices heard. Through in-depth observations, interviews, and document analysis, this study shows how such equity-infused curricula, in conjunction with critical multicultural pedagogies, facilitated learning opportunities for diverse newcomer immigrant students in southern Ontario.
Implications of Classroom Dialogue About Conflict and Diversity for Literacy Engagement: A Key to Educational Improvement

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development’s (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) identifies reading engagement as a stronger predictor for students’ school success than socioeconomic status (Cummins, 2009). PISA’s cross-national studies correlate improved opportunities for literacy engagement with greater student achievement. My study has shown that discussions about conflict and diversity encouraged critical reading of multiple texts, which is an essential component of peacebuilding education and also essential to school improvement. While I did not set out to study student academic achievement, I found many instances of increased engagement among diverse students when teachers made conflict explicit, especially when they invited inclusive conversations about conflict and diversity issues. Confictual discussions also motivated students such as Mona, in Mr. Hiroshi’s class, to seek out additional sources. She read newspaper articles about the uprising in Egypt; brought them in to share with her classmates; and posted them publicly on the current events board, thereby reinforcing her own and her peers’ literacy engagement. When Jawali, Malika, and Sunita, students in Mr. Hiroshi’s class, worked in groups to write letters of protest to the governments of Sri Lanka and Egypt, and conducted research independently or with their peers, they engaged in critical reading and writing as they gathered information to support their positions. Fatima and Mina, in Ms. Marlee’s Grade 4 class, independently visited the school library to gather books on Islam. Mina, an English language learner, had described herself to me as invisible in her class
(see Chapter 4) but during the creation story sharing exercise, she chose to select and read passages from these books aloud to her peers, sharing facts about Islamic culture.

Classroom discussions about issues of diversity and conflict engaged a broad range of students, and motivated them to do meaningful and critical reading. For instance, in Mrs. Amrita’s class, students recorded their family’s oral histories of immigration to Canada. Newcomer immigrant students, like Aalia, who often were not comfortable in speaking about their perspectives in traditional academic discourse, researched their arguments for a class debate. In this way, conflictual topics and discussion pedagogies provided the scaffolding necessary to encourage diverse students to seek out additional sources of information. Such processes of independent research encouraged critical reading of multiple texts and thus contributed to literacy engagement, which, as Cummins (2009, 2011) and Krashen (2004) have argued, is associated with school improvement.

Speaking about controversial and sensitive issues that are also identity-linked (such as religion and war) is risky for both students and teachers (Bickmore, 2005; Zembylas & Kambani, 2012). However, all three teachers in this study approached conflictual issues in ways that did not give rise to negative reactions from administration or parents. Ms. Marlee minimized this risk when she invited students to speak to their parents and bring their cultural creation stories into the classroom. In so doing she also situated this task within her literacy program. These pedagogical approaches were compatible with Cummins’ (2009) literacy engagement framework for supporting diverse students, which includes activating students’ background knowledge, scaffolding meaning by preparing students for a particular task or discussion, affirming students’ identities, and extending their academic language.
Ms. Marlee drew on students’ cultural knowledges to interpret the Aboriginal creation story, which helped to prepare them to research and write about their own cultural stories and provided them with the language to question and interpret the diverse identities of their peers and their teacher. Ms. Marlee’s pedagogical process is an example of how conflict can be used as an opportunity to encourage diverse students to critically read and write about cultural texts, again strengthening possibilities for school improvement.

The Ontario Curriculum: Social Studies (Grade 1 to 6) and History and Geography (Grade 7 and 8) “organizes students’ learning around a set of fundamental concepts: systems and structures; interactions and interdependence; environment; change and continuity; culture; and power and governance” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 3). The social studies curriculum proved to be a space where these teachers felt comfortable to engage their students in discussions of conflictual issues. Although Mrs. Amrita was confident in her content knowledge of science, she still taught it, as did Ms. Marlee, through a transmission approach.\textsuperscript{34} The language arts and the social studies, and the study of historical issues in particular, provided ample opportunities for exploring diversity, culture, and conflict through both content and pedagogy.

Ontario elementary teachers are encouraged to teach about conflict and diversity in their implemented curriculum (Bickmore, 2006; Winton, 2008). However, the central question of multiple/intersecting identities and power relations is absent from Ontario Ministry of Education curriculum guidelines. This constrains the extent to which the hidden curriculum can be challenged, because the power dynamics of the dominant

\textsuperscript{34} Mr. Hiroshi’s students had another teacher for science.
society are not necessarily made explicit. Furthermore, diverse students’ identities complexify how historical and conflictual issues can be addressed in the classroom (e.g., Fine, 2003; Kim & Markus, 2005; Peck, 2010). The study of power relations is a critical component of interruptive democratic citizenship education (Barton & Levstik, 2003; Davies, 2004a; Seixas, Peck, & Poyntz, 2011). Therefore, my study suggests that curricular guidelines should address social power structures, and more directly encourage discussion about conflictual issues that reflect students’ diversities. Such guidelines would better support teachers who feel constrained by the prescribed curriculum, and thereby offer diverse students the opportunity to develop their skills for critical reflection and deeper literacy engagement.

**Implications of Ethnocultural Diversity for Peacebuilding Education**

This study has shown how critical consciousness was enacted through various critical literacy and social studies initiatives, how the hidden curriculum was challenged when teachers made power dynamics of the dominant society explicit, and how providing diverse students with autonomy was a crucial component of educating for democracy. Teachers’ facilitation of discussion about conflictual issues and diversity opened up learning opportunities for diverse students. My findings, in sum, illustrate the following:

- Teaching and classroom discussion about conflictual issues and diversity are pedagogical approaches that facilitate the inclusion of diverse students.
- Teachers’ choices to promote and critique national values and democratic ideals are central to educating for democracy.
- Teachers’ choices to connect implemented curriculum to students’ identities enable possibilities for engagement and inclusion.
Ethnocultural minority students responded to discussions and activities about conflict and diversity in varying ways. Problem-posing education (Freire, 1970/1994b) encourages learning by doing and is a central component of educating for democracy. In this study, diverse students’ experiences with such implemented curriculum encouraged political, literacy, and identity engagement and provided opportunities to develop critical thinking and analytical skills. The experiences of diverse students’ in this study overall showed that:

• Attention to social conflict in the implemented curriculum uncovered hidden power structures and encouraged civic engagement in students’ sociopolitical contexts.

• Role playing provided opportunities for diverse students to find their voices and play with the fluidity of their identities and social realities.

• Dialogue about social issues and conflict provided diverse students with opportunities to develop their reading, speaking, research, and analytical skills, to build effective arguments, and to critique multiple sources of evidence.

The three teachers’ pedagogical choices better supported these outcomes when they assigned roles to students, arranged them in mixed groupings, and presented conflictual issues in ways that promoted dialogue and reflection on students’ personal experiences.

Overall, this research adds to the extant theory and research literature showing that teachers carry a lot of power to influence the process and outcome of classroom activities that purposely address and invite dialogue about conflict and diversity issues (Bickmore, 1999, 2005; Bekerman et al., 2009; Torney-Purta et al., 2001). Such
progressive and transformational teaching methodologies are necessary for building and developing citizenship in healthy democracies. These dialogic learning processes are even more important for newcomer and second-generation children, whose parents may not be Canadian citizens or who may have been marginalized in Canadian society. When students are given the agency to make and to act upon their decisions, whether in role or in real life, my research shows that they become empowered, and further engaged and included in what they learn at school. This study shows various ways diverse students responded to conflictual lesson content—sometimes out loud, and sometimes through silent responses. Students’ silences were often misunderstood by both their peers and teacher and thus interpreted negatively.

Research on identity-based conflict, reviewed in the literature in Chapter 2 and illustrated in the vignette about religious conflict in Chapter 5, points to the importance of the social studies and language arts curriculum in particular, in helping citizens to define and transform group identities and intergroup interactions contributing to peacebuilding (Barton & Levstik, 2003; Bekerman & Zembylas, 2011). Paying attention to how difference is handled, in particular how conflict is taken up rather than avoided, involves acknowledging difference and confronting conflict in ways that support and practise equity amongst all students’ identities. In this way, the teachers implicitly taught the value of unity amongst different and similar abilities and diverse beliefs, to prepare students to become upstanding citizens of their democratic pluralist society. Many students in Canadian classrooms are visible minority immigrants. Thus, this study is valuable in helping to clarify how teachers can address and position discussion about
diversity and conflictual issues in diverse classrooms: providing opportunities to acknowledge and transform structures of power and domination.

All three teachers taught values through both explicit and implicit curricula. Moral education, given these diverse immigrant students’ beliefs, was at times contentious in the context of the Christian-founded public school system. In these classrooms, East Asian and South Asian values flourished. When Ms. Marlee recognized diverse cultural values and morals she facilitated safer cultural spaces for many diverse students to participate and engage in their respective classrooms. In the same way, Mrs. Amrita facilitated many diverse students’ integration into national ideals through classroom activities. Mr. Hiroshi’s implemented curriculum presented national values, which shaped how vocal and quiet students chose to respond. When all three teachers linked students’ identities to conflict, students sometimes felt included to participate more—such as with Madia and Aalia who “felt great” when they presented their speeches. My study also reinforces Pace and Hemmings’ (2007) theoretical argument that the “character of teacher-student authority relations has great bearing on the quality of students’ educational experience and teachers’ work” (p. 4). My study provides practical evidence of how teacher authority and student agency were indicators for understanding how conflictual issues were addressed and responded to within these three classroom contexts. In this way, teachers’ enactment of varying dialogic pedagogies influenced students’ participation, social status, development of morals and values, and overall agency within the classroom.

In all three classroom contexts, the complexity of identities shaped the ways in which teachers took up and explored conflictual issues. For instance, South Asian and
East Asian group identities were paramount in these community and school contexts.

These classroom contexts illustrated how teachers facilitated social conflict and issues of diversity within these relatively homogenous populations: teachers expected students to know about conflicts and social issues in their ancestral countries, such as Egypt and Sri Lanka. This research shows how education about conflictual and diverse issues encouraged students to critically self-reflect on their social position and privilege, through their own diverse identities—especially when they felt connected to the content. These very different, yet similar, classes of diverse students positively experienced discussions about diverse and sensitive issues when they were implemented consciously and inclusively.

Based on the findings of this study, facilitating conflict dialogue processes through a critical multicultural perspective fostered a space for the inclusion of many diverse identities. It also created opportunities for students and teachers to engage with their multiple identities by drawing on their diverse lived experiences and perspectives to interpret and respond to various social conflict issues. Cummins (2009) reminded educators that facilitating diverse students’ critical engagement with academic learning is socially beneficial: “The entire society benefits when all students are given a realistic chance of contributing to their societies” (p. 9). The teachers introduced in this dissertation demonstrated how their implicit and explicit liberatory praxis offered their diverse students opportunities to choose consciousness over dysconsciousness (King, 2004). When social-conflict issues were explicitly discussed and connected to students’ diverse identities, even the typically quiet students found their voice in classroom discussions. This finding demonstrates how education for democracy supports the
engagement of diverse voices. Claudia Ruitenberg (2010) has written: “Young people should be given opportunities to experience this kind of disagreement and the affective commitments that drive it” (p. 52). In this way, conflict-dialogue pedagogies allow for promising democratic citizenship learning opportunities that foster inclusion within a critical multicultural learning environment.

**Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research on Inclusion in Peacebuilding Education**

In this thesis research, I studied students’ experiences with implemented curriculum about conflict and diversity, from their perspective as ethnocultural minorities living in a diverse, multicultural city in southern Ontario, Canada. Do their experiences represent and speak to the experiences of all ethnocultural minorities? Certainly not. The vignettes I have presented are intended to illustrate how different types of ethnocultural minorities experienced conflictual dialogue pedagogy. As the opening quote from Roy (1994) has reminded us, participants remember conflictual events differently: “what happened, happened to many different people differently” (p. 24).

Through extensive classroom observations and interviews with students, I have researched how conflict and diversity that are embedded in implemented curriculum and pedagogy influence participation of diverse students, particularly for less confident and quieter students. Amongst students in this study, participation was enhanced when teachers connected the content to students’ identities. Stimulating cooperative learning activities, open classroom climates, peer support, individual reflection, paired sharing, and academic buddies enhanced the engagement and participation of diverse students by strengthening relationships among diverse groups of students and between students and...
teachers. Constructive conflict education, in which opportunities to exercise dissent were encouraged and respected, enhanced students’ ability to learn. While a few studies have pointed to the capabilities of younger children (Angell, 2004; Beck, 2003) to engage in conflict learning, most existing evidence focuses on students age 14 and over (e.g., Hess, 2001; Hess & Posselt, 2002; Kohlmeier, 2006). This study speaks to the minimal research that exists on how students’ ethnocultural, gender, and sexual identities differentially affect the ways that they do and do not participate in such learning opportunities.

Teachers’ inclusion of culturally relevant content encouraged and built upon shared group identity experiences such as immigration or religious conflict. Whether preparing for a class discussion on religious conflict, on rural versus urban, or on current events such as uprisings or immigration, some students found meaningful connections through their and their peers’ backgrounds and experiences.

A limitation of this research design was the sampling across similar school contexts within a similar region of southern Ontario. I only studied three teachers in junior (Grades 4 and 5) and intermediate (Grade 7) grades. While this study illustrated the potential for discussing conflict and diversity with younger students, it was not inclusive of younger primary-age children (i.e., preschool to Grade 3). Another limitation was that I did not conduct individual student interviews. In conjunction with the small group interviews I did conduct in this study, individual interviews might have presented a more refined understanding of how students experience particular moments of inclusion or exclusion, which they might have been reluctant to speak about in front of their peers.

Further comparative study on classrooms and schools in contexts with different demographics, such as different ethnocultural minority groups in southern Ontario and
areas with dominant or higher class populations, might also provide greater insights into how students’ identities shape how they respond to conflict. Such studies would shed further light on how societal values are contested and taken up through conflict, which is expected and necessary in a pluralistic society.

Finally, the issue of linking students’ identities to particular experiences is complex. Further study on how education about identity-based, settled social conflicts, in the neoliberal sense, would be useful for furthering our understanding of how dialogue-based pedagogies connect to the multiple layers of students’ identities.

Future studies on how immigrant and refugee students’ participation in various pedagogical processes available through both in-class and online technologies would also provide a wider understanding of how different pedagogies can support immigrant students’ civic engagement. Such a study would allow for the consideration of various cultural and technological modalities that might influence participation, engagement, and inclusion of the Other. In a future study of how dialogue is enacted and integrated into diverse classroom spaces, it would be useful to examine how specific, identity-linked topics could silence or engage different students in postconflict and relatively harmonious nations. In such a study, identifying target students prior to conducting observations, in collaboration with the classroom teacher, could contribute to better understanding the experiences and perspectives of the quiet, vocal, and academically strong students.

Conclusion: Promising Possibilities of Peacebuilding Education

Culturally relevant curricula and democratic peacebuilding education encourage diverse students to connect, reflect, and engage in difficult social conflict issues. Explicitly linking content to students’ identities and experiences through dialogic
pedagogies increases opportunities for seeking alternative and multiple points of view—an essential component of peacebuilding education. In this study, for example, some students were aware of perspectives from their own families’ histories of conflict, which were different from perspectives offered in their textbooks. Cooperative classroom environments encourage dissent to be expressed and healthy models to be created for diverse immigrant students to practise exercising their agency in a democratic society. Diverse students who fear embarrassment or negative feedback in competitive classrooms may feel safer in inclusive spaces that encourage minority and dissenting viewpoints. Paying attention to diverse voices challenges hegemony and activates otherwise silenced classroom dialogue. Delpit (1988) directed educators to listen to silenced dialogue:

> We do not really see through our eyes or hear through our ears, but through our beliefs. . . . It is not easy, but it is the only way to learn what it might feel like to be someone else and the only way to start the dialogue. (p. 297)

Critical consciousness challenges the culture of silence, and offers the possibility to transform hegemonic classroom cultures. When teachers assign roles to students for their participation in dialogic activities, possibilities for greater student engagement and inclusion increase. Engaging in conflict is not an easy process. It involves time, dedication, and careful scaffolding. Students are not all the same, and drawing on diverse students’ cultural resources challenges the hidden curriculum and creates spaces for equitable social relations amongst students and teachers. Such democratic peacebuilding education is a critical, crucial, and necessary process—and through dialogue, it is possible.
REFERENCES


Amsterdam, the Netherlands: International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement.


APPENDICES
Appendix A:

Information and Consent Letter for Parents/Guardians of all Students

(On OISE/UT letterhead)

Dear Parents/Guardians:

My name is Christina Parker. I am a doctoral student in the Curriculum Studies and Teacher Development program at the University of Toronto. For my PhD thesis research I am studying how (Grades 4 to 8) teachers implement discussion-based lessons on social and diversity issues in their classrooms, and how diverse students experience these discussions.

The School Board has granted approval for this study. The principal has also given permission for this study to be carried out in your son/daughter’s school. I will be in your child’s classroom observing their social studies and language arts classes for approximately two to three months.

If you and your child consent, I will also invite your child to participate in an interview, where I will be asking them about how they experience various dialogue activities, such as discussions, debates and/or small group work, in their classrooms. Not all students will choose to be interviewed. The interviews will be audiorecorded and upon completion of the study all of the transcripts will be destroyed. With you and your child’s consent, I will also collect copies of (not-to-be graded) student work related to these activities, such as journal entries. The purpose of my study is not to evaluate students or teachers.

The participation of all schools, teachers, and students is completely voluntary. I will make strong efforts to ensure confidentiality: schools, teachers, and students will be anonymous (not named). I will also ask all students to keep our discussions confidential. You have the right to withdraw your child and your child also has the right to withdraw from participation in any part of my study at any time, without any consequences.

The small risk for participation is that some students may feel a little uncomfortable responding to some interview questions or showing copies of their work. Your child is welcome to respond to only the questions they choose to answer, and to only share any work they choose to share. The benefit of your child’s participation in this study will be to provide insights for improving discussion-based teaching that encourages all students to participate and feel included in the classroom.

If you would like further information about my study and/or would like to speak in person, I will be offering an optional information session on [date/time] at your child’s school where you can ask any questions.

If you choose to allow your child’s participation in this study this is what I will ask of him or her:

1. (Option) To take observations of your child during their language arts and social studies classes.

2. (Option - Part of class, all who agree) I will request samples of their not-to-be graded STUDENT WORK done in the classroom

3. (Option) To participate in an optional SMALL GROUP (4-6 students) INTERVIEW for approximately 20 to 30 minutes

Attached is a consent form. Please review it and indicate whether you provide consent for your child to participate in one or more aspects of my research by completing the form and returning it to the red folder in the teacher’s classroom as soon as possible and the second copy is for your records.
If you have questions or would like to discuss this project further, please feel free to contact me (info below) or my thesis supervisor, Dr. Kathy Bickmore at 416-978-0237 or k.bickmore@utoronto.ca. You may also contact the University of Toronto’s Office of Research Ethics at 416-946-3273 or ethics.review@utoronto.ca for more information about your rights or potential participation in this project. Your time and effort are greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

______________________
Christina Parker, PhD Candidate

Email: christina.parker@utoronto.ca
CONSENT FORM for Parents/Guardians

I acknowledge that the topic and process of this research has been explained to me and that any question that I have asked has been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

Please indicate all the research activities to which you agree to participate.

☐ Classroom observations

☐ Small group student interview

☐ Collection of (not-to-be graded) student work

Signature: _______________________________

Name: _________________________________

Your child’s name: _________________________________

Date: ________________________________

Would you like to receive a final report (oral or written)? If so, please record your email address:

Email: _________________________________
Appendix B: Information and Consent Letter for Teachers

(On OISE/UT letterhead)

Dear [Prefix, First Name, Last Name, Teacher]

My name is Christina Parker. I am a doctoral student in the Curriculum Studies and Teacher Development program at OISE, University of Toronto. For my PhD thesis research I am studying how selected (Grades 4 to 8) teachers implement dialogue (discussion-based lessons) on conflictual issues in their social studies and language arts programs, and how diverse (including visible minority and immigrant) students experience these processes.

I intend to observe regular social studies and language arts classes (4 to 5 times per week) for approximately two to three months each. I will also invite students to participate (if they wish to do so) in a group interview where I will be asking them about how they experience various classroom dialogue activities, such as discussions, debates, and/or small group work. Where teachers and students consent, I will also collect copies of (not-to-be graded) student work in relation to these activities.

The purpose of my study is not to evaluate students or teachers. It is to understand how teachers may present discussion-based curriculum effectively, to encourage diverse students to participate and to have their voices heard in the classroom.

The participation of all schools, teachers, and students is voluntary. I will carefully protect confidentiality: schools, teachers, and students will remain completely anonymous (not named, or identified with pseudonyms). You have the right to withdraw from participation in any aspect of my study at any time, without negative consequences. If anyone chooses to withdraw, I will ask them whether or not they will allow me to use any data that I may have already collected.

The small risk for participation is that some students or teachers may feel a little uncomfortable being observed, or responding to some interview questions. Any participant is welcome to respond to only the questions they choose to answer. Similarly, some students may be uncomfortable showing copies of their work, even though it’s not being evaluated. They are always welcome to refuse to share any piece of work. Also, while I will request classroom documents, such as lesson plans, it is not required that you share them. All of the observation notes that I take in your classroom will be shared with you: you will have the opportunity to provide any feedback, or to request changes or deletions to the content of my notes. The two interviews that I conduct with you will be audiorecorded. Upon completion of the interview, I will share the transcript with you and ask for your feedback. Once I have completed this study (its analysis and writing), I will destroy all the data.

The benefit of your participation in this study is that it will provide insights into practical ways teachers can facilitate classroom dialogues that encourage diverse students to participate and to have their voice heard.

If you choose to participate in this study, here is what I will ask of you:

To OBSERVE your social studies/language arts classes (4-5 times/week) for approximately 2-3 months.

I will request CURRICULUM RELATED DOCUMENTS (such as unit/lesson plans [optional], seating plans, and ungraded student work [optional], such as journal entries related to what they are learning in the classroom.

To participate in 2 INTERVIEWS, each 30-45 minutes, about how you facilitate conflict dialogue processes among diverse students, particularly visible minority and newcomer immigrants.
If students choose to participate in this study this is what I will ask of them:

(Whole Class) To OBSERVE the class as they engage in their social studies/language arts classes for approximately 2-3 months.

(Option - Part of class, all who agree) I will request samples of their not-to-be graded STUDENT WORK done in the classroom

(Option) To participate in an optional GROUP INTERVIEW for approximately 20 to 30 minutes

Attached is a consent form. Please review it and indicate whether you are willing to participate in one or more aspects of my research by completing the form and returning it to me in person, as soon as feasible, please. The second copy is for your records.

If you have questions or would like to discuss this project further, please feel free to contact me (info below) or my thesis supervisor, Dr. Kathy Bickmore at 416-978-0237 or k.bickmore@utoronto.ca. You may also contact the University of Toronto’s Office of Research Ethics at 416-946-3273 or ethics.review@utoronto.ca for more information about your rights or potential participation in this project. Your time and effort are greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

______________________
Christina Parker, PhD Candidate

Email: christina.parker@utoronto.ca
CONSENT FORM for Teachers

I acknowledge that the topic and process of this research has been explained to me and that any question that I have asked has been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

Please indicate all the research activities to which you agree to participate.

☐ Classroom observations

☐ Individual interviews (2)

☐ Collection of planning materials (e.g. lesson/unit plans, resources consulted)

☐ Collection of (not-to-be graded) student work

Signature: _______________________________

Name: _________________________________

Date: _________________________________

Would you like to receive a final report (oral or written)? If so, please record your email address:

Email: _______________________________
Appendix C: Classroom Observation Protocol

Site

• Date:
• Start time:
• End time:
• Facilitator/Teacher:

Student Participants

• # of students, characteristics (ethnocultural visible minorities, gender, age)

Classroom Environment/Space

• Seating arrangement
• How is the classroom space set up? (E.g. posters, student work posted, seating arrangement)
• How do students appear to be included/represented in the classroom space?

Classroom Context

• Subject of academic lesson, context of lesson, time of day/period, unit

Dialogue Pedagogies

• Processes teachers use to elicit (invite) and facilitate conflict dialogue
• Responses teachers and students have to various students’ actions and contributions
• Instances of disagreement between teacher-student, or student-student
• Verbal and nonverbal responses by various students

Perspectives and Responses

• How do students speak from their own experience, history, and/or privilege?
• How are students’ silences dealt with?

Pedagogy/Content

• How do the teacher’s teaching choices (seem to) encourage students to express viewpoints from different perspectives?
• How are students encouraged to respect diverse viewpoints/perspectives/cultural identities?
Appendix D:

Guidelines for Informal Conversations and Group Interviews

With Students (Open-Ended)

- How did you feel in [describe class activity from observation]?
- Do you ever discuss issues of diversity (e.g. different cultural backgrounds) in this class? What’s that like for you?
- Do you ever discuss topics where people disagree in this class? What’s that like for you?
- If other students in your class have a different opinion from yours on an issue, how do you respond? Can you give an example of how this happened in your classroom?
- What do you do when you don’t agree with something you read in a text, or something your teacher says? (What do you do when you do agree?)
- Tell about a time when you felt included in your classroom? (Optional prompts: a topic you found especially engaging, an activity you especially liked).
- Tell about a time when you felt left out (or put down) in the classroom.
- Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your experiences with discussion of diversity or conflictual issues in your classroom?
Appendix E:

Sample Open-Ended Teacher Interview Questions

(Two Interviews, Similar Agendas)

• How do you use discussion of diversity and conflictual issues in your teaching, to facilitate learning opportunities for your diverse students? What different pedagogical processes have you used?

• How do you encourage discussion about diverse identities, experiences, histories, and power/privilege (e.g. different cultural backgrounds) in this class? What’s that like for you?

• Do you ever discuss topics where people disagree in this class? What’s that like for you?

• If students in your class have a different opinion from yours on an issue, how do you respond? Can you give an example of how this happened in your classroom?

• How do your various students respond to those different pedagogies? (How do students’ participation differ in various situations?)

• How do you prepare your diverse students for engaging in these discussions (e.g. build skills, understandings, norms, set up, roles or groupings)? What are some examples of how you do this? [NOTE: second interview will ask about particular examples that were observed.]

• What teaching strategies have you used when you have observed moments of students’ disrespect or exclusion in your classroom? Please describe some examples.
Appendix F:

Information and Consent Letter for School Administrator (Principal)

(On OISE/UT letterhead)

Dear [Prefix, First Name, Last Name, Principal]

My name is Christina Parker and I am a doctoral student in the Curriculum Studies and Teacher Development program at the University of Toronto. For my PhD thesis research I am studying how selected (Grades 4 to 8) teachers implement dialogue on conflictual issues in their social studies and language arts program and how diverse (including visible minority and immigrant students) experience these processes.

I intend to observe regular social studies and language arts classes (4 to 5 times per week) for approximately two to three months each. I will also invite students to participate in a group interview where I will be asking them about how they experience various conflict dialogue activities, such as discussions, debates and/or small group activities, in their classrooms. Not all students will choose to be interviewed. Where participants consent, I will also collect copies of (not-to-be graded) student work in relation to these activities, such as journal entries.

The purpose of my study is not to evaluate students or teachers. It is to understand how teachers may present discussion-based curriculum effectively, to encourage diverse students to participate and to have their voices heard in the classroom.

The participation of all schools, teachers, and students is completely voluntary. Please note that I will carefully protect confidentiality: schools, teachers, and students will remain completely anonymous (not named, and details that would identify them masked). Your school, and each participant in my study, will also have the right to withdraw from participation in any aspect of my study at any time, without negative consequences. If anyone chooses to withdraw, I will ask them whether or not they will allow me to use any data that I may have already collected.

The small risk for participation is that some students or teachers may feel a little uncomfortable being observed, or responding to some interview questions. Any participant is welcome to respond to any question they so choose. Similarly, some students may be uncomfortable showing copies of their work, even though it’s not being evaluated. They are always welcome to refuse to share any piece of work. The benefit of your school’s participation in this study will be to help your teachers and others to understand how teachers can effectively present discussion-based curriculum in ways that encourage diverse students to participate and to have their voices heard and included in the classroom.

If teachers choose to participate in this study this is what I will ask of them:

To OBSERVE their social studies/language arts classes (4-5 times/week) for approximately 2-3 months.

I will request CURRICULUM RELATED DOCUMENTS (such as unit/lesson plans, seating plans, and student work that is ungraded, but is done in relation to what they are learning in the classroom, such as journal entries with anecdotal feedback)

To participate in 2 INTERVIEWS, each 30-45 minutes, about how they facilitate conflict dialogue processes among diverse students, particularly visible minority and newcomer immigrants.

If students choose to participate in this study this is what I will ask of them:
1. **(Whole Class)** To OBSERVE the class as they engage in their social studies/language arts classes for approximately 2-3 months.

2. **(Option - Part of class, all who agree)** I will request samples of their not-to-be graded STUDENT WORK done in the classroom

3. **(Option)** To participate in an optional GROUP INTERVIEW for approximately 20 to 30 minutes

Attached is a consent form. Please review it, ask me any questions you may have, and indicate whether you are willing to allow one or more teachers (classrooms) in your school participate in my research, by completing the form and returning it to me in person (or, email or call me to come pick it up), as soon as feasible, please. The second copy is for your records.

If you have questions or would like to discuss this project further, please feel free to contact me (info below) or my thesis supervisor, Dr. Kathy Bickmore at 416-978-0237 or k.bickmore@utoronto.ca. You may also contact the University of Toronto’s Office of Research Ethics at 416-946-3273 or ethics.review@utoronto.ca for more information about your rights or potential participation in this project. Your time and effort are greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

______________________
Christina Parker, PhD Candidate

Email: christina.parker@utoronto.ca
CONSENT FORM for School Administrator (Principal)

I acknowledge that the topic and process of this research has been explained to me and that any question that I have asked has been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

Please indicate all the research activities to which you agree one or more teachers and students from your school may participate.

☐ Classroom observations

☐ Small group interviews with students

☐ Collection of teachers planning materials (e.g. lesson/unit plans, resources consulted)

☐ Collection of (not-to-be graded) student work

Signature: _______________________________

Name: _________________________________

Date: ________________________________

Would you like to receive a final report (oral or written)? If so, please record your email address:

Email: ___________________________
Appendix G: Information and Consent Letter for Student Participants

(On OISE/UT letterhead)

Dear Student:

My name is Christina Parker and I am a doctoral student at the University of Toronto. I am studying how (Grades 4 to 8) teachers implement discussion-based lessons on social and diversity issues in their classrooms, and how diverse students experience these discussions.

I am not evaluating you or your teacher. The School Board has granted approval for this study. Your principal and classroom teacher have also given permission for this study. I will be in your classroom observing your social studies and language arts classes for approximately two to three months.

I would like to invite you to be part of a group interview where I will ask you and some of your peers about how you experience dialogue activities (like discussions, debates, and/or small group activities). Not all of you will choose to be interviewed. The interviews will be audio recorded, but when I finish writing about them the recordings will be destroyed. I will also ask you for copies of some of your classroom work, but only the work that is not going to be graded by your teacher.

Your participation is completely voluntary. I will try my best to make sure that I carefully protect your confidentiality by using a pseudonym (made up name) to describe your school, teacher, and you. I hope that our group discussions will remain confidential, but I will need your help to make sure that what is said within our group discussions stays with us in the classroom. You will also have the right to withdraw from participation in any aspect of my study at any time, without any consequences. If you choose to withdraw, I will ask you whether you will allow me to use any data that I may have already collected.

The small risk for participation is that you may feel a little uncomfortable responding to some interview questions or showing copies of your work. You are welcome to respond to only the questions you choose to answer, and to only share any work you choose to share. The benefit of your participation in this study will be to provide information for improving discussion-based teaching that encourages all students to participate and feel included in the classroom.

There’s a red folder in your classroom and I would like you to put the consent form in that folder to let me know whether or not you give me permission to invite you to an interview and/or to collect samples of your work. There’s also a green folder that I will leave in your classroom during the whole time I am there. If you ever need to tell me anything (including whether you’re no longer interested in participating) you can put a note in that folder for me to read.

If you choose to participate, this is what I will ask of you:

1. (Option) To take observations of you during your language arts and social studies classes.

2. (Option) I will request samples of your not-to-be graded STUDENT WORK done in the classroom.

3. (Option) To participate in an optional SMALL GROUP (4-6 students) INTERVIEW for approximately 20 to 30 minutes.

Attached is a consent form. Please review it and indicate whether you are willing to participate in one or more aspects of my research by completing the form and returning it to the red folder in your classroom. The second copy is for you to keep. An additional letter is for your parents to provide their consent. It is important for you to know that even if you agree to participate, I also need your parents to sign a consent form.

If you have questions or would like to discuss this project further, please feel free to contact me (info below) or my thesis supervisor, Dr. Kathy Bickmore at 416-978-0237 or k.bickmore@utoronto.ca. You
may also contact the University of Toronto’s Office of Research Ethics at 416-946-3273 or ethics.review@utoronto.ca for more information about your rights or potential participation in this project. Your time and effort are greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

______________________
Christina Parker, PhD Candidate

Email: christina.parker@utoronto.ca
CONSENT FORM for Students

I acknowledge that the topic and process of this research has been explained to me and that any question that I have asked has been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

Please indicate all the research activities to which you agree to participate.

☐ Classroom observations

☐ Small group interview

☐ Collection of your (not-to-be graded) classroom work

Signature: ________________________________

Name: _________________________________

Date: ________________________________