

# JOURNAL OF EDUCATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

RESILIENCE PEDAGOGY



VOLUME 5    ISSUE 1    SPRING 2017

ISSBN 2153-683X

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The *Journal of Education and Social Justice* is housed at Virginia University of Lynchburg. The purpose of the Journal is to create opportunities for issues to be addressed, for enrichment programs to be documented, and to improve the quality of social justice and education in this country. The publication provides educators, scholars, and professionals across academic disciplines an opportunity to disseminate their scholarly works. Articles published in the *Journal of Education and Social Justice* include reports of original, rigorously conducted research employing diverse methodologies, epistemologies and cross-disciplinary perspectives. The Journal also includes works that are comprehensive syntheses of research toward understanding the education and social justice as well as analyses of trends and issues. The editorial board is committed to including only the highest level of research and professional ideas in this publication.

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The editors of *Journal of Education and Social Justice* invite submission of original manuscripts which contains essential information on education and social justice. All manuscripts must be carefully edited before submission. Article submissions should not exceed 25 to 30 pages doubles-paced 8.5" by 11" manuscript pages (roughly 6,500 to 7800 words), in a 12-point font and with one-inch margins. The manuscript must be typed utilizing Microsoft Word. Submissions should include one e-mailed copy. Authors should include a separate cover page with their names, titles, institutions, mailing address, daytime phone numbers(s), fax number(s), e-mail addresses, and a brief biographical sketch. Every effort should be made to ensure that, except for the cover sheet, the manuscript contains no clues to the authors' identity. The manuscript must be accompanied by a cover letter containing the name, address, and phone number of a contact author, as well as a statement that the manuscript is not under consideration elsewhere. The editors request that all text pages be numbered. The page length includes the "Footnotes" section (for substantive additions to the text which should be included at the end of the paper) and the "References" section (where full citations amplify the abbreviated in-text references for books or periodicals, e.g., alphabetized by author's name). References should include the most recent publications on your research topic. For writing and editorial style, authors must follow guidelines in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA)*. The editors reserve the right to make minor changes for the sake of clarity. Manuscripts should be sent to Editor at ashesmail@aol.com.

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ISSN 2153-683X

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Printed in the United States of America by Garrity Print Solutions, P. O. Box 11305, New Orleans, LA 70181-1305

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# PEACEABLE ACTION: SHAPING AND STRENGTHENING RESILIENCE PEDAGOGY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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*Abstract:* The editors begin the special issue of the *Journal of Education and Social Justice* with an introduction to the unifying thread across each of the featured articles—resilience pedagogy. After which, the editors target their audience as peace education researchers, progressive educators, peace activists, and like-minded individuals that continue to invoke the need for resilience pedagogy around the world. Each of the individual authors are introduced. The editors take care in situating how the author’s scholarship is positioned within the larger context of resilience pedagogy. Each paper featured in the special issue is then summarized, with attention to how the individual authors sought to reinvigorate the Deweyian progressive ideals of action-oriented resilience education.

## INTRODUCTION

This special issue explores the central theme of “resilience pedagogy.” Historically speaking, the English word “resiliency” is a derivative of the Latin word “resiliendum” (Low Dog, 2012). Yet, what new meaning has the word “resiliency” taken on in modern day? This special issue of the *Journal of Education and Social Justice* attempts to address these issues.

The authors published in this issue attempt to differentiate between incomplete and oversimplification of adversity. Instead, these authors placed emphasis on a definitional shift toward resilience as a means of successful transition and adaptation of individual and collective strengths (Brown, 2001; Henderson & Milstein, 2003; Hoffman, 2010). Therein, we assert that resilience pedagogy, while not

defined as the mere recovery from adversity, lacks in adequate description as to the trials and tribulations an individual in crisis experiences in their perceptions. Survivors often experience the attitudinal defeatism of those interested in resiliency, but unwilling or incapable of assisting the individual.

In the twenty-first century, a stronger emphasis must be placed on a disposition that promotes peaceful dialogue through restorative educational practices aimed to serve the common good and populations most in need. This collection of work was written for peace education researchers, progressive educators, peace activists, and likeminded individuals that continue to invoke the need for resilience pedagogy around the world.

## RESILIENCY: A DEFINITIONAL SHIFT

The authors in this issue sought to reinvigorate the Deweyian progressive ideals of the early 1900s (Howlett & Cohan, 2016) through the claim that action-oriented resilience education can be a promising form of peace education. We borrow from the wisdom of Phelps, Fennewald, Sandoz, and de los Angeles (this issue): “Learning to dialogue across difference is a key practice in democratic education. Yet, facilitating classroom discussions on serious and sensitive topics poses a number of difficulties for educators.” The manuscripts in this issue illuminate the responsibility that modern peace education researchers play in orchestrating a wider public audience and developing diverse democracies.

Throughout the curation of this special issue, diverse perspectives were sought. The rationale behind representing such diverse perspectives was to better substantiate the scope of resilience pedagogy and the methods in which resilience can be fostered. The editors placed emphasis on manuscripts aspiring to foster resilience among individuals and communities experiencing inhibitors to personal and societal peace.

#### STRUCTURAL OVERVIEW OF THE SPECIAL ISSUE

Readers will experience both up-close and macroscopic views of emergent findings from studies of formal and informal peace education programs developing resiliency. The editors recognized that there is an abeyance between research and action. In other words, research alone does not sufficiently remedy complex societal strife. We know this from Candice Carter's (2010) book titled *Conflict resolution and peace education: Transformations across disciplines*, in which Carter (and the authors in the edited volume) emphasize the transformation needed for cross disciplines in order to transform peace education initiatives. Consequently authors who were featured present Freirian (2006) models of experience.

The editors strove to maintain the integrity of each author's personal voice and individual perception of their respective experiences. Each author prioritized and attended to behavioral change as a necessary means to advance the scholarship of peace education in the twenty-first century. Additionally, the editors sought to expand the content to include voices that have been historically sequestered by data collected from a segregated segment of the population. This special issue repudiates the notion that "resilience pedagogy" has previously been reserved for the benefit of serving white, middle-class populations.

#### INTRODUCTION TO RESILIENCE PEDAGOGY: A SPOKEN WORD POEM

The special issue begins with a provocative, yet moving, spoken word poem. The spoken word poem was first performed at the annual meeting for the American Educational Research Association (AERA) in Washington D. C. Each author-performer's delivery was regarded by attendees as eloquent, moving, and authentic. The editors felt it a necessary inclusion to the special issue. Its oration was delivered, ever so confidently, by two women: a woman of Irish appearance (Jennifer Killham) and a woman of African accent (Florence Nyemba). It was evident that Killham and Nyemba were devoted to expanding the geopolitical boundaries of resilience pedagogy, having composed the piece after extensive reflection on the articles presented in this special issue. Not only does the poem recognize the value of diversity, the performance, itself, transcended their geographical and ethnical differences to create solidarity. The piece poignantly addressed the conference theme of "Public Scholarship to Educate Diverse Democracies," and extended beautifully on Florence Nyemba's work with Zimbabwean women. The editors found the poem to be a riveting alternative introduction to the overarching themes of resilience pedagogy, and hope for it to serve as a beacon for how the voices of a movement can be presented in a variety of ways.

#### CONFLICT RESOLUTION BETWEEN PARENTS AND TEACHERS: RAISING AWARENESS TO IMPROVE RELATIONSHIPS AND ENHANCE CHILDREN'S EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES

This article is presented by L. Nicole Hammons, a doctoral candidate at the University of Cincinnati in the Developmental and Learning Sciences strand of the Educational Studies program. Hammon's current line of research extrapolates the significance of parental involvement, conflict resolution, self-regulated learning, and student-teaching experiences in order to examine key conflict resolution concepts



(i.e., communication and conflict management styles). Hammon's paper titled "Conflict Resolution between Parents and Teachers: Raising Awareness to Improve Relationships and Enhance Children's Educational Experiences," not only frames the most current research on conflict resolution, but simultaneously presents recommendations for the inclusion of parents and teachers in systems of conflict resolutions. As editors, we are reminded of how Hammon's contribution connects to a larger body of peace education literature, in which we must not forget that, to borrow from the words of Candice Carter, "Learning to accept and understand differences is the foundation that peace educators foster for building stronger communities" (Carter, C., 2002, 49).

#### SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS: A DETERMINANT OF PERCEPTIONS AND RESPONSES TO BULLYING

Our next article also raises awareness about the experience of children. This article is presented by Kelli M. Jette, Assistant Professor at the University of Cincinnati and former public school teacher, who is devoted to the betterment of rural education. Jette draws on her extensive experience with bullying prevention (c.f., Berlowitz, Frye & Jette, 2015) to present the paper titled "Socioeconomic Status: A Determinant of Perceptions and Responses to Bullying." In this paper, Jette deconstructs the widespread and troublesome problem of in-school bullying, with careful attention to the influences of socio-economic status.

#### ROLE-PLAY TOWARDS SUCCESSFUL CONFLICT RESOLUTION

This article is presented by Fawzeyah Al-Awadhi of Kuwait University, a longtime advocate for the advancement of Nel Noddings' (2010/2012) "ethic of care" (Al-Awadhi, 2014).

Her paper titled *Role-play Towards Successful Conflict Resolution*, explores roleplay conflict dichotomies in kindergarten classrooms as a conflict-mediation technique to strengthen cultural pluralism and coexistence. Al-Awadhi skillfully weaves insight from Fisher, Yry and Patton's (2010) article, *Getting to Yes*, and Patricia Collins' (199), *The Other*, into her analysis.

#### MASLOW ILLUMINATES RESILIENCE IN STUDENTS PLACED AT RISK

This article is presented by Michelle Tichy, an Assistant Professor of Educational Psychology at The University of La Verne, La Fetra College of Education, La Verne, California. Efforts to transform organizational systems to better serve the holistic needs of stakeholders is central to Tichy's research (Tichy, Johnson, Johnson, & Roseth, 2010; Tichy-Reese, M, 2006). Constructive controversy: A long overlooked path to moral development. In her mixed methods study, titled *Maslow Illuminates Resilience in Students Placed At Risk*, Tichy connects Maslow's hierarchy of human needs with efforts to serve at-risk students attending charter schools. Tichy carefully attends to how schools may serve as a protective factor, aiding in healthy development.

#### TRAVERSING THE ADVANTAGEOUS INTERSECTION BETWEEN UNBRIDLED CREATIVITY AND CAPABILITY: MY JOURNEY WITH STUDENTS IN MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

This optimistic teacher-reflection is presented by Serah Duvall, a pre-service teacher candidate in Middle Childhood Education. Duvall is devoted to the enrichment of Middle Childhood Education through feminist pedagogy, critical consciousness, and early field experiences (Duvall, & Killham, 2016; Killham & Duvall, 2016). We felt the human dimension of Duvall's work was an appropriate narrative to follow Jette's research on bullying (this issue) and Al-Awadhi's work on conflict resolution

with teachers and parents (this issue). Duvall's theoretical and practical experience enable her to craft a compelling first-person account titled "Traversing the Advantageous Intersection Between Unbridled Creativity and Capability: My Journey With Students in Middle Childhood." In her narrative, Duvall awakens us to the resilience required of pre-service teachers working with youth placed at risk.

SERVICE-LEARNING FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD:  
EDUCATING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

This article is presented by Rosemarie Stallworth-Clark, Associate Professor, Emerita, at Georgia Southern University. Stallworth-Clark's research (2006, 2007) has traditionally focused on the creation of safe, inclusive learning environments and transformative teacher preparation for development of teacher dispositions, programs, and teaching models that support peace, caring, and non-violence in the schools, as well as the work of women in educational leadership for peace. Since retirement, Stallworth-Clark has extended her scholarship and research to the quest for universal social sustainability, beginning at community levels, through the implementation of collaborative service-learning programs in the schools. As an extension of this work, presented in this issue, Stallworth-Clark contributed a paper titled "Service-Learning for the Public Good: Educating for Social Justice." Her paper examines the student's development of a social justice orientation to service as well as the impact of school-based service learning on the public good for the improvement and sustainability of democratic society.

FACILITATING SERIOUS AND SENSITIVE  
CLASSROOM DISCUSSIONS THROUGH  
ANALOG GAMES: A PRACTITIONER'S GUIDE

The next paper is titled "Facilitating Serious and Sensitive Classroom Discussions through Analog Games: A Practitioner's Guide." This guide is written for educators who are searching for their unique style and voice in leading classroom conversations on difficult topics, in an engaging and equitable way. Specifically, the guide will support educators in (a) selecting and designing effective experiential learning activities on controversial topics, (b) spotting deficit-thinking, rhetorical silencing and othering during group discussions, and (c) promoting equitable interactions at each phase of an experiential learning activity. The piece is written by four educators whose past work demonstrates a deep commitment to the design of equitable learning activities. David Phelps, of University of Washington, is an educational researcher, game designer, and co-founder of Transformative Games (<http://www.transformativegames.com/>). Phelps is joined by Tom Fennewald from Concordia University, Joli Sandoz from The Evergreen State College, and Gabriel de los Angeles from University of Washington. Tom Fennewald, also a co-founder of Transformative Games, focuses his designs on the primary experiences that games invite players to walk away with (c.f., Fennewald & Kievit-Kylar, 2013). Joli Sandoz constructs learning activities and enjoys using simulations and games to engage students in deep learning during classes she teaches at The Evergreen State College (from game design and creative writing to community resilience). Gabriel de los Angeles, co-founder of NDN Players Research Group (<http://ndnplayers.com>), works with Seattle urban indigenous communities to create games with and for indigenous populations and designs from what he calls Culturally Responsible Game Design.

‘EDUCATION FOR EMANCIPATION’: A  
PHOTOVOICE STUDY WITH ZIMBABWEAN  
IMMIGRANT WOMEN IN MIDWEST AMERICA

This photovoice study is presented by Florence Nyemba, an alumni of University of Cincinnati’s Educational Studies program. Nyemba draws on her background in African languages and cultures, international studies, and community-based participatory research (c.f., Nyemba, 2014) to explore the lives of Zimbabwean immigrant women. In the paper, titled “‘Education for Emancipation’: A Photovoice Study with Zimbabwean Immigrant Women in Midwest America,” Nyemba testifies to the power of liberation methodologies (e.g., photovoice). Readers are strongly encouraged to view the power of the images and associated text presented in this compelling photovoice project.

EFFECTIVE METHODS?: INVESTIGATING THE  
ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION OF  
PROGRAMS TREATING POSTTRAUMATIC  
STRESS DISORDER

This article is presented by Jennifer E. Killham of University of Cincinnati, Brenden Sewell an independent researcher, and Nicholas Bengé of University of Cincinnati. Each author, with a previous commitment to educational innovation and rigor (c.f., Killham & Chen 2016; Killham, Tyler, Venable, & Raider-Roth, 2014), joined forces to advance the rigor and understanding of post-traumatic stress disorder. In the paper titled “Effective Methods?: Investigating the Assessment and Evaluation of Programs Treating Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder,” the authors investigated the complex facets of the coping and recovery of posttraumatic stress disorder.

PLAUSIBILITY, CREDIBILITY, AND INTEGRITY: THE  
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF PEACE  
EDUCATION ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

In this article titled “Plausibility, Credibility, and Integrity: The Challenges and Opportunities of Peace Education Assessment and Evaluation,” Killham and Jette breathe new life into the goal to raise the quality of research in the field of peace education. Through the lens of social reconstructivism, the authors call on a range of stakeholders to strengthen and reinforce the assessment and evaluative techniques of their respective peace education programs. The article agglomerates the research components of this collection and addresses scalability that allows for integration across contexts.

ON THE MERITS OF SUCCESS IN RESILIENCY

Jason Autry’s work titled “On the Merits of Success in Resiliency” commences our contributions on resilience pedagogy. Autry, who serves as the Assistant Director and Advisor for the University Honors Program at the University of Cincinnati, offers concluding words that situate future discourse concerning peace education programs in contemporary learning environments with tomorrow’s leaders. Autry communicates honestly to the reader, as an individual, as he shares personal accounts of overcoming adversity. His words do so by exposing the emotions of isolation and voicelessness. Further, Autry helps us to differentiate between stories of deficiency and shifts us towards stories of strength.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In our efforts, we hope to join in conversation with other peace educators in this process, including Blythe Hinitz<sup>1</sup> who gave a keynote speech titled, *Peace Education in Primary and Early Childhood Education: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century*. Collectively, these papers present an interwoven theoretical (re)framing of resilience pedagogy. We acknowledge the structure and quality

of this special issue was heavily influenced by a number of transdisciplinary colleagues. The editors would like to thank two of our strongest advocates, Vanessa Allen-Brown and Marvin Berlowitz, for their early mentorship. We were inspired by their commitment to working in the area of resilience pedagogy. Last but not least, we remain grateful to our numerous peer reviewers for their time and insight.

## NOTE

1. Blythe Hinitz was recently inducted into the Eleanor Roosevelt Chapter of Kappa Delta, an international honors society.

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# INTRODUCTION TO RESILIENCE PEDAGOGY: A SPOKEN WORD POEM

Jennifer E. Killham, University of Cincinnati  
Florence Nyemba, University of Cincinnati

*Abstract:* This spoken word poem was first performed live at the annual meeting for the American Educational Research Association (AERA) in Washington D. C. This poem seeks to awaken a long-term discussion on the strengths and livelihood of resilience pedagogy.

Keywords: Peace, Survive, Empowerment, Transform, Community, Engagement

## PEACEABLE ACTION, SHAPING AND STRENGTHENING

21<sup>st</sup> Century Resilience Pedagogy.

Define, refine.

Prevention, reinvention: to heal, to become whole again.

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century, stalking us somberly,

A time marked by governmental mistrust,

Global concern of terrorism,

Linguistic and cultural diversity, and modern technology.

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the prickly thorn,

Grief, depression, violation, reminders of pain,

glaring lack, glaring back.

What do we need?,

How do we understand?

How do we spark about change?

Stand against patriarchal dominance, overcome these adversities?

How do we empower women, veterans, parents, teachers, neighbors, individuals, human beings?

How do we bring about peaceful environments, to grow, to thrive in peace SURVIVE:

Adapt,

Infuse your situation,

Be champions of community

The power to identify, to motivate, to not give up.

Research alone cannot remedy

Transformative capacities, capabilities,

Critical consciousness,

Engage women, the main drivers of change

Build hope, strengthen love, empower peace,

With the necessary skills to revolutionize

Collective struggle

TRANSFORM!

Our claim: YOU... can... do this!

Reinvigorate, a promising form of Peace Education.

A disposition, a cultivation,

A promotion, peaceful dialogue, mediation, serving the common good.

Restorative practices.

Our work illuminates the role, my role, your role, our role.

Developing diverse democracies.

Survive or thrive?: We strive, we thrive.

# ROLE-PLAY TOWARD A SUCCESSFUL CONFLICT RESOLUTION PROCESS

Fawzeyah Al-Awadhi, Kuwait University

*Abstract:* Bullying is an aggressive behavior which can impact the psychological state of the victim, the bully and the bystanders. Providing an actual successful case in conflict resolution in a bullying incident is important to add to the literature. The topic of the paper discusses the successful technique of role-play as a preparation for a conflict resolution session between two kindergartners and their parents in Midwestern America. This study is based on Fisher, Ury and Patton's article "Getting to Yes" (2010) to peacefully resolve a conflict, in collaboration with Patricia Collins's theory of "The Outsider Within" (2006). Findings of this study demonstrate the effectiveness of role-play preparation in increasing empathy towards parties who are least likely to receive such emotional stance. The researcher concludes that the role-play helps induce empathy prior to being in the scene. It allows the party in question to focus on amplifying mutual gains instead of positional bargaining to reach a peaceful conclusion. Further research can investigate the prolonged effect of such successful techniques in future school programs and its impact on the psychological well-being of the victim, the bully and the bystanders.

## INTRODUCTION

### ROLE-PLAY TOWARD A SUCCESSFUL CONFLICT RESOLUTION PROCESS

Students fall into conflicts of various nature at school. One of the worst conflicts they face is bullying. Bullying is the unwanted aggressive behavior among school-aged children (Stop Bullying, n.d.). Bullying has become such an international issue that the United Nations has moved to spread awareness about how to deal with bullying (UNESCO, 2014).

Resolving a conflict between two groups can lead to catastrophic results when the two parties in question have a conflict of interest. Hence, the conflict resolution process is actually

hindered. A different route is needed when both parties are more interested in taking action to maximize their own interests (Johnson & Johnson, 2008). Usually in such cases a detour from the original goal takes the two parties into an emotional brawl of who scores more points. This in turn destroys the original premise of finding mutual gains to work toward through a peaceable conflict resolution process (Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 2010).

Conflict resolution is when two parties facing a conflict are ready for a mediation process that takes place at a certain time and location with the presence of a professional "trained teachers or support staff" (Katz, A., 2012) According to Johnson and Johnson, (2008) there are two methods of negotiation, positional bargaining and integrative or what Barash referred to in his introduction to Fisher, Ury and Patton's article (2010) as the principled negotiation. Mary Watkins (1999) presented an interesting method in her research on the multiplicity of the psyche, which rendered her finding of the dialogical nature of thought and its implication of how clear human decision making would be via this method. The dialogical nature of thought can lead a person to set a goal with clearly defined ideas. The notion of the "other" presented primarily by Patricia Collins (1986) on how a person can envision a stance where he/she can be admitted into a reality and all its details, yet they are estranged from this reality because they simply do not see themselves as able to fit into it. Watkins (1999) involved this notion in her analysis of conversational aspect of thought between the "other" and ourselves. To enter a negotiation session where conflict resolution is supposed to take place, sometimes the best route to success is a negotiation with one's inner voices. This inner

negotiation can raise awareness of the current social problem, which will promote integration between awareness and social action. (Watkins, 1988) Therefore, role-play can constitute an important forward step toward positive action into conflict resolution.

The school atmosphere needs to provide the proper environment to promote scholarship, social development, and most importantly safety for students to be able to thrive (Noddings, 2008). When this atmosphere is not available, peace is shattered (Noddings, 2008). As Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, and Hymel (2010) indicate in their paper, the school climate is a predictor of student's prosocial and problematic behavior. (2010) When such violence takes place in schools, it is not only conducted overtly, but also covertly in the form of structural violence (Barash, 2010). According to Barrash, "structural violence has the effect of denying people important rights such as economic opportunity, social and political equality, a sense of fulfillment and self-worth, and access to a healthy natural environment" (p. 147). Therefore, a student who is bullied would feel a lack of self-worth. (Berlowitz, Frye & Jette, 2015; Jette, 2016) Also, the sense of safety, which is crucial for any process of development, becomes jeopardized (Johnson & Johnson, 2008).

The process of dehumanization can be in the form of name-calling, hence, the theme "words do hurt." The issue is not whether the child understands the meaning of his words, (especially in a case where the words used are from an adult's world). It can belittle a person's existence, alienate the victim, and make one feel less worthy. Instead, we must focus on the impact that these words have over their recipient in order to identify the proper characteristics

that the student needs to fit in so as to flourish in a diverse environment (Freire, 2000).

Promoting interaction is an essential skill a teacher should implement not only in the classrooms, but also outside school walls (Freire, 2000). A teacher needs to educate not only the students, but also herself on how to form a productive and positive dialogue (Freire, 2000; Noddings, 2008). The conversation which takes place between students and teachers can alleviate many pains of both parties before any drastic action needs to be taken.

The aim of sharing this study is to make the peaceful conflict resolution process used in this study known to the public in an effort to normalize the positive peace sessions (Barash, 2000). This kind of sharing is especially needed for peaceful resolutions achieved in school settings for its potential to contribute to advancing a justice oriented school environment that nurtures children's virtues (Johnson & Johnson, 2008).

## METHODS

### METHODOLOGICAL UNDERPINNING

This study uses narrative inquiry (Murray, 2003) as a means to amplify participant voice (Killham, 2014; Murray, 2003). Narrative inquiry is the investigation of stories told in social interaction from content, function and structure. "Through narrative we not only shape the world and ourselves but they are shaped for us through narrative" (Murray, 2003, p. 95). Therefore, through narrative the researcher is able to identify the underlying sentiments as valuable data through the stream-line of the narrative or telling the story. Narrative inquiry highlights the fact that storytelling is based on the narrator being more self-conscious of the actual telling of the story. This perspective serves Watkins' (1999) concept of dialogical thought and supports the findings with the idea of its validity. As Murray (2003) explains in his chapter "Narrative Psychology and Narrative Analysis" that creating a



narrative makes “sense of the world by connecting events over time through stories...it provides a means of integrating the strange and the unknown into the realm of everyday life” (p. 97).

#### PARTICIPANTS

In this case the conflict took place in a kindergarten classroom at a distinguished public school in the city of Cincinnati, Ohio. The participants in the study included the bullied girl’s mother, a counselor who works at the local university as a college professor. This bullying incident included 3 parties: Malak, a Middle Eastern girl; Jordan, an African American boy who actually committed the bullying action against Malak; and Ariaah, the Caucasian boy who is also their classmate.

#### DATA COLLECTION

The narrative presented below draws upon two forms of qualitative data: written reflection-papers by the mother of the bullied child, and semi-structured interviews with the students’ counselor. Quotes used in this paper are direct quotes from the reflection papers of the mother and from the interview transcripts of the counselor.

#### NARRATIVE

Jordan tried to befriend Malak. Malak ignored him. Jordan is frustrated with Malak’s rejection. Later, Jordan approaches Malak in recess and says, “I wish a war will happen in your country and I would come there to kill you.”

Malak is petrified. She approaches the teacher in recess and informs her of what happened. The teacher advises her to play with someone else. Jordan repeats his verbal bullying several times in that month. Malak informs her parents she’s having trouble with kids at school. Her father complains to the assistant teacher, who promises

to take action. However, the verbal bullying continues on a daily basis due to the fact that Malak sits on the same table with Jordan in class and shares the same table with Ariaah at lunchtime.

Grade reports are sent home. Malak’s mother notices a comment from the homeroom teacher indicating Malak’s tardiness in submitting her homework. The mother sits to talk to Malak about her late homework. Malak burst into tears and asks not to be taken back to school. After further questions, Malak discloses to her mother what her classmate told her.

Malak’s parents email the teacher and the principal describing the incident and requesting immediate investigation. Both the principal and the teacher reply next day. The principal acknowledges the conflict and states her intention of beginning an immediate investigation. The teacher’s response acknowledges her joy to have Malak in her class and describes her recent complaint as an attempt to divert attention from what she called “silly” actions in the past few days. The teacher labels Malak’s attitude as a “cover-up” to her parents saying that Malak is trying to ‘cover up’ her recent actions that she does not want her parents to know about. She goes further to describe Jordan as an intelligent and “sweet” boy with good character.

Malak’s parents became agitated with her email. They insisted to the principal that their child would not come back to school until this issue was resolved. The principal suggested a meeting between the two kids, but Malak’s mom insists on being there for moral support to her daughter. The principal then suggests that Jordan’s parent needs to be there as well. The girl’s mother welcomed the idea. A local counselor was contacted to attend the conflict resolution meeting in order to avoid misunderstanding to any cultural codes—codes that may be brought up on the table by any of the parents, teacher, or principal—are key to comprehend the situation.

This conflict resolution session included six parties: the principal, the kindergarten teacher, Jordan's parents, Malak's mother, and the counselor. The meeting is set two days from the incident. Malak's mother and the counselor head to the principal's office, where they meet Jordan's parents. The two mothers greet each other with a handshake and a smile. Then after a ten-minute delay the two families, the teacher, and the principal gather in the meeting room.

The teacher starts the conversation with praise of Jordan's character and gives Malak a single retroactive praise: "Not that I mean Malak is not good." Jordan's mother states that in her household, slurring and name-calling are absolutely not allowed and she always makes sure that she keeps up with what her kids bring back home. At this point she started to fluster then cry. Malak's mom reached across the table and grabbed her hand in consolation. Both mothers start crying facing the fact that each one has a hurt child out there because of what had happened: Malak for what she has been through, and Jordan for the thorough interrogation he went through under his parents, teacher and principal.

The principal reads her minutes from the investigation report she conducted with both Jordan and Aria. She concludes that they speak about war often due to a video game they share. The principal's line of facts suggests her aroused suspicion in Aria's involvement in the bullying case. Jordan's father states that he does not want to "bash the kid" and accuse him of starting this matter. Both the teacher and Jordan's mother demonstrate that Jordan does not actually realize where Malak's country is located geographically nor what Malak's religion is. The counselor intervenes and tries to highlight what a hard time for people with a multicultural background are going through at

the moment because of the political unrest in certain parts of the world, and how this is affecting even a kindergartner's innocent ears.

Malak's mom focuses on the issue of "words do hurt." She speaks about how Malak too does not even understand the differences between the two religions. As an example she tells them about Malak's passion towards Christmas trees, yet she as a mother welcomes her daughter's joy despite the fact that they practice another religion. She addresses the issue again that although she fully recognizes the child's ignorance towards Malak's demographics and the meaning of his words which he used to bully her, still "words do hurt." She clarifies how such words said on a prolonged period of two months, caused her child to fear school and refrain her ongoing passion from the school activities, due to her fear of being bullied in such a manner. She clarifies how this continuous bullying impacted her daughter's appetite to fully learn and be integrated in her classroom at school.

The principal joins Malak's mom at this point and states it is essential that they work to bring back the desire in Malak's heart to come back to school, and emphasizes the importance of making her feel safe. Then, Jordan's father describes how kids aim towards what you love most in order to hurt you with a word or an action even though they do not realize the extent of the pain and damage these words may cause. He gives an example of his son, Jordan throwing his sister's favorite stuffed doll away in simple dispute between them. He describes how his son, knowing how Malak is so proud of being who she is (a student with a different culture), used this knowledge as a weapon to hurt her. He goes further to say that this might not be the end of his sons remarks, but that he will pay close attention to what he says from now on especially towards Malak.

With Jordan's father's acknowledgment to the fact that "words do hurt," Malak's mother is relieved.

The principal indicates she will further investigate with Aariah and his parents to look into the fact that he might be the instigator of this verbal bullying action. Malak's mother ends the meeting by saying how she wanted to come to raise the awareness about the impact of words on children even if they did not fully understand its weight and influence over their classmates. The teacher approaches Malak's mother, hugs her warmly, and asks to speak to Malak in private in order to reassure her how she, as a second mother, can protect her as her real mother does. The parents shake hands and then wish each other goodbye. The principal escorts them to the door and Malak is invited in to speak with her teacher. Five minutes later she comes out of the meeting room with a happy smile and is looking forward to tomorrow to be back at her classroom but this time with new table arrangements and classmates.

#### FINDINGS

Malak's mother is a graduate student in the university nearby, who won a scholarship from her country's university to pursue her post-graduate studies in the United States. She was a mother of three children at the time and a vocal person when it comes to disclosing her opinions. In her reflection about the conflict resolution process, several important facts become prominent. One of which is the fact that she actually practiced a role-play meditation technique before the date of the conflict resolution meeting. When prompted on the reason behind such action, she explained that it is a necessary step she undertakes whenever she will be in serious meetings with American officials. She insisted on the importance of letting her feelings surface and witnessing them first then directing her action based on the best routes she sees fit for the occasion. In this case, she explained, "I imagined myself as the bully's

mother and how embarrassed I would be if it was my child who actually said these horrible things, it made me see things in a better light" (Interview transcription, 09/13/2012). She goes further to explain why practicing empathy makes her life easier:

I see why, when I do this, I see why people do what they do. Of course not always, but in a human being's condition and state of mind, I try my best to put myself in their shoes and then, figure it out (Interview transcription, 09/13/2012).

When asked about how her philosophy of life came about, she quoted Patricia Collins (1999):

I read this from Collins, she said something about negotiating one's self. I remember being baffled. How can one negotiate themselves? After several experiences I was able to relate to what she said. We are Muslims, but what we are is not what is imposed on us to look like especially with the wrong notions out there. Gosh some are horrible. . . So, I think of this poor mother. Just because my child makes a mistake does not mean I am a bad mom or dad, really (Interview transcription, 09/13/2012)

I asked why she repeated at the end of the session, "Words do hurt." She explained that she wanted to stay on track. If she allowed "the little things" to take over the situation, then Malak would be the one who pays the price for "her parents' misguided pride" (Interview transcription, 09/13/2012).

#### DISCUSSION

It is evident in this study that the participant's high academic level played a large role in determining her course of action which, in turn affected the results of the conflict resolution meeting. The mother's focused effort not to deviate from the fact that "words do hurt" sent an educational message

alongside her personal message. The educational message declaring that the school staff and crew needs to spread awareness about the impact of words over children, while her personal messages resided in her sincere and focused attempt to remedy the situation her daughter went through and gain peace in order for her child to go back to school and continue to thrive, instead of simply getting even with the other party in question. This attempt is affirmed when the father of the bully acknowledged the fact that his son bullied the girl.

This collaboration of thoughts between the two sets of parents increased the sense of safety in the room. It allowed them both to find mutual ground as a mother who was hurt by the incident that involved her child. Hence, it allowed the principal to share her findings about the suspected “true” instigator of the incident and her plan of taking action of further investigations.

The goal behind the suggested meeting was to find some kind of resolution among all of the parties based on their shared interest for having safe interactions between the students involved. Due to the success of the session, the parties left amicably.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR MEDIATION STRATEGIES

Sutton and Smith (1999) argue that interventions should include not only the victim and the bully but the entire group, which in this case included the parents. In fact, in this study, the parents turned out to be the core component as to how the resolution session unfolded. My interview with Malak’s mother revealed the importance of preparation for mediation in a conflict resolution process. This preparation fortified the discussion, and allowed it to have a focused and empathetic parent at the

negotiation table. For counselors, I would recommend requesting the same effort from all parties in question including the principal preparing the meeting in the hoped-for ambiance.

Future research should explore the other participants’ realities and self-awareness prior to and after the conflict resolution session. Future research can further explore how the demographic elements shaped the participants reaction and reflection, in addition to the socio-economic status of the students. Furthermore, examining the effectiveness of the results in these conflict resolution sessions for the long-term will be a great measurement tool for the long lasting impact of this role-playing mediation technique.

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# CONFLICT RESOLUTION BETWEEN PARENTS AND TEACHERS: RAISING AWARENESS TO IMPROVE RELATIONSHIPS AND ENHANCE CHILDREN'S EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES

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*Abstract:* Conflict resolution theories and programs in school settings have focused on traditional student-student, student-teacher, and parent-child relationships. Teacher-teacher interactions have also been studied in recent research. However, a review of the literature reveals a gap in conflict resolution research with regard to the parent-teacher relationship. This article examines key conflict resolution concepts such as communication and conflict management styles, as well as programs such as the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP). Each section concludes with recommendations for the inclusion of parents and teachers in these systems. In light of limited research about teacher-parent conflict resolution, it is imperative to adapt current theories and programs in order to enhance children's educational experiences and improve their ability to resolve conflict effectively.

*Keywords:* conflict resolution, parents, teachers, communication, negotiation

## INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, schools across the nation have acknowledged the importance of conflict resolution education for students. According to CREnet Standards (now CReducation.org), conflict resolution education is defined as “. . . a learning process that helps individuals understand conflict dynamics and empowers them to use communication and creative thinking to build relationships and to manage and resolve conflict fairly and peacefully” (Prichard, 2000, p. 2). Conflict is the result of the incompatibility of two or more opinions, principles, or interests. In personal relationships, a straightforward philosophy of conflict recognizes a lack of harmony between two people whose needs are not being met. A complementary philosophy of conflict resolu-

tion, therefore, relies on compassion and patience to meet each party's needs by finding and implementing a solution between conflicting parties. Though conflict affects all areas of life, the school is the focus of this article, as it is one of the primary settings for children's developmental years. By scrutinizing the area of conflict resolution, this article highlights the attention that parents and teachers miss, yet deserve, due to the significance of each group's role in the life of a student. Limited research about teacher-parent conflict resolution deems it imperative to adapt current theories and programs in order to enhance children's educational experiences and improve their ability to resolve conflict effectively.

There has been substantial research about parent-child, student-teacher, teacher-teacher, and teacher-administrator conflicts. Additionally, conflict resolution programs focusing on these particular relationships have been developed, implemented, and analyzed (Bodine & Crawford, 1998; Eisler, 1994; Lantieri & Patti, 1996). Student-centered conflict resolution education “teaches and models, in culturally meaningful ways, a variety of processes, practices, and skills that help address individual, interpersonal and institutional power imbalances and the unmet human needs that can feed destructive conflict” (Prichard, 2000, p. 2). Interpersonal conflict between parents and teachers, however, has not been addressed in conflict resolution literature. This gap is notable, in part, due to parents' and teachers' shared responsibility to model conflict management and resolution for students. “Children learn how to deal with personal conflicts, establish relationships, tackle challenges,

and achieve goals according to the models adults provide” (Bey & Turner, 1996, p. 95). In order for conflict modeling to be beneficial for students, the relationship between parents and teachers must be researched more thoroughly, and both groups must learn better strategies for conflict resolution.

Recognizing the importance of including the parent-teacher relationship in conflict resolution research, the first section of this article explores key elements of conflict resolution. Within this section, suggestions of how to incorporate parents and teachers into the discussion are offered. The next section examines principled negotiation and mediation practices and how the parent-teacher relationship could incorporate these strategies. Thirdly, practical implications are examined through the school setting in discussions of behavior changes, school and family, as well as parent-teacher meetings. Two classroom-based parent-teacher conflict scenarios follow, which illustrate the gravity of conflict situations without a visible solution. The scenarios provide a more personal look into parent-teacher conflicts, as well as how conflict resolution principles could have improved the situations. The article concludes with a review of three past and present conflict resolutions programs that incorporate parents in the programs, as well as a call for future research into increased parent integration into similar programs.

Conflict between teachers and parents has the potential to distort perspectives of organized education for adults and children alike. As such, conflict resolution between parents and teachers must be made a priority in research and programs in order to prevent the imminent negative impacts of unresolved conflict.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theory of conflict *management* holds that most conflicts will not be completely settled but instead can be managed constructively (Warters, 2000). Opponents of management theory, though, are concerned that “managing” involved parties actually attempts to control them. Additionally, there is a fear that “underlying social or structural inconsistencies or inequities that are driving the dispute are too often suppressed or lost along the way” (Warters, 2000, pp. 3–4). Conflict *resolution* theory asserts, “individual disputes and larger ongoing conflicts can be ended successfully by using techniques that address and resolve the root causes of the conflict” (Warters, 2000, p. 4). It could be argued, however, that the multitude of sources of conflict makes “resolution” difficult to achieve and maintain.

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) is a specific conflict theory. Interests, rights, and power of involved parties are at the center of conflict in this theory. In ADR, there are discoverable and articulated interests, “standards or rights [which] may exist that may provide guidelines toward a fair outcome, and there is always some kind of power relationship between or among the disputants that can affect the outcome” (Warters, 2000, p. 5). Although conflict management may appear to be the only feasible outcome of conflict, conflict resolution should always be the goal. According to principles of ADR, it is necessary to identify parents’ and teachers’ basic concerns, needs, and issues in order to start building a mutually satisfying agreement when conflict arises. Based on these conceptions, conflict theory serves as the theoretical foundation of this article as themes of conflict management and resolution are woven throughout the following sections. By analyzing various factors contributing to handling conflict between parents and teachers, the case will be made for the importance of a

relationship that significantly affects children's educational experiences.

## COMMUNICATION

Communication is at the center of conflict. Misunderstandings and misinterpretations are communication-blocking variables commonly caused by not talking or listening (Bodine & Crawford, 1998, as cited in Lincoln, 2002). Fischer, Ury, and Patton (1991) echoed Bodine's and Crawford's (1998) views in their guidebook to negotiation, *Getting to Yes*. Personality issues also negatively influence communication between individuals. Persons with dominant personalities talk more or longer, often try to control the conversation by not allowing the other person to speak or express her feelings, ask rhetorical questions not truly expecting or desiring a response, and impose their will or point of view on others (Lincoln, 2002). When conflict resolution researchers and program designers ignore the relationship between parents and teachers, as well as their communication patterns, the programs neglect the adults' influence on children's learning of effective communication strategies.

Though spoken communication is often misinterpreted by the lack of active listening, nonverbal communication can also lead to misunderstandings. "A discrepancy often exists between what the speaker is thinking or feeling and what he/she is actually saying" (Scott, 1990, p. 119, as cited in Lincoln, 2002). Nonverbal cues—such as head nods, foot movements, open and closed body positioning, eye contact, posturing, and physical appearance—accentuate individual differences, often escalating conflicts in a way in which most participants are unaware. In a parent-teacher conference, an understanding of interpersonal space, or *proxemics*, would be beneficial for both parties

involved. Lincoln (2002) cites the importance of interpersonal distance and body orientation as "nonverbal indicators of power and status in conflicting situations. Body orientation between two communicators moves between the most direct position of face-to-face contact to a more indirect position of [individuals] angling or leaning forward toward or backward" (pp. 47-48). By acknowledging the importance of nonverbal communication, something as simple as the seating arrangement in a meeting between a parent and teacher is recognized not as neutral, but as having a significantly positive or negative influence on the participants. Parents and teachers should be aware of, and respect, cultural and societal norms that can also affect nonverbal cues.

Though often instrumental in conflict, communication is also a necessary element in its resolution. Verbal and nonverbal communication in the process of conflict resolution occurs in "a stimulus-response pattern" that can effectively diffuse conflicts (Lincoln, 2002, p. 53). Through productive communication, conflict between parents and teachers can first be managed, and then resolved resulting in the returned focus on the student. When communicating, Fischer et al. (1991) suggested speaking "about yourself, not about them" (p. 36). When one speaks about the self, the opposing party is less likely to challenge the statement and the possibility of a defensive reaction is reduced (Fischer et al., 1991). Parents can speak accurately about their viewpoint and what they see at home; teachers can speak to the happenings of the classroom – an environment that is drastically different than the home – possibly resulting in a divergent and eye-opening perspective. By heeding Fischer et al.'s (1991) advice, teachers and parents share what only they can know while also respecting the other concerned party's frame of reference.

Another tactic, *inclusive communication*, encourages individuals to share information willingly, as well as



to listen and respond peacefully during information exchange. Each person is respected for what s/he brings to the conversation, listens to opposing views, and draws conclusions on courses of action. By recognizing that no one person is viewed as having exclusive rights to workable solutions, the rights and responsibilities of each party are affirmed and barriers to understanding are broken (Bey & Turner, 1996).

Embedded in the concept of inclusive communication is the process of active listening, which extends beyond simply remaining silent. Active listening techniques are: paraphrasing, clarifying, reflection, encouragement, summary, and validation (Lantieri & Patti, 1996). An active listener does not immediately try to fix the problem; rather, active listening gives “the speaker the opportunity to think about possible solutions or alternatives to a problem” (Bey & Turner, 1996, p. 47) and is used to better understand another’s needs, aspirations, and problems. Fisher et al. (1991) advise each person to listen before phrasing a response so as to take in the other’s perceptions, needs, and constraints in order to increase understanding (p. 34). Because it requires that “we clear a mental and emotional space and allow the speaker to fill that space,” and that we neither judge nor plan our next statement, active listening is also known as empathetic listening (Lantieri & Patti, 1996). Information is gained, issues and concerns are clarified, and emotions – especially anger and hostility – are regulated. Interactions between parents and teachers are at considerable risk for being emotionally charged since the well-being of the parent’s child is involved. Listening will encourage parents and teachers to focus on the central issue – the child – and not each other. Inclusive communication is a technique that can strengthen the relationship

between teachers and parents and aid in their discussions concerning the student.

### CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLES

Parents and teachers enter into possible conflicts from very different perspectives, using different strategies, and with different interests. Yet, they share at least one common interest – the child – that must take priority and allow them to work to resolution. People deal with conflict in a range of ways. While it is not necessary for two people involved in conflict to use the same style of conflict management, it is beneficial for an individual to recognize his or her personal method of handling conflict in order to maximize the strategy’s potential. Likewise, it is important to acknowledge others’ methods of dealing with conflict in order to improve the compatibility of different strategies. When parties acknowledge that different strategies can coexist, people can begin to move towards a solution.

As stated earlier, when conflict cannot be fully resolved, ongoing management is sometimes the only way to settle the dispute. However, some manners of dealing with conflict are ineffective for both resolution and management. For example, unproductive conflict management styles include avoidance/withdrawal, suppression/smoothing-over, and power/ dominance tactics (Rodd, 1998). Withdrawal/avoidance is marked by a person’s unwillingness to participate in discussions. In order for resolution to be possible, both parties involved in a conflict must be active in the process; by avoiding the conflict, or withdrawing from the process, neither party’s needs are met. Similarly, the method of suppression/smoothing-over minimizes the importance of the conflict. Involved parties aim to move away from the problem as quickly as possible. They come “no closer to understanding one another’s perspective, [or] to negotiating a mutually acceptable practice . . . [B]oth are likely to

feel that their position is really the right position and will continue with the practice that initiated the feelings of tension” (Rodd, 1998, pp. 78-79). Withdrawal, avoidance, suppression, and smoothing-over all jeopardize future interactions between the parent and teacher, as tension compounds and increases the possibility that an outburst will occur. Additionally, when either the parent or teacher opts out of the discussion, he or she underestimates the relevance of the conflict, manipulates the situation, and taints a relationship that is essential to the child in common.

Lastly, power/dominance effectually shows a basic lack of respect. Power and dominance are exhibited in a multitude of ways such as dominating conversations with a loud voice, interrupting others and not letting them finish what they want to say, and using intimidating non-verbal communication. Parents sometimes threaten to use influence over school administration or the school board as a source of power and dominance; teachers alternately may try to use their control of the classroom or grades as a play of power. When power is used to dominate a conflict, one side may cede in order to make way for peace. Giving in to power and dominance can lead to resentment, anger, and bitterness, as well as increase the risk of future subversiveness from the dominated party. Power and dominance strategies do not tend to truly resolve conflict; instead, conflict likely escalates in the long term.

Although teachers may be familiar with conflict management styles because they often participate in conflict resolution programs in schools, parents have primarily held an outsider’s view. It is time to bring parents into the conversation so they can also be proactive when conflict arises. By including parents in conflict resolution programs and research, they will

learn to recognize when unproductive conflict management styles are being used and better understand why conflict is not resolving.

Parents and teachers whose concern for the student is greater than for themselves will partake in useful conflict management strategies that may include assertion, negotiation, and problem-solving (Rodd, 1998). Unlike the less productive methods above, a person who practices the method of assertion acknowledges there is a problem, and then makes an appropriately assertive statement. The statement describes the behavior, problem, issue, or action and the associated feelings to signal that one party has a different perception of the incident to that of the other party (Rodd, 1998). Assertion is an active strategy that explains one’s perspective to another in addition to suggesting a possible solution. Parents and teachers can both apply the practice of assertion, repeatedly if necessary, until a common solution can be discovered. Through assertion, both parties have their feelings and perspectives acknowledged and respected. As a result, the conflict is recognized, dealt with, and can be used as a learning experience in later situations.

In negotiation, the aim is both to achieve goals and to maintain a harmonious relationship; it is essential to communicate a cooperative intention, highlighting the costs of continuing the conflict and the benefits of resolving the conflict (Rodd, 1998). Further details of negotiation are discussed in a forthcoming section. Assertion and negotiation are techniques that sometimes require multiple attempts before resolution occurs. If conflict continues after repeated efforts at assertion and negotiation, problem-solving can be utilized. Problem-solving incorporates a collaborative perspective on conflicts and aims for a ‘win-win’ situation in which everyone’s needs are respected and where people are invited to cooperate and contribute to the resolution of the issue. Steps include clarifying the problem, gathering facts and information, brainstorming

alternatives, setting priorities, creating solutions, and evaluating the implementation of the most acceptable solution (Rodd, 1998). Similar to assertion and negotiation, the process of problem-solving can be repeated until a viable solution is achieved. Though most parent-teacher conflicts are not severe enough to warrant multiple attempts at problem-solving, ongoing conflicts that seriously affect the education of the student require concentrated measures. When both parents and teachers are able to acquire an understanding of productive and unproductive conflict management styles, as well as practice skills of productive styles, conflicts have a greater probability of reaching resolution. Not only do conflict resolution programs need to acknowledge conflicts between parents and teachers, but research into possible dynamic differences between parents' and teachers' perspectives would also be beneficial for all parties involved.

#### NEGOTIATION

Negotiation is an essential tactic in conflict resolution and is used by most people on a daily basis. Negotiations can range from decisions of where to meet someone for lunch to conflicts such as place of blame in an automobile accident. Because they come from different perspectives, both parents and teachers can benefit by consciously recognizing their roles as negotiators and understanding the process of negotiation. In the introduction of *Getting to Yes*, Fischer et al. (1991) described negotiation as "a basic means of getting what you want from others . . . back-and-forth communication [is] designed to reach an agreement" when two people have some shared interests and others that are opposed (p. xvii of introduction). At the most basic level, the student is the shared interest of parents and teachers in conflict

thereby making the student the center of parents' and teachers' relationship. Values, beliefs, customs, and communication styles are only a few things that may be different than each other. In order to counterbalance the larger number of differences over similarities in parents' and teachers' interests, negotiation is a conflict resolution strategy that should be explicitly taught to both groups.

Conflict is frequently viewed as a contest in which one party wins and one loses. However, negotiation, like problem-solving, aims for a win-win solution that satisfies much of the interests and needs of both involved parties. To achieve this win-win result, parents and teachers actively decide to create a cooperative climate by choosing to reframe their situation. They do so by focusing on the principles of the issues instead of quibbling over what each party says it will or will not do. Specific points of 'principled negotiation' include: separate the people from the problem; focus on interests, not positions; and generate a variety of possible options before deciding what to do (Fisher et al., 1991). Through practicing principled negotiation, parties increase the likelihood of a wise agreement—one that "meets the legitimate interests of each side to the extent possible, resolves conflicting interests fairly, is durable, and takes community interests into account" (Fisher et al., 1991, p. 4). Through negotiation, each party in the conflict has been actively involved and treated empathetically. Their differences in perception, feelings of frustration and anger, and difficulties in communication are acknowledged and addressed. Furthermore, each side's interests have been understood, and a gradual consensus is jointly reached. Although it is assumed that teachers and parents always remember their primary shared interest—the student—conflict can alter people's focus. Teaching parents and teachers specifically about negotiation helps them to start with their concerns for the student and work outward, ensuring that all interests are understood,

mutual gains are sought, and the problem at hand is attacked instead of the people involved.

#### MEDIATION

Occasionally, after parties have exhausted the process of negotiation, they come to an impasse and are unable to resolve their conflict. In this case, mediation may be the next step. In mediation, “a neutral third party helps create an environment where the disputants themselves can find a mutually acceptable solution” (Lantieri & Patti, 1996, p. 80). At its most basic level, mediation is facilitated negotiation. The role of the mediator is to help separate parties’ interests and needs from their positions, and give each person’s perspective attention (Lantieri & Patti, 1996). Mediation could be used to approach the conflict in a new and fresh way when parties become more concerned with their position in a conflict than on the shared interest. Through a mediator’s unbiased view, a mutually agreeable solution may be discovered that will ultimately benefit the student and improve the working relationship between the parent and teacher. An administrator or representative from the district’s office would likely be the mediator between parents and teachers. For this reason, all personnel in school systems would benefit from conflict resolution education.

### PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

#### CHANGING BEHAVIOR PATTERNS

Parents and teachers who find themselves in conflict often notice lasting consequences. Even after a particular conflict is resolved, the parent, teacher, or both may be labeled a troublemaker. Those unfavorable reputations can be difficult to counteract and may plague the parties that were involved in conflict. People who are known by the conflicts in which they are involved can

benefit greatly from changing behavior patterns in order to work more peacefully towards resolutions. Sometimes, intervention strategies are needed to break the cycle of repeated behaviors that lead to unresolved conflicts.

The use of new coping strategies, listening and communication techniques, mediation procedures, and an acknowledgment or appreciation of universal differences is the first step in a life-long commitment to solving altercations peacefully. The transition into new patterns of behavior depends heavily on the use of effective coping skills, identification of issues, removal of emotional baggage, listening and hearing strategies, and stepping into another’s point of view (Lincoln, 2002, pp. 94–95).

Trust, respect, and tolerance are valuable outcomes that can be gained by learning new ways of dealing with conflict and changing harmful behavior patterns. Research into behavior patterns within conflicts could be advantageous to teachers and parents so they may learn how to emphasize affirmative patterns as well as recognize, change, and prevent those that have adverse effects.

#### SCHOOL AND FAMILY

The school and the family influence students’ educational successes and failures. Parents have a responsibility to the child to be involved; likewise, schools and families must form a functional partnership consisting of shared contributions (Bey & Turner, 1996). Because parents commonly have difficulty scheduling time to be active in the schooling process due to barriers such as work demands, cultural barriers, or prior personal experiences, they often leave the task of initiating contact to the teachers. Unfortunately, many teachers’ first effort to reach out to the parents stems from less than optimal circumstances, primarily when there is an academic or discipline problem.

Due to the negative undercurrent of the ensuing communication, the following interactions between parents and teachers potentially provide a learning opportunity for children to observe conflict resolution skills in action. Teachers are aware students, fellow teachers, and administrators are observing them. Parents, however, need to remember that they are also models. Students need both family and school support to aid them in learning and practicing their conflict resolution and intergroup relations skills (Lantieri et al., 1996). According to Bey and Turner (1996), “children learn how to deal with personal conflicts, establish relationships, tackle challenges, and achieve goals according to the models adults provide” (p. 95).

Once communication between the school and the family has been established, it must continue. The relationship between parents and teachers will benefit from healthy, ongoing interactions. In *Making School a Place of Peace*, Bey and Turner (1996) made the following suggestions to open communication between schools and families: weekly progress notes that require teachers’ and parents’ signatures; weekly positive telephone connections or text messages; student-prepared and delivered class newsletters, at least once every two months; and meeting hours that accommodate work schedules, with snacks. Bey and Turner (1996) also recommended that parents host informal at-home meetings to “promote school-parent rapport” (p. 97). The home meetings allow multiple parents to meet teachers and school leaders where they can all generate ideas about improving and strengthening partnerships between schools, families, and communities. Although held at a parent’s home, meeting outside of school in a group setting also provides a more neutral environment where all adults can meet on equal terms. More research

of home meetings, as well as tips on their practicality and how they should be conducted, could help Bey’s and Turner’s strategy become more widespread and effective.

#### PARENT-TEACHER INTERACTIONS

Parents and teachers regard each other largely based on their interactions, which can also serve as models of relationships for students. Unfortunately, meetings between parents and teachers often take place behind closed doors, not in the presence of children. This is potentially a lost opportunity for parents and teachers to model efficient conflict resolution skills. Parents and teachers could consider conducting meetings alongside students to address this missed chance for modeling. By including students in meetings, parents and teachers could take a proactive step to modeling conflict resolution if conflict were to arise. Teachers can incorporate this strategy by using models for student led parent-teacher conferences (to furthermore be referenced as “meetings”), which have been shown to positively support students’ social skills and facilitate better communication between children and parents (Borba & Olvera, 2001).

In an ideal situation, introductions between parents and teachers would be at the beginning of a school year under favorable, or at least neutral, circumstances. In reality, many first interactions between teachers and parents are the result of a problematic situation. In the case of a private conversation or meeting emerging from a negative occurrence, parents and teachers often decide upon a position and adamantly defend it. When each party takes a side, the natural perspective is that one side will win and one will lose. This stance contradicts Rodd’s (1998) idea of problem-solving, as well as principled negotiation suggested by Fisher et al. (1991), both of which focus on a win-win goal for both parties. The idea of winning and losing is especially harmful to the student, whose role as the focal point of the discussion is diminished because

of the misdirection of attention. It is the student, not the parent or teacher, who should be the winning party and reap the most benefits. It is important to remember that conversations between teachers and parents will likely influence the student's academic performance, as well as children's communication and conflict management and resolution skills. Therefore, it is necessary for parents and teachers to model effective skills that promote positive outcomes if conflict does occur.

Communication between parents and teachers is central to conflict resolution. The environment in which communication takes place is a significant component of meetings. For convenience, parent-teacher meetings are usually held at the school, in the teacher's classroom. Because the classroom tilts the power scale in favor of the teacher, Bey and Turner (1996) reiterated the importance of effective communication through suggestions for teachers in meetings with parents: listen reflectively to parents' concerns and comments, empathize with parents, resist placing blame; communicate clearly, concisely, and without educational jargon; use "we" and not "you" in the conversation; actively listen, then offer relevant information, helping parents understand the issues and explore choices and possible solutions; and be timely and offer realistic outcomes. When teachers follow the above suggestions, students see teachers purposefully engaging in conflict resolution skills instead of potentially emphasizing their power by meeting in their comfort zone.

Communication is not the only factor to affect parent-teacher meetings. Parents and teachers may not plan adequately for their meeting and feelings of embarrassment or being taken advantage of can also threaten the effectiveness of their interactions. High emotions, power

struggles, deficient communication, personal or cultural differences, attributing blame, or poor interpersonal skills can additionally foster hostility between parents and teachers (Bey & Turner, 1996). Meetings between parents and teachers should instead be viewed as opportunities for collaboration between the school and family. In effective meetings, parents and teachers contribute equally in the success of the meeting, and both keep the child's interests in the forefront of the discussion. A goal of effective meetings is to "provide a possible plan of action to promote the child's academic and personal achievement and provide suggestions that parents and teachers can use to help the child overcome weaknesses" (Bey & Turner, p. 94). By parents and teachers actively focusing on the student, the child benefits academically as difficulties are addressed along with possible solutions. Additionally, by considering the inclusion of students in parent teacher meetings, students would be able to observe adults dealing with potential problematic situations.

It must be acknowledged that adding focus areas of changing behavior, school-family partnerships, and parent-teacher interactions to conflict resolution research and programs will require a substantial time investment, both to the development and the implementation of strategies. However, it is believed students will benefit socially and academically when parent-teacher relationships are included in conflict resolution research and programs. Moreover, the addition of parents to conflict resolution programs will allow for their voices and perspectives to inform future research and improve current conflict resolution programs.

## CONFLICT RESOLUTION OPPORTUNITIES LOST

This section illustrates two situations of parent-teacher conflict. The scenarios were anecdotal stories from two elementary school teachers relayed to the author in personal conversations.

Unfortunately, each of the scenarios was rife with conflict and ended without “successful” resolution. For this article, after the descriptions, each situation will be viewed through the lens of conflict resolution principles previously highlighted. All names and identifiable information have been changed.

#### SCENARIO 1

Ms. Mitchell is a first-grade teacher. At the beginning of the school year, Mr. and Mrs. Jackson met with Ms. Mitchell to give her some background information on their son, Bobby. The Jacksons told Ms. Mitchell that Bobby had been diagnosed with autism, had difficulty interacting with other children, and had trouble adjusting to school in kindergarten. Bobby’s relationship with his parents could be considered unconventional – Bobby called his parents by their first names, and it was Bobby who established the rules of the household, telling the parents what to do, as well as when and how. Ms. Mitchell was a bit apprehensive about having Bobby in her class, primarily wondering how Bobby would adapt to, or accept, a more traditional authority figure.

The first month-and-a-half of school went smoothly for both Bobby and Ms. Mitchell. Bobby liked Ms. Mitchell and did not display any behavioral or social problems. Ms. Mitchell noted that Bobby got along well with the other children, and was baffled by how Bobby seemed to “turn off” his autism. Problems began the second month of school, around the time friendships between students start to cement. Unlike home, where Bobby’s dominance and control were accepted, the children at school stopped playing with him. Ms. Mitchell tried to help Bobby develop friendships, but he began acting out toward the other students and exhibiting bizarre behaviors. Because she knew that home and school were “two different

worlds,” she did not immediately contact the parents. Instead, she documented incidents as well as her attempts to address the behaviors. When Bobby began inappropriately touching other students in the bathroom, Ms. Mitchell discussed the situation with the principal and asked for a meeting with Bobby’s parents.

Ms. Mitchell began the parent-teacher meeting with positive remarks about Bobby. Ms. Mitchell’s goal of the meeting with the parents was to make them aware of Bobby’s actions in school, and to collaborate with them so as to provide consistent discipline at both home and school. The parents said, “He is who he is and he won’t change,” and gave no suggestions to help stop Bobby’s behavior at school. Ms. Mitchell tried to use incentives to reward Bobby for appropriate behaviors, with no success. She invited the Jacksons to observe the classroom so they could see Bobby’s interactions with other students, and see how Ms. Mitchell addressed the behaviors; only one 30-minute observation occurred in which Mrs. Jackson blamed Ms. Mitchell for Bobby’s behavior. Separately, an art teacher threatened to call the police to report physical assaults by Bobby on other students. As the problems persisted, in January another parent-teacher meeting was scheduled. The parents called the board of education and demanded Ms. Mitchell be fired, which resulted in the district bringing in their lawyer and the teacher’s union representatives. Mr. and Mrs. Jackson continued to blame Ms. Mitchell for Bobby’s behavior, and then accused her of focusing only on other children. Finally, the parents left the January meeting and withdrew Bobby from the school.

One can find numerous areas of conflict resolution principles that could have benefitted Ms. Mitchell and the Jacksons. Communication began early by the parents reaching out to the teacher. By opening the lines of communication, Ms. Mitchell was made fully aware of the different approaches to discipline

that the child would be exposed to between home and school. Ms. Mitchell, however, felt anxiety before Bobby even entered the classroom. Yet, she did not express her concerns to the Jacksons and, instead, waited until she had a list of infractions from Bobby. Ms. Mitchell perceived that Mr. and Mrs. Jackson resisted her plea for suggestions when she asked them for help and expressed her desire to collaborate. When they did meet, Ms. Mitchell felt the Jacksons came in to the meetings with a set position that their son couldn't change, instead blaming Ms. Mitchell for any problems. At this point, it can be presumed that neither party felt heard or acknowledged; both sides were interested in "winning" and true problem solving and negotiation were not being practiced. Additionally, teachers sometimes feel an adversarial stance from parents when parents try to be advocates for their children when problems occur. Along those lines, parents feel a similar adversarial stance from teachers who feel they are to be advocates for *all* the children in their classes.

Power was also a key issue in the interactions between the parents and teacher in this scenario. The Jacksons tried to use power in their favor by going to the district, using intimidation through the threat of having Ms. Mitchell fired. Yet, power was also at play when the art teacher stepped in and threatened to call police. To regain the upper hand, Mr. and Mrs. Jackson used what power they had left by removing Bobby from the school.

Another principle from conflict resolution that may have helped this scenario is mediation. Often, a principal would be a likely objective third party to enter the situation and assist in a parent-teacher conflict as a negotiator or mediator. Had the principal acknowledged the conflict, its severity, and requests for assistance,

she may have been able to contribute to its resolution by determining and focusing on the parents' and teachers' needs (instead of their emphasis on opposing stances). Additionally, as a mediator, the principal could have helped generate possible suggestions to meet those needs. In this particular scenario, when the situation escalated significantly, lawyers and union representatives were brought in not as unbiased mediators, but as advocates for Ms. Mitchell, focused only on her needs. As the scenario stands, the parents' and Bobby's perspectives are unknown, as they did not have a mediator to acknowledge them or an advocate to represent them. The school-family relationship dissolved, and lessons in conflict resolution were prevented.

#### SCENARIO 2

Jennifer and Paula were in the same multi-age class at school in their first-grade year. Later, at a summer birthday party for a common friend, Paula threatened violence toward Jennifer in the heat of an argument. Once school resumed in the fall, Jennifer's mother, Ms. Sparks, voiced concern to the girls' teacher about them being in the same second-grade classroom. The teacher noted she had seen no instances of bullying between the girls; they seemed to be friends, in fact. However, Ms. Sparks continued to fear for her daughter's safety and demanded action: remove Paula from Jennifer's class, question Paula's family, search Paula's home for weapons, and seek counseling for Paula. In response to Ms. Sparks's concerns, the teacher kept a written log of interactions between Jennifer and Paula. At school, however, there continued to be no observed instances of bullying or violence between the girls. Emails between the teacher and Ms. Sparks were exchanged and meetings were held, in which Ms. Sparks continued to voice concerns for Jennifer's safety and the teacher shared her observations. Conflict escalated between the parent and teacher as Ms. Sparks contacted the board of



education and reported the teacher for negligence. After hearing from Ms. Sparks and the teacher, the board did not find evidence of bullying occurring at school and made no discipline recommendations for Paula. In response, Ms. Sparks ceased volunteering in her daughter's classroom and discontinued contact with the teacher. At the time of the article, Paula and Jennifer regularly eat lunch together, and are set to remain in the same class next year.

In multi-age classrooms, students can stay with a teacher for up to three years. In cases where there will be a long-term relationship, teachers and parents would benefit greatly from being familiar with conflict resolution principles. As in the previous scenario, the parent made the first contact, opening the lines of communication by conveying her concern for the safety of her daughter, Jennifer. When the teacher said she did not observe actions that supported Ms. Sparks's statements, it can be extrapolated that the parent did not feel heard or acknowledged. She reacted by bringing in her personal perspective as a psychologist. By then, positions were taken – Ms. Sparks considered herself an expert in child psychology, and the teacher considered herself an expert in education, especially within her classroom. Both “experts” felt they were correct and refused to budge for the other side. Again, the focus on holding positions was stronger than determining and meeting needs, students' included.

Eventually, Ms. Sparks severed the lines of communication, likely due to her perception of not experiencing active listening on the part of the teacher. Power struggles continued the conflict as Ms. Sparks accused the teacher of negligence and reported her to the board of education. The teacher felt this personal attack by Ms. Sparks was an attempt to assert power. The teacher's responses to the parent's actions

were not shared, nor were any follow up actions by outside forces. Ultimately, Ms. Sparks withdrew and avoided contact with the teacher, tactics that have previously been noted in the literature as unproductive in dealing with conflict. While the parent's actions were not aggressive, the resulting lack of resolution, or even management, now has the potential to have lasting negative effects for the next year, as the classroom setting is to remain unchanged.

It is worth noting that, again, this scenario was based on the teacher's perspective. Future research into this conflict resolution in schools would benefit not only from parents' inclusion, but also from the perspectives they bring. It also can be assumed that Jennifer was not included in any of the meetings between her mother and teacher. Jennifer's presence could have added a valuable view into the personal relationship and dynamics between her and Paula. Additionally, knowing that Jennifer was observing her mother and teacher may have encouraged the adults to be proactive in using conflict resolutions skills and modeling positive behaviors. By changing just a few key elements to reduce conflict, Jennifer could have seen successful conflict resolution in practice, and the increased the likelihood of a better start to the new school year.

### CONFLICT RESOLUTION PROGRAMS IN SCHOOLS

Numerous school programs aim to educate students in conflict resolution. Most programs primarily focus on infusing conflict resolution principles into school and class curricula, as well as training and enlisting the services of peer mediators. Students commonly learn conflict resolution information from their teachers who simultaneously learn the material and techniques and act as models for the students. Parents and families are often involved in the programs peripherally, with the intention that reinforcement in the home setting will cement the

knowledge for the students. However, few (if any) conflict resolution programs acknowledge the need for assistance in the relationship between parents and teachers. The gap of conflict resolution between parents and teachers has implications on students' academic and social education. In an effort to shed light on the gap containing these groups in programs, this section will look at three conflict resolution programs that school districts have adopted. This is not an extensive review of the literature or current programs. Specifically, the reviewed programs are highlighted due to their involvement of parents, and the lessons learned from these programs that can inform future research.

#### RESPONDING CREATIVELY TO CONFLICT PROGRAM

The Responding Creatively to Conflict Program (RCCP) began in 1985 as a response to the growing amount of violence in New York City schools. At the heart of RCCP was creative non-violent conflict resolution and respect for diversity. Two of its goals were to: "promote more caring and cooperative behavior among young people and adults, in and out of school; and bring about lasting changes in the attitudes and behavior of young people and adults in how they manage their emotions, resolve conflict, and honor diversity" (Lantieri & Patti, 1996, pp. 215–216). Although parent-teacher relationships rarely involve outward violence, these two goals speak to underlying causes of conflict between parents and teachers. RCCP provides curriculum materials to teachers that are to be used by teachers in a 30- to 45-minute lesson at least once a week. The materials focus on skills and are built around a variety of activities such

as "role-playing, interviewing, group dialogue, brainstorming, and other experiential learning strategies, all of which require a high degree of student participation and interaction" (Lantieri & Patti, p. 216). Teachers are also expected to recognize teachable moments that can benefit from the application of conflict resolution skills. In order to lead lessons and be effective models, teachers are trained by RCCP staff. The staff intensively supports teachers through the school year via classroom visits, one-on-one consultations, and after-school meetings. In addition to curricular conflict resolution theory, students also learn how to be peer mediators. Though other programs have a singular focus of peer mediation, RCCP has found mediators are more effective when a curriculum component is first in place (Lantieri & Patti, 1996).

As children became mediators through RCCP, parents reacted favorably and wanted to reinforce their children's new peaceful behaviors at home. From this reaction, a parent-training component of the program emerged. In one model, RCCP staff train parents; in the second model, parents are trained to teach other parents. Active listening, I-messages, and win-win negotiation are themes parents are exposed to, just as are students. Parents are also encouraged to examine their own beliefs, values, and behavior around conflict and diversity issues. Through RCCP training, parents develop better ways of dealing with conflict and prejudice at home and become more effective leaders in their children's schools (Lantieri & Patti, 1996). One would expect that conflict between parents and teachers would decrease as a result of the teacher and parent training components. RCCP could solidify this assumption by highlighting the influence and significance of parent-teacher interactions; while parents and teachers can learn to objectively aid students in recognizing emotions and

working through conflict, parents and teachers can lose that objectivity when it comes to their own reactions to negative situations. By confirming that conflict between the two sets of adults is possible, a natural extension of RCCP's parent training could be to specifically focus on teacher-parent interactions that would reinforce and strengthen the framework's foundation. RCCP is still active today, utilizing parent workshops that both train parents in conflict resolution skills, as well as provide them opportunities to become workshop leaders.

#### PROJECT STOP

Project STOP (Schools Teaching Options for Peace) was a one-year pilot program within New York City Schools. Student peer-mediation, classroom instruction on conflict resolution, and parent training were the program's three main components. Parents learned to better understand issues from their child's perspective, communicate more openly, and deal with their own anger more effectively. Furthermore, broader comprehension of conflict and developing ways of solving problems within the family, including conflict between adults, were objectives of parent training. Principals of schools that implemented Project STOP believed that the education of parents in conflict resolution was vital to the program's success. However, they also acknowledged it was the most difficult component to implement (Eisler, 1994). Parents were recruited for the program through flyers sent home with students, presentations and invitations at PTA meetings, announcements at special events, as well as recommendations by current parent participants, school personnel and the PTA president. A notable limitation to parent participation was noted from schools with parents who spoke multiple languages or dialects who often had difficulty communicating with the school, felt

intimidated, or did not understand the workings of the school.

Eisler's Office of Educational Research report (1994) did not provide detailed information on parent training; in particular, scheduling, location, and follow-up were not addressed. In order to adequately address parent-teacher conflict, an ideal program would train all parents in a neutral location, in parents' native languages, and with opportunities for check-ups with parents on a regular basis. It must be recognized, though, that to train parents this extensively would be extremely time-consuming and require personnel solely dedicated to this training.

#### COMMUNITY BOARDS PROGRAM

On the other side of the country, the Community Boards Program (CBP) is based in San Francisco. CBP provided free dispute resolution services to every neighborhood in San Francisco for more than twenty years before expanding into the schools. The goal of CBP in schools was to infuse "the values and philosophy of conflict resolution and [put] mechanisms in place that enable conflicts of all levels to be resolved peacefully, positively, and effectively" (Bodine & Crawford, 1998, p. 73). In addition to helping students learn to react appropriately to conflict, the program also aimed to change fundamental beliefs about, and the system for dealing with, conflict by educating students in conflict-prevention. A whole-school approach included core committees made up of teachers, counselors, administrators, students, and parents that planned and helped implement the program in the schools. Beyond outreach and publicity, parents could also train and work with student mediators, keep records and follow up on cases, as well as refer cases to the program. Additionally, some schools chose to create parent support groups that would provide ongoing skills training and practice, and discussions for areas of concern (Bodine & Crawford, 1998). By specifically acknowledging that meetings can often be emotional and

uncomfortable for both parents and teachers, the parent support group could also reinforce communication and conflict resolution principles to help strengthen the parent-teacher relationship. Now called Community Boards, the program continues to help strengthen communities through conflict resolution, primarily through mediation and facilitation.

## CONCLUSION

Conflict is a natural occurrence in any relationship, as two people will not always agree what should be done or how to do it. In his introduction for *Conflict Resolution Communication*, Mellander wrote, “Conflict resolution is a process, a journey, not a solution to be learned once and then forgotten . . . solutions are ever changing and developing” (2002, p. viii). Conflict resolution is a learning objective that is taught to students, especially through the actions of teachers and parents whether or not it is included in the curriculum. As violence in schools has gained national attention over the past couple of decades, student-centered conflict resolution education programs have been implemented and have shown positive effects. Likewise, teachers’ relationships with students and colleagues have been included in conflict resolution programs yielding positive results. Yet, parents’ roles have primarily been a supportive one; until now, parents’ conflict resolution education largely consisted of summaries on skills their children were learning.

Parents and teachers alike can benefit from direct training in conflict resolution principles as conflict between these concerned adults can pose an obstacle in a child’s education. By learning to communicate more effectively, focusing on interests instead of taking a static position, recognizing others’ perspectives, and

other conflict resolution skills, parents and teachers can improve their relationship, likely improving their a child’s educational experience. Specifically targeting parent-teacher interactions in the training of conflict resolution principles and skills will strengthen connections between home and school and is a necessary element in future conflict resolution education programs.

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# SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS: A DETERMINANT OF PERCEPTIONS AND RESPONSES TO BULLYING

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*Abstract:* Bullying has been examined by a variety of international professionals, all intent upon stopping this challenging problem in the school setting. Many experts have designed and implemented strategic whole-group, anti-bullying campaigns that are purchased by school administrators in the attempt that bullying will be thwarted by a one-size-fits-all “fix” of the pervasive and troublesome behaviors. Bullying continues to impede the efforts of school officials, regardless of the program by which they are educating students. The reason? There are no anti-bullying campaigns that adequately address the dynamics of class, race and gender. These factors act as a catalyst for different manifestations in the definition of bullying, the perceptions of bullying, and the reactions of teachers and staff toward bullying situations. These factors also account for the differences in behavioral manifestations among students. Race, class and gender are major determinants of “how,” “why” and “what” perpetrators and victims experience when faced with a bullying incident. Therefore, it is necessary to understand these complex dynamics in order to develop a more substantial and pertinent solution to the bullying epidemic.

## INTRODUCTION

**B**ullying and peer victimization has been a problem that continues to plague administrators and teachers, as well as students and parents. Many schools have administered “one size fits all” anti-bullying programs and found those to be ineffective. Why do these programs prove ineffective? Why do certain student populations resist or ignore the message? The focus of the present research is to question whether, or not, the program ineffectiveness can be traced to a deeper issue. The possibility exists that faculty members define bullying differently, and as a result, address the problems in an inconsistent manner. Such dis-

ciplinary repercussions can vary from a modest recess detention to a severe expulsion. Do the bullying behaviors of students vary as a result of race and socioeconomic status (SES), thus requiring such variance in teacher reactions due to zero-tolerance policy restrictions regarding aggression? The following teacher and principal interviews provide valuable data that helps to enrich our understanding of what bullying looks like in different socioeconomic school environments and how administrative and legislative regulations may better serve the student population in such economically and behaviorally diverse environments.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

School bullying has been found to be most prevalent between the ages of nine and fifteen, during the stages of late-childhood and early-adolescence (Carney & Merrell, 2001).

Not all physical violence constitutes bullying, nor does all bullying involve physical violence. The following are essential components of bullying. The federal and state governments have delegated these factors to define bullying as aggressive behavior that:

- Is intended to cause distress or harm
- Exists in a relationship in which there is an imbalance of power and strength
- Is repeated over time (Limber, 2002, 2001; Olweus, 1993)
- Involves physical actions, words, gestures or social isolation
- May be direct or indirect
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- Some states understand bullying as the above listed, but include additional criteria such as: spreading rumors, ridiculing, humiliating or the infliction of any physical or mental harm (Georgia, 2001).

The subjectivity of the definition of bullying among school districts has provided an expansion opportunity on the enforcement of the zero-tolerance policy, thus providing more possibilities for the expulsion of students deemed “problematic.” To some, it appears as a proactive method of “pushing out” students who may be disruptive or intimidating to unprepared teachers and who are ultimately the students with the greatest needs. In addition, these needs are not recognized and/or addressed, typically those of the mental health or behavioral nature and potentially stemming from the issues of poverty. Instead, the zero-tolerance policy demonstrates the pervasiveness of racism in our school disciplinary actions in regard to bullying and violence and ultimately sanctions the refusal to instruct students, especially those in the urban environment.

### TRENDS IN BULLYING PREVENTION

School violence has forced the adoption of policies and procedures in our schools in an attempt to thwart catastrophic consequences of bullying and peer victimization. Once school teams identify bullying behavior as a problem, the most common response is to implement a standalone, anti-bullying program. Such programs commonly include holding school assemblies with speakers who highlight the harmful effects of bullying and teach students how to identify bullies, then follow up with a focus on catching such students in the act and providing increasingly severe punitive measures. Unfortunately, these practices have shown to be generally ineffective (Vreeman & Carroll,

2007). There has been decades of research conducted in the area of peace education, conflict resolution, and violence prevention. Researchers continue making strides against the legislative impacts of punitive justice regulations, however programs such as the Peacemaker Program have yet to become adopted among the majority of American schools. This program provides a Pre-K through middle school curriculum based on personal empowerment and peacemaking skills. The skills specifically address the encounters students may have with a bully, and readily address the variations among schools and classrooms. Programs of this nature incorporate positivity over punitive reaction, but are not readily accepted as suitable means to meeting legislative requirements by most public school districts, which continue to focus their efforts on imposing zero-tolerance policies and automatic suspensions/ expulsions for student transgressions.

### METHODOLOGY

#### DATA COLLECTION

The purpose of this study was to examine the difference in behavioral manifestations of bullying as they pertain to race, class and gender in order to better construct an improved method of addressing and ending bullying in the classroom. This study involved seven schools and twelve participants (see Table 1).

A qualitative approach was chosen because of the depth of emotional and psychological trauma incurred by victims and bystanders enduring bullying at school.<sup>1</sup> Using a case-study design (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003), data was collected from observations, archival data, oral histories, artistic renderings and face-to-face semi-structured interviews. Descriptions of violence witnessed or experienced by the student were included. Data also incorporates the perceptions of students in areas regarding teacher and principal interventions. Data sources included individual interviews conducted at

the end of the 2010–2011 school year. Participants selected the interview locations. Questions were presented at the onset of the interview. Teachers and administrators were told that their discourse is confidential and no identifying information would be shared. Interviews lasted between forty-five minutes and one hour.

#### SAMPLING

Participants from a Midwestern region included principals (n=6) certified teachers (n=6) serving the school and classroom no less than six years and as many as forty years. The administrators are responsible for monitoring and reporting bullying incidents to the school board and superintendent. They are also enforcers of school-wide rules based on the district guidelines. Teachers maintain the rules specified in the individual school handbook, determined by the administrators, as well as designing micro-level classroom climate techniques to manage bullying behaviors among students they oversee.

First, two groups from racially and socio-economically diverse backgrounds were determined (see Table 2).

#### RESEARCH SETTING

The study took place in 2011 in several Midwestern school districts. There will be seven individual schools with varying degrees of diversity within the populations, including rural, suburban and urban classifications. All schools serve kindergarten through eighth grade. The demographics are accurate as of 2011–2012 school year statistics (see Table 3).

#### PARTICIPANTS

Although the names assigned to each principal and teacher in Tables 4 and 5 are fictional, the descriptions applicable to the administrators' and teachers' careers are factual.

#### PARTICIPANT RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following questions were administered to the teachers and administrators/principals of each socioeconomic group:

1. Please define bullying as it pertains to you.
2. What are your personal thoughts regarding bullying?
3. What attempts do you make to thwart or alleviate bullying behaviors?
4. What effects have you witnessed as a result of bullying? Psychologically? Physically? Socially? Academically?
5. What actions have you witnessed or expected from teachers and administrators when confronted with peer on peer bullying behaviors?<sup>2</sup>

#### METHOD OF ANALYSIS

The data was recorded, transcribed and finally coded. The resulting data was expected to show disparity in definitions, perceptions and reactions between teachers/administrators in differing socioeconomic school settings. The behavioral manifestations of the lower socioeconomic group proved to be that of direct, physical and blatant confrontations when compared to covert, indirect and social isolation techniques exercised by those in the upper socioeconomic classes. Additionally, the methods of response among members of each group revealed drastic differences in definitions and strategies used by teachers and administration to alleviate the problems. Parental involvement was expected to differ as parents of lower socioeconomic groups tend to confront the issues between children in comparison to upper socioeconomic parents who tend to “brush it under the rug” or “play games” amongst themselves.



Table 1. *Differences in School Types and Bullying Behaviors*

School Type	Details
Low SES (School with over 30% free/reduced lunch)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More physical and blatant bullying than that of their upper SES counterparts.</li> <li>• Students were prone to strict enforcement of the zero-tolerance policy.</li> </ul>
Upper SES (School with less than 29% free/reduced lunch)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students, teachers and administrators reported problematic behaviors arising from covert or hidden use of technology as well as social isolation techniques.</li> <li>• Students rarely experienced punishments or deterrents of this nature.</li> </ul>

Table 2. *Subset of Groups*

Group	SES Details	Admin	Teacher
Mid-Upper SES: Group B	Student populations that yielded less than thirty percent that qualified for free or reduced lunch	Mr. Smith Mr. Kaiser Mr. Nelson	Mrs. Wright Mrs. Hartwell Mrs. Carroll
Low SES: Group A	Student populations of more than thirty percent that qualified for free or reduced lunch	Mr. Rollins Mr. Fields Mr. Cole	Mrs. Haburn Mrs. Frye Mrs. Williams

Table 3. *School Demographics*

School	Demographics	% Economically Disadvantaged
AAA Elementary	White-62% Black-37% Hispanic-<1% Asian/Pacific Islander-0% Native American-0%	79%
Arvada Elementary	White-99% Black-0% Hispanic-<1% Asian/Pacific Islander-<1% Native American-0%	51%
Dillensberg Elementary	White-99% Black-0% Hispanic-0% Asian/Pacific Islander-<1% Native American-0%	24%
Donovan Elementary	White-94% Black-2% Hispanic-2% Asian/Pacific Islander-2% Native American-<1	28%

School	Demographics	% Economically Disadvantaged
Missouri Hill Elementary	White-99% Black-0% Hispanic-<1% Asian/Pacific Islander-0% Native American-0%	48%
Mitchell Elementary	White-100% Black-0% Hispanic-0% Asian/Pacific Islander-0% Native American-0%	28%
Top Academy	White- 1% Native American-0% Black 97% Hispanic- <1% Asian/Pacific Islander-<1% Native American-0%	79%

Table 4. Group A (Poverty School Subset)

Participant	Employment	Personal Details
Mr. Rollins	AAA Elementary Urban Diverse	12 years of service Extreme community engagement Severe poverty issues K-8
Mr. Fields	Top Academy Suburban Charter School	Emphasis on academic excellence Pre-testing acceptance Majority African American Award: Excellence in Academics
Mr. Cole	Missouri Hill Elementary Rural	20+ years of service Expressed concerns about poverty issues Drug and violence problems Resides in the area
Mrs. Haburn	AAA Elementary Urban Diverse	9 years of service Intervention specialist Advocate of zero-tolerance policy
Mrs. Frye	Arvada Elementary Suburban Non-diverse	35 years of service Retirement in several years Concerned about increase of violence in poverty neighborhoods
Mrs. Williams	Missouri Hill Elementary Rural Non-diverse	11 years of service 1st grade classroom Promotes parental involvement Attended Arvada Elementary Has see rise in violence in past 5–7 years

**Table 5. Group B (Non-Poverty Subset)**

Participant	Employment	Personal Details
Mr. Smith	Donovan Elementary Suburban Western portion of Midwestern city. Diverse	14 years of service Long-time resident in school district High job satisfaction Pleased with direction school is moving
Mr. Kaiser	Mitchell Elementary Rural Non-diverse	17 years of service Recognizes community challenges Has taught generations of families
Mr. Nelson	Dillensberg Elementary Rural Non-diverse	42 years of service “Excellent” academic rating High job satisfaction
Mrs. Wright	Donovan Elementary Suburban Western portion of Midwestern city Diverse	6 years of service Adequate job satisfaction Praises administration Concerns involve behaviors in particular classrooms
Mrs. Hartwell	Mitchell Elementary Rural Non-diverse	40 years of service Decreasing job satisfaction Focuses on increase in violent behaviors, specifically female
Mrs. Carroll	Dillensberg Elementary Rural Non-diverse	33 years of service High expectations/strict discipline Emotionally disturbed inclusive classroom High job satisfaction

The interviews were coded using two varying methods: First, the text segments were coded as addressing one or more factors involving race, class or gender issues as they pertained to bullying behaviors and trends in their classroom or school, and secondly, the text was analyzed using an open-code scheme which indicated segments of text that were coded with regard to changing perspectives—definition, current regulations and potential improvement ideas. This revealed the differences in perspectives as to how teachers define bullying taking into consideration race, class and gender differences. It was equally informative in the area of prevention and troubleshooting chronic bullying issues in the school settings; the comparison of current rules and continued misbehaviors provided segue into teacher perspectives regarding missing elements in current anti-bullying trends.

The methodology and interview questions were designed to prompt teachers and administrators to give detailed descriptions of the problematic behaviors they were witness to inside their school environment and what responses to incidents they deem appropriate. Teachers and administrators reviewed their personal records of conduct referrals, suspension and expulsion reports and included these conduct reports in their interviews. Is it possible that the behavioral differences are a result of access to monetary funds used to secure advanced technology systems in the home and for personal use that allows for covert bullying behaviors among the upper SES students, while proliferating physical violence among lower SES students who are not privy to the technologically advanced gadgets and personal computer social networks? Although evidence shows that upper SES students demonstrate covert bullying behaviors in the act of social isolation,

computer bullying via Facebook, YouTube, SnapChat and instant messaging, is it reality to declare lower SES students violent in an overt physically aggressive mode because of the lack of opportunity and access to computers and technology? And if so, would it not be necessary to devise anti-bullying strategies that address these differences in student manifestations of bullying behaviors?

### FINDINGS

Each individual participant of the study declared “bullying” a major problem in their educational setting. Administrators and teachers recognized and expressed that bullying is a “major” problem and can be damaging to the students mentally, physically and academically. Both groups determined bullying to be dangerous to the welfare of individual students and the collective school climate. Every school was equipped with an anti-bullying strategy and some type of protocol for addressing incidents. There were no teachers or administrators that reported zero bullying in their building and/or classroom. This important declaration is evidence that the problem of bullying is pervasive and affecting all students in every socio-economic environment. The administrators and teachers participating in this study agreed that bullying can be “tricky” to pinpoint and this fact makes intervention difficult. Participants agreed that physical bullying was the “easiest” to combat, as the situations were blatant enough to determine a bully, a victim and bystanders. In such cases, the bully is punished, the victim is offered in-school supports, and preventative measures are taken to thwart future attacks. These could include but are not limited to: in-school suspension, out-of-school suspensions, proximity adjustments, parent/teacher/administrator conferences, and psychological screenings. The participants described problematic interventions for “sneaky” bullying, or covert bullying. Behaviors that included social isolation were most vehement due to the intense mental damage sustained by victims. Participants described victims of covert bullying as

becoming depressed, withdrawn and anxious. Teachers and administrators viewed loss of interest, dropped or failing grades, and general malaise as the main symptoms of students experiencing covert bullying. Participants also reported that the negative effects of covert bullying long outlasted those of outward physical aggressions between students. Participants went so far as to say that students engaging in overt bullying behaviors in the form of physical outbursts found their victims recovered much quicker than those of their covert counterparts. Students were apt to become “friends” or “be cool with each other” in the cases of physical bullying while students experiencing covert bullying violence never recovered while in that school setting. Participants cited instances of students resorting to alcohol, drugs and/or self-harming behaviors as a result of depression and anxiety prompted by bullying experienced in and out of school.

All physical aggression on a repeated basis was defined in the school policies as the basic example of bullying behavior, regardless of student population SES. Schools of the upper SES, (Donovan Elementary, Mitchell Elementary, and Dillensberg Elementary) determined that technological bullying was problematic and incorporated clauses in the handbook addressing the behaviors of students in and out of school. The student handbooks required student behaviors to reflect the school mission of community and responsibility at all times. Students (Donovan, Mitchell, Dillensberg Elementary) were required to sign technology contracts requiring appropriate actions on all social media outlets, including personal computer usage, Facebook, MySpace, IM, cellular phones, YouTube and texting. Students of lower SES schools (AAA Elementary, Top Academy, Missouri Hill Elementary, and Arvada Elementary) were not offered or required to sign and abide by any such rules. Upon further probing, it was determined that the economic disparities were the contributing factors for such rules. For example, the teachers of the lower SES schools (AAA, Top, Missouri Hill and Arvada) were instructed by administrators to avoid homework assignments and projects requiring internet and/or computer usage, as the majority of the student population lacked access to such technology. On the

other hand, the teachers of the upper SES schools (Donovan, Mitchell, and Dillensberg) were encouraged to promote technology use in their classroom with extended enrichment opportunities in the form of homework requiring home computer usage. These facts have a profound impact on this study. The upper SES schools reported high levels of covert bullying, while the lower SES schools reported escalated incidents of physical/overt bullying, thus supporting the initial hypothesis that the behavioral manifestation of bullying behavior will differ in accordance to economic status of student populations, as will the administrative responses according to adopted policy (see Table 6).

### ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

The results chronicle the similarities and differences among teachers and administrators serving diverse populations and how they perceive and respond to bullying. Teachers and administrators are experiencing some of the same disturbing trends, yet strategizing in drastically diverse manners in an attempt to accomplish the goal of ceasing bullying behaviors. The goal of the study was to understand the perspectives of teachers and administrators accommodating diverse student populations that are experiencing bullying in and out of the school setting. By initiating discourse with in-service teachers and administrators, it was possible to deconstruct the definition of bullying, which, first and foremost is the most important element in creating effective, research-based methods of combating the problem. The investigation revealed that teachers and administrators are understanding bullying and the effects of the student population, very differently. While some teachers incorporated all types of bullying, such as technological and texting violence, other teachers felt that this problem was a moot issue, and as a result did not address the issue in the classroom. Teachers and administrators commonly reflected that the

problems occurring with violence and bullying in their school setting was a result of lack of supervision, or community violence that was acting as a model of behavior for students. Parental involvement was a major factor, according to all of the teachers and administrators. The involvement, or lack thereof, could be partially to blame for recurring violence, and a lack of coping skills for the bully, victim and bystander. The obvious finding that supports the hypothesis is that of socioeconomic status contributing to the method and nature of bullying incidents. Clearly, the upper-economic schools were not experiencing blatant physical violence at the rate and duration commonly experienced by lower-economic schools. While the lower-economic schools experienced higher levels of physical altercations/bullying, they did not report experiencing high levels of technological bullying as the upper-economic schools reported. Lastly, expected results in the area of racial bullying were surprisingly reported to be a non-factor with the exception of a few isolated incidents. The initial expectation was that the lower socioeconomic schools would rate physical/blatant bullying behaviors higher, with a higher demographic of black students. Although this was true in most cases, the rate of physical/blatant bullying behaviors was reported equally in the lower socioeconomic, non-diverse schools as well. This factor equates the fact of physical violence/bullying with socioeconomic status, specifically lower, rather than with racial or gender issues.

Currently, teachers and administrators are acting punitively, which may be an understandable reaction since parents of victims are insisting on retribution for their child. However, it is imperative that anti-bullying campaigns are designed for the specific needs and dynamics of each school rather than addressing generalized behaviors of students across all cultures, SES and racial backgrounds. Teacher-education programs should place intense emphasis on socio-cultural foundations and require future teachers to have a command of history, philosophy and social elements of schooling and society. Peace-building strategies are often overlooked.

Table 6. Comparison of Low SES/Upper SES Findings

Topic of Discussion	Low SES Schools: Group A (30% or more; free/reduced lunch program)	Upper SES Schools: Group B (29% or less; free/reduced lunch)
Student behavior snapshot	Physical, blatant attacks of aggression. Verbal assaults escalate to physical assaults. Lack of technology results in face-to-face bullying. Escape occurs at home or with assistance of family/friends. Hitting, punching, hiding personal belongings, mock slapping, and slanderous graffiti. Survival behaviors to prevent attacks.	Covert, emotional attacks. Isolation techniques and public humiliation via technology. Attacks continue outside of school due to social media. Little to no means of “escape,” adults rarely knowledgeable. Videoing students for YouTube, spreading rumors via social media, purposeful isolation from peer gatherings. Group:individual ratio.
Student targets	Poverty issues such as clothing, looks, poor hygiene, special needs (academic and mental)	Social blunders, jealousy, early sexualized behaviors, drug or addiction issues
Faculty response to behavior	Place blame on lack of parental involvement and community dysfunction. Lack of positive model, mental illness, single parent household, lack of supervision, outside family feuding, substance abuse issues. Teachers dislike the disruption and disrespect; relieved to have student removed from classroom.	Place blame on lack of parental supervision. Affording students too much freedom with technology and peer interactions. Sometimes overlooked as “rite of passage” or “growing pains.” Students are coached on civil expectations and upholding reputations. Transgressions viewed as momentary lapse. Teachers feel responsibility to prevent further issues.
School policy on behavior	Zero-Tolerance Policy including automatic suspension/expulsion and possible law enforcement involvement. Strictly upheld. Typically easy to target and implement policies due to physical nature of assault.	Zero-Tolerance Policy including automatic suspension/expulsion and rare law enforcement involvement. Rarely upheld. Difficulty in implementation of out-of-school technological bullying.
Victim and bystander impact	Victims experience less PTSD symptoms, bystanders fear retribution for victim defense. Bystanders fear retribution for victim defense and rarely report.	Victims experience extreme PTSD symptoms, bystanders fear retribution for victim defense. Bystanders likely to anonymously report and attempt to avoid.
Bully impact	Direct contribution to the “School to Prison Pipeline” and lower graduation rates. Parental involvement is low. No opportunity for amends.	Bully has opportunity to make amends. Prevention of documentation on permanent record. Parental involvement is strong.
Therapy or prevention strategies	Parental involvement due to out-of-school suspension/expulsion and forced supervision issues. Involvement of Job and Family services. Involvement of resource officers.	Psychological de-briefing. Increased monitoring. Special accommodations for avoidance or peer mediation. Psychiatric evaluation and counseling offered.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS: PATTERNS OF DISCRIMINATION BY CLASS

Data analysis revealed emerging patterns among the participants of this study. Obviously, teachers and administrators all responded unanimously that the policies in place at their school were not effective in stopping bullying

behaviors and acts of aggression and or violence via physical or covert means.

Teachers and administrators at the lower SES schools stated that the rates of bullying had decreased, in particularly with Mrs. Haburn and Mr. Fields, both urban schools and majority African American. However, upon further investigation it was revealed that both schools implemented a zero-

tolerance policy that was meticulously enforced. The policy requires expulsion of violent students, thus increasing these rates, almost always involving black males. Administrators and teachers claimed exhaustion from attempting to manage behaviors in order to keep students from being expelled. Due to the necessity to improve school attendance, thus improving standardized test scores, administrators were hesitant to expel or out-of-school suspend students. They preferred in-school suspension, referred to as ACP. The student is placed in lockdown—isolated from the rest of the student body—and assigned homework. Students were monitored and “forced” to complete work correctly. Therefore, the school does not receive penalties for lack of classroom management, as judged by the number of expulsions/suspensions by the state government. However, the administrator and teacher did acknowledge that the expulsion rates were higher for their school than those of any suburban or upper-class school.

On the contrary, the upper socioeconomic schools (majority white student populations) reported that they did, in fact, publish a student handbook that included zero-tolerance policies regarding drugs, weapons and violence. Administrators and teachers declared that it was extremely rare—less than once a year—that “such extreme measures were necessary to resolve conflicts.” When asked to expound on this anomaly, participants explained that it is usually not necessary to carry out such punitive consequences because once parental involvement in the situation was established, the families and the schools were able to “work it out.” Sometimes, school psychologists or counselors could assist parents in promoting healthier choices. And, as the explanation continued, their school really didn’t have problems with extreme violence. The worst-case scenarios involved dealing with social isolation, Facebook issues, texting, etc. Occasional fights resulted in detentions, Friday schools, and elimination from school functions such as field trips and sporting events.

A particularly glaring commonality, no matter the socioeconomic status of the school, is one of bureaucracy in the school disciplinary policies, which tend to negate a basic ethical and humanistic function, that of care, support and guidance. The typical response to bullying is reactionary and punitive, rather than preventative. Teachers and administrators in this study focus on a behaviorism model (Bandura, 1986) while a humanistic approach may be a necessity in future bullying prevention research. The seminal work of Noddings (1984), “Caring, A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education” discusses relatedness and receptivity. Although there is an emphasis on targeting behaviors after the incident, preventative actions maintained by teachers, parents, and students with a focus on moral attitude, encouragement and reward for ethical treatment of peers, would be a refreshing and positive alternative to the current state of anti-bullying campaigns. Additionally, this ethical approach with a focus on realigning educational policies to generate positive outcomes would allow for differentiation among diverse school settings. The disparity between defining and addressing the issue of bullying continues to challenge teachers, administration, parents and students while continuing to remain at the forefront of school disciplinary research

## NOTES

1. “When Does Bullying Happen?” pathways courses.samhsa.gov/bully/bully\_2\_pg3\_h.htm.
2. Questions designed by Kelli E. Jette post pilot study.

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# EFFECTIVE METHODS?: INVESTIGATING THE ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION OF PROGRAMS TREATING POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

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*Abstract:* Over the last decade, medical diagnosis of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) has increased substantially. In contrast, remarkably little research has been conducted to gauge the long-term effectiveness of PTSD treatment programs. The majority of research on the effectiveness of PTSD programs consists of single-source, cross-sectional assessment of non-representative samples. This paper argues for an increase in longitudinal and mixed approach research as a means to improve the efficacy of PTSD treatment programs. The authors highlight the promise of recent innovations in video game technology, such as virtual reality exposure therapy (VRET) and corresponding physiological assessment measures, as a promising avenue for future PTSD prevention programs.

*Keywords:* peace education, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), virtual reality exposure therapy (VRET), video game technology

## INTRODUCTION

Meet Pvt. Sutter and Spc. Martinez, two American military veterans attempting to re-situate themselves within normal civilian life. Pvt. Sutter and Spc. Martinez believed they would return from their military deployment, reenter civilian life, and be better positioned to create the future they had always wanted, but could not afford. Like many of their peers, both joined the military based on the allure of the attractive educational benefit package from the GI Bill. The GI Bill served as a primary recruiting tool for America's all-volunteer military (Simon, Negrusa, & Warner, 2010). In the last decade, we have seen a rapid influx of veterans reintegrating into colleges and universities after service (Vacchi, 2012). The hope has been that educational pursuits will

offer veterans a means to reintegrate into civilian life (Smith-Osborne, 2009).

Both Pvt. Sutter and Spc. Martinez shared a similar experience during their tour in Middle East; their world changed when a devastating roadside bomb struck their tank. The detonation of the bomb thrust them from the precipice of a foreign land (Iraq) to another unsettling backdrop: the sudden re-emergence into civilian life. Injured, but alive, Pvt. Sutter and Spc. Martinez were recovering and attempting to sort through memories of their military experiences. The nightmares about explosives were regular. The memories of soldiers lost from their unit were vivid. The pain from combat injuries were real. Pvt. Sutter and Spc. Martinez would soon be diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), "a chronic condition that occurs in a significant minority of persons who experience life-threatening traumatic events" (Rothbaum, Rizzo, & Difede, 2010, p. 126).

Both Pvt. Sutter and Spc. Martinez will need support from family members, medical and psychiatric professionals, and society in the years ahead. Over the last decade, the number of veterans diagnosed with PTSD has increased substantially, including many military personnel returning from conflicts in the Middle East (Hodges, Anderson, Burdea, Hoffman, & Rothbaum, 2001; Rizzo et al., 2010; Shad, Suris, & North, 2011). While Pvt. Sutter and Spc. Martinez were optimistic at the start of their military careers, their vision of attending classes and graduating with the skills needed to thrive in society was replaced by joining many of their fellow injured servicemen and women in line at a Veteran Affairs Office.

While these are fictional accounts, the vignette of Pvt. Sutter and Spc. Martinez are based on a collection portraits from actual servicemen and women from the Veterans History Project ([www.loc.gov/vets/](http://www.loc.gov/vets/)). These vignettes serve as useful reflections in a time where there is an urgent need to better understand the emotional, social, and physical health needs of returning veterans, many of whom suffer invisibly as students in the college classroom, clients in social work settings, or patients in care centers.

## POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

### WHAT IS PTSD?

It is natural for the human body to react to traumatic situations, be they natural disasters, personal assault, or combat (McLay et al., 2011). Though each person responds to these traumatic encounters differently, the ongoing trauma reflected in PTSD can be debilitating for even the most hardened of warriors.

The American Psychiatric Association (1994) stated PTSD may develop after a traumatic event, such as combat, a natural disaster, or a violent personal assault. According to the DSM-IV, the diagnosis of PTSD is “characterized by re-experiencing, avoidance, and hyperarousal symptoms (as cited in Rothbaum et al., 2010, p. 126). Since then, PTSD has been recategorized from an “anxiety disorder” to a “trauma-and-stress-or-related disorder.” The DSM-V (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) fact sheet states that the following scenarios must have resulted in the patient:

directly experience[d] the traumatic event; witness[e]d the traumatic event in person; learn[ed] that the traumatic event occurred to a close family member or close friend (with the actual or threatened death being either violent or accidental); or experience[d] first-hand repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of the traumatic event (not

through media, pictures, television or movies unless work-related) (p. 1).

The disturbance, regardless of its trigger, is most often clinically significant.

Gamito et al. (2010) and Wiederhold (2010a) have documented the rising global impact of PTSD. Despite these rising trends, little is being done to gauge the long-term effectiveness of PTSD treatment programs over the last thirty-five years of research being conducted on PTSD (Lopes, Macedo, Coutinho, Figueira, & Ventura, 2014). According to Cukor et al.’s work (2011), indicators of PTSD have been observed in non-rescue disaster workers near the World Trade Center following the attacks of September 11, 2001. A similar increase in reported psychological problems is occurring with individuals in hurricane-affected areas. Many of these reports are regarding children and adolescents (McLaughlin et al., 2010). Despite the growing need for survivors of mass casualty disasters, Wiederhold (2010b) warns that many people “Often get too little attention, too late” (p. 119).

### WHAT TREATMENT OPTIONS EXIST?

There are a range of treatment options for PTSD (Cukor, Spitalnick, Difede, Rizzo, & Rothbaum, 2009), including:

- psychological interventions,
- social and family based treatments,
- behavioral treatments (i.e., exposure therapy),
- imagery-based treatments,
- therapies focused on distress tolerance,
- power therapies,
- technological-based treatments, and
- pharmacologic treatments.

Behavioral treatments, such as exposure therapy, are believed to be the most effective form of treatment for patients experiencing PTSD (Hodges et al., 2001). Exposure therapy stems from cognitive behavior therapy, a goal-oriented approach aimed at changing the patient’s behavior. Exposure therapy

offers evidence-based treatment that, in essence, exposes the patient to illness relevant stimuli (Reger et al., 2011).

## A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW: ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION OF PTSD TREATMENT PROGRAMS

A systematic review on the assessment and evaluation of PTSD treatment programs was conducted. PTSD treatment programs were categorized within the following four types of assessment and evaluation self-report, summative evaluation, narrative, and outcome variables.

### SELF-REPORT

The vast majority of PTSD studies rely on self-reported measures. Several reasons for this exist. Many self-reported measures can be administered without a clinician, rendering them a cost-effective method (Cukor et al., 2011). Additionally, these instruments are considered well-validated within the industry (McLay et al., 2010). They include the Clinician-Administered PTSD Scale (CAPS) and the Beck Depression Inventory.

There are conflicting views as to whether self-report measures over-diagnose or under-diagnose PTSD. North et al. (2002) feel that if an instrument does not assess the entirety of the diagnostic criteria, it may over-diagnose PTSD (also see North, Pfefferbaum, & Tucker, 2002). However, Cukor et al. (2011) feel self-report measures may lead to “an under-identification of symptoms and may be unduly influenced by social desirability” (p. 211).

Reager et al. (2011) used a pre-post treatment design with self-reported symptoms on the PTSD Checklist, Military Version. Gamito et al.’s (2010) pilot study with elderly war veterans and virtual reality exposure therapy (VRET).<sup>1</sup>

Gamito et al.’s pilot study utilized self-report measures such as the Impact of Event Scale Revised, the Symptoms Checklist Revised, and the Beck Depression Inventory (2010). McLay et al. (2010) used a self-report measure to compare pre and post-treatment depressive symptoms; however, the authors specify that the instrument is well-validated instrument used as part of the Primary Care Evaluation of Mental Disorders. Botella et al. (2010) used 3 separate self-report measures. Freedman et al. (2010) uses self-report measures to assess the effectiveness of treatment related to terrorist suicide bomb attacks on buses in the Middle East.

PTSD studies are also conducted outside of military contexts, as seen with a study about emotional distress with Hurricane Katrina victims that used a self-report telephone survey with the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (McLaughlin et al., 2010).

There is a lack of follow-up assessment or delayed-post design studies. Most studies cease at the conclusion of treatment after nine to twelve sessions. In a study that uses VRE to address the fear of flying, Rothbaum et al. (2002) were the first to conduct a year-long follow up. However, very little has been seen in the way of yearlong follow-ups since 2002. Ready, Gerardi, Backscheider, Mascaro, and Rothbaum (2010) included a six-month follow-up in their research design with three self-report instruments. Ready et al.’s literature review indicated that they “found only four published studies with multiple U.S. Vietnam veterans that report statistically and clinically significant reductions in PTSD symptoms six months or more after treatment” (p. 49).

Lastly, most studies rely on single cross-sectional assessment of non-representative samples (Norris, 2006), which often fail to consider pre-disaster/trauma contribution to post-disaster/trauma problems. Complicating matters further, they often inappropriately jump to causal conclusions from

results that are more accurately providing simple associations.

#### SUMMATIVE EVALUATION

Disaster Research Training and Education Program, a comprehensive disaster mental health program, was reviewed as an example of a summative evaluation of PTSD programs. While the Disaster Research Training and Education Program was carefully thought out and involved strong partnerships, no formal assessment or evaluation measures were reported (Pfefferbaum et al., 2010). Rather, the article presented a summative account of the strengths and weakness of the development process.

#### NARRATIVE

Several research studies utilize narrative as a form of assessment and evaluation. North et al. (2010) uses focus groups to study exposure to workplace disaster following the September 11 terrorist attacks. Their work suggests the need for future disaster workplace research and the importance of individualizing workplace responses. Secker and Membrey (2003) conducted semi-structured interviews. These results support the importance of providing natural supports as a form of assistance with returning to work. Wyche et al. (2011) conducted research on community resilience activities with Hurricane Katrina first responders using a survey, focus groups, and key informant interviews.

#### OUTCOME VARIABLES

Andreano et al. (2009) urge us to study the neural effects of immersion in relation to VRET. An increase in studies using outcome variables has occurred in recent years (c.f., Norrholm, et al., 2016; Price, 2015). Wood, Wiederhold, and Spira (2010) collected biofeedback through

physiological monitoring. These measures were used in conjunction with self-report and clinician rated measures. Tworus, Szymanska, and Ilnicki (2010) used biofeedback in conjunction with a personality inventory measure. Biofeedback was collected by connecting the patient to sensors that measured autonomic arousal, which consists of body temperature, breathing frequency, and skin conductivity. Gerardi, Rothbaum, Astin, and Kelley (2010) used prolonged exposure therapy in an experimental design where patients were randomly assigned to a treatment group. In Gerardi et al.'s study, baseline pre-post test measures were used to determine a decrease in depressive symptoms with rape victims exhibiting signs of PTSD, along with the repeated measurement of salivary cortisol over the course of several therapy sessions.

#### DISCUSSION

Within all categories, the majority of PTSD research consisted of single-source, cross-sectional assessment of non-representative samples (Pfefferbaum & North, 2008). Most existing studies were limited by small sample sizes, such as Rizzo et al. (2010): n= 20, Reger et al. (2011): n=24, Jaycox, Foa, & Morral (1998): n = 37, and McLay et al. (2010): n= 28).

This is with the exception of a few like Walter, Dickstein, Barnes, and Chard (2014) and Cook, Dinnen, Thompson, Simiola, and Schnurr (2014). Most studies have also been short durations rather than longitudinal research designs. The body of research also suffers from the lack of randomized studies (McLay et al., 2010), limited access to representative samples (Pfefferbaum & North, 2008), and single course information.

While the research evaluating the effectiveness of ET with active duty military personnel was limited (McLay et al., 2011; Reger et al., 2011). VRET is already recognized as effective treatment for a wide range of phobias (Hodges et al., 2001; McLay et al.,

2011; Parsons & Rizzo, 2008; Wiederhold, 2010a/2010b). Furthermore, many researchers posit that VRET may be especially useful with combat-related PTSD due to the difficult nature of visualizing and imagining traumatic wartime experiences (c.f., Cukor et al., 2009; Hodges et al., 2001; Wood et al., 2010) and reduction in dropout rates in therapy sessions (Hodges et al., 2001).

The existing body of research supports the use of VRET as a substantial, effective treatment compared to other existing treatments. By delivering multiple sensory cues (e.g., visual, auditory, olfactory, and haptic), VRET is often capable of evoking suppressed trauma memories and triggering a sense of immersion and presence (Cukor et al., 2009; Spira et al., 2010; Wood et al., 2010). Jaycox et al. (1998) contended that the degree of immersion and presence in VRET is important because poorer emotional engagement in treatment predicts poorer treatment outcome. Moreover, these computer-generated environments can be used as an enhancement to established empirically-validated treatments (Cukor et al., 2009; McLay et al., 2010) or as an alternative form of treatment all together (Cukor et al., 2009).

However, much of the research reported gives little indication about the extent to which the VRET treatment is actually working long-term. Parsons and Rizzo (2008) aimed to improve this with a call for consistent reporting in the VRET literature in order to provide a uniform way to report findings. Pfefferbaum and North (2008) believe that as the field of PTSD research grows, “greater attention to the sophistication of research methods and design will increase our understanding” of PTSD treatment programs (p. S54). This is of particular importance as PTSD related funding and research grow, as seen with

the emergence of Europe’s project called Future and Emerging Technologies (Riva & Gorini, 2010).

While there are some promising findings with VRET (McLay, 2014), Andreano et al. (2009) have called for the continued investigation of “the neural mechanisms underlying the experience of immersion” in order to better understand how the body responds to VRET (p. 309). With this, a more complete look at the research around PTSD treatments, ET, and VRET must be explored in hopes of guiding the direction and rigor of future research on PTSD.

Based on this literature analysis, there is an immediate need for an increase in longitudinal, outcome-based research studies (i.e., employing outcome variables) as a means of improving the rigor and efficacy of PTSD rehabilitation programs. In addition to the need for more sound research, there is also a growing need for screening, education, and prevention programs, as Cukor et al. (2011) point out in the case of disaster workers. We posit that high-tech exposure therapy may offer a promising opportunity with the advent of virtual reality exposure therapy. The authors recommend looking to the work of cutting edge centers for growth in VRET’s use with PTSD patients, including the University of Southern California’s Institute for Creative Technologies (<http://ict.usc.edu/>).

## LIMITATIONS

The authors take into consideration that most people needing treatment do not seek professional help (Kessler, as cited in Cukor et al., 2009). Often, there is a societal stigma attached to enrolling in treatment programs, with patients fearing being perceived as ill or weak. This can contribute to self-stigmas, as well (Corrigan & Watson, 2002; Watson, Corrigan, Larson, & Sells, 2007). Aversions to mental health treatment is ordinarily well-documented; however, Mittal et al. (2013) report that “very little is known

about stigma” with PTSD (p. 86). Furthermore, while a vast amount of literature was reviewed, another limitation that was considered was how challenging the recruitment process for research studies can be.

## NOTE

1. Virtual reality exposure therapy (VRET) is a recent innovation in ET that provides technological-based treatment through three-dimensional computer simulations (c.f., Josman, Reisberg, Weiss, Garcia-Palacios, & Hoffman, 2008; Rothbaum, 2009). VRET has been gaining the attention of university research institutes (c.f., Institute for Creative Technologies and the Virtual Reality Medical Center).

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# ‘EDUCATION FOR EMANCIPATION’: A PHOTOVOICE STUDY WITH ZIMBABWEAN IMMIGRANT WOMEN IN MIDWEST AMERICA

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*Abstract:* This study explores the educational experiences of Zimbabwean immigrant women living in Midwest, Ohio. From an American context, education is generally regarded as a way to secure higher paying jobs. However, Harrell-Bond (2004) suggested education as a powerful, peaceful weapon in women’s battle for liberation. In this study, Zimbabwean women regard education as a ‘liberating tool’ from male domination which limits their access to education. Therefore, this study seeks to empower Zimbabwean immigrant women to share peaceful approaches to educational access. Using snowball sampling, seven Zimbabwean women aged 18 years of age and older participated. This was a five-week study culminating in a final communal gathering in which a PowerPoint slide-show celebrated the participants’ voices through photos.

*Keywords:* Zimbabwean women, migration, education, participation, photovoice

## INTRODUCTION

The last two decades have seen a rise of the African immigrant population in the United States. In 2013 alone close to a hundred thousand African immigrants obtained legal permanent resident status ([www.dhs.gov/publication/yearbook-2013](http://www.dhs.gov/publication/yearbook-2013)). Major factors such as wars, famine, weak economic bases and political instability have contributed to this influx of African immigrants. Changes in the United States immigration policies and visa requirements such as the 1990 Diversity Lottery Visa Program<sup>1</sup> have also promoted the African migration to the United States (Adepoju, 2010; Arthur, 2008; Yeboah, 2008; Yewah & Togunde, 2010). Census data from the year 2000 have shown that recent African immigrants are preferring to settle in Midwestern cities such as Cincinnati, Columbus (Ohio) and Indianapolis because they offer better economic oppor-

tunities, quality schools and affordable accommodation (Yeboah, 2008). Zimbabweans are among the recent groups of Africans to come to the United States. Statistics reveal that the number of Zimbabwean arrivals increased significantly in the late 1990s and this was attributed to political instability and economic decline in the country during that same period (Crush & Tevera, 2010; Mlambo, 2010). In 2013 alone, the Department of Homeland Security indicated that approximately 4,789 Zimbabweans obtained United States legal permanent resident ([www.dhs.gov/publication/yearbook-2013](http://www.dhs.gov/publication/yearbook-2013)).

Recent immigration statistics published by the Office of Immigration Statistics in 2013 have also shown that more women are migrating to the United States than men. Traditionally disadvantaged groups such as Zimbabwean women are breaking cultural strictures and are also migrating in larger numbers (Crush, 2003; Pasura, 2008, 2010). Despite the large population of women in the migratory patterns, women remain invisible in migration studies especially African women; in most cases where they did emerge, they tended to be part of a category involving men thereby shadowing their assimilation experiences (Morokvasic, 1983). There have been few reports describing how the diaspora has opened avenues for African immigrant women to improve their literacy and consequently their economic status (Arthur, 2009; Chidimma, 2003; Osirim, 2008). For example, Arthur (2009) stated that African women are just like their males, “they see the link between quality higher education and well compensated jobs” (p.118). However, these few African immigration literatures do not detail the challenges the women encounter in the diaspora as they attempt to

accomplish their educational aspirations and achieve economic freedom.

#### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Critical education according to Freire takes the life situation of the learner as its starting point and the raising of consciousness and the overcoming of obstacles as its goals (Freire, 2000). The result of critical education is “critical consciousness” (Freire, 2000). Critical consciousness involves teaching adults to read and write so that they become conscious about their social reality. The assumption is that, when individuals are equipped with the proper tools, they develop the ability to organize themselves to critically examine and reshape both their social and personal reality. He argued that once individuals perceived a challenge, understand and recognize the possibilities of response they react accordingly (Freire, 2000).

The concept of critical consciousness also values the assumptions of equality to all people, their right to knowledge and culture and their right to criticize their situation and act upon it (Freire, 2000). Therefore, drawing on Freire’s (2000) notion of education for critical consciousness, a photovoice participatory research method is used to bring together Zimbabwean immigrant women to critically discuss the importance of education as a necessary tool to fight against gender stereotype and bring about peace in the society. Improving Zimbabwean women’s access to education would enhance their ability to critically examine their position in the society as well as their potential to free themselves from the oppressive tendencies of their culture. For Zimbabwean women they are aspiring for education that liberates, shatters the silence and make them become aware of their stereotyped position, and their democratic rights to participate in social change and transformation as suggested by Freire (2000).

#### GENDER GAP IN ZIMBABWEAN

#### EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

As a starting point, Freire (2000) emphasized that for emancipation/freedom from oppression to take place, the oppressed should “first critically recognize its causes, so that through transforming action they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity” (p.46). In line with this, herein, participants identified patriarchal domination as the main contributor to women’s limited access to education. Historically, Zimbabwe is a patriarchal society and a look at post independent Zimbabwe (1980) shows that this position has not changed. The cultural and religious traditions among the Shona and Ndebele ethnic groups are characterized by patriarchal domination and women have limited power and freedom in both the private and public domain (Mungwini, 2007). Patriarch is defined by radical feminists as “a social system in which men appropriate all social roles and keep women in subordinate positions” (Kambarami, 2006, p.1). This patriarchal system is exerted through the socialization process in the family where children are prepared to understand appropriate and expected behaviors in their communities as well as their future roles as adults. It is therefore common among all the different ethnic groups in Zimbabwe that once a girl reaches puberty, all teachings are directed towards pleasing the husband and to be a respectable obedient wife (Kambarami, 2006). This forces women to develop a dependence syndrome where they rely heavily on men for social and moral support. It limits women to restricted social roles where they only operate as wives, daughters and mothers with little control of their freedom (Kambarami, 2006; Mungwini, 2007). On the other hand, boys are socialized to be victorious, leaders, providers and protectors for their families. This gender role socialization between boys and girls consciously or subconsciously results in an unequal distribution of resources such as education with more access given to boys. The current situation in Zimbabwe is that women lag behind in

formal educational accomplishments compared to men. Going back to history, formal education was introduced in Zimbabwe by missionaries during British colonial rule. Even though the missionaries condemned some traditional cultural practices of the indigenous people, they unfortunately, supported traditional patriarchal practices of superior and inferior relationship between men and women. As a result, colonial education system had no specific educational policies for girls as their labor and time was required for agricultural and domestic chores (Gordon, 1994). Even the few girls that were lucky enough to attend school were directed into feminine subjects such as cookery and needlework which prepared them for domestic roles. Furthermore, its curriculum system through images and graphics in textbooks emphasized male supremacy thereby further stereotyping girls (Gaidzanwa, 1985; Gudhlanga, Chirimuuta, & Bhukuvhani, 2012). This is in line with Freire's argument that some educative processes instigated by the oppressor domesticate people where there exists a culture of silence. In this culture, people are taught to accept what is handed down to them by the oppressor without questioning. Hence their understanding of their social reality is limited to what they are taught to accept and believe (Freire, 2000).

However, two decades later, after gaining independence from British colonial rule in 1980, women's access to education in comparison to men has not improved significantly. Table 1 indicates the disproportionate gender gap of high school completion rates (2000-2004) with female students lagging behind in Zimbabwe. Among the reasons for girls not completing school include early marriages which lead to school drop outs. Moreover, in cases where the family is faced with financial difficulties, it is the girl child that is forced to drop out of school

or never enrolled at all (Klaveren van, Tijdens, Hughie-Williams, & Ramos-Martin, 2010). Dropping out of school interferes with girls' education and career development, leading to economic dependence, illiteracy, disempowerment and vulnerability to violence. The possibility of these girls going back to school as adults is very low. Conversely, the United States statistics indicated higher completion rates among female students compared to male students during the same period. This is consistent with an absence of gender specific educational attainment barriers for the United States girl.

In colleges and universities, women's enrollment continued to be very low relative to men. Faced with the pressure to address women's educational needs, Zimbabwe's Ministry of Education in 1990 embarked on an affirmative program aimed to increase the enrollment of female students in universities since female students only comprised 20 percent of the total student population in the country's universities in 1980. Such programs included reducing the entrance requirement for female students to enroll in college. For example, where male students needed to pass Advanced Level with fourteen points in order to study Law, female students required only eleven points.

However, these efforts by the government to create an equal representation of students across genders in schools were fruitless because efforts to empower women did not take effect in either the household or private sphere. As a result, female student enrollment in colleges did not increase even with reduced entrance requirements (Gudhlanga et al., 2012; Shabaya & Konadu-Agyemang, 2004). Men continued to maintain their status quo by controlling women's labor and sexuality within the family (Batezat & Mwalo, 1989). Currently, a smaller population of women in Zimbabwe proceeds to higher institutions of learning such as colleges and universities as shown in Table 2.

Table 1: *High School Percentage Completion Rates by Sex: Zimbabwe versus U.S. 2000–2004*

Year	Zimbabwe			United States		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
2000	73.69	82.09	77.89	88.1	84.9	86.5
2001	74.42	82.16	78.29	88.3	84.6	86.5
2002	70.96	83.43	77.20	88.8	84.8	86.8
2003	67.47	71.96	69.72	89.2	85.1	87.2
2004	70.66	75.27	72.97	88.8	84.9	86.9

*Sources:* Zimbabwe National Strategic Plan for the Education of Girls, Orphans and other Vulnerable Children 2005–2010 (2006).

Trends in High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States 1972–2012: United States Department of Education (2013).

Table 2. *University Enrollment Numbers by Gender 2006–2012: Zimbabwe versus the U.S.*

Year	Zimbabwe			United States		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
2006	20,596	33,729	54,325	10,184,055	7,574,815	17,758,870
2007	21,867	32,977	54,844	10,432,214	7,815,914	18,248,128
2008	24,771	34,524	59,295	10,913,919	8,188,895	19,102,814
2009	18,597	29,456	48,413	11,658,207	8,769,504	20,427,711
2010	23,011	30,536	53,547	11,971,315	9,044,811	21,016,126
2011	22,963	31,132	54,095	11,967,614	9,026,499	20,994,113
2012	26,891	33,264	60,143	11,723,732	8,919,087	20,642,819

*Sources:* Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency. Education Report, October 2014

U.S Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics: October 2013

*Note.* United States statistics include all races.

In contrast, female enrollment in the United States continues to surpass that of male students by large margins as also shown in Table 2. By 2012 the share of women attending college in the United States had widened dramatically representing nearly three-fifths of college students in the country (Pollard, 2011). On the

other hand, Zimbabwean female enrollment continues to trail dramatically behind with no indication that they may equal or surpass that of men in the near future. These college enrollment trends are consistent with high school graduation rates of both countries and are indicative of the large

educational background hurdle Zimbabwean women face.

### METHOD

Photovoice provided the methodological framework for this study. According to Nyemba (2014), photovoice is defined by Wang & Buris (1997) as a research method in which people use cameras to take and discuss photographs that reflect the reality of their lives. Taking photos gives an opportunity to traditionally silenced populations to document their lives and the environment they live in (Hergenrather, Rhodes, & Pula, 2009; Novek, Oswald, & Menec, 2012).

Photovoice as a research methodology provides participants with an opportunity to take photographs that address a salient community concern and present them in group discussion that empowers them to reflect on personal and community strengths, create critical dialogue, share knowledge about personal and community issues, and develop and host a forum for the presentation of their lived experiences and priorities through self-identified images, language, and context (Hergenrather et al., p.687).

Therefore, it is an empowerment tool that can be used to link community needs with capacity building for action. As such, taking photos and

describing them gave Zimbabwean immigrant women the opportunity to critically examine their educational experiences and bring about change.

### PARTICIPANTS

Seven Zimbabwean women over the age of 18, living in Midwest America participated in the study. The demographics of the seven women are summarized in Table 3. The group was homogenous in the sense that all the women were Zimbabwean immigrants, now residing in Midwest America and also striving to fulfill their educational aspirations. Length of stay in the United States varied from two to ten years. Three of the women migrated with bachelor’s degrees from Zimbabwe and were actively exploring possibilities of furthering their studies. The remaining four women migrated with high school diplomas and were currently enrolled in colleges. Five of the seven women were married to Zimbabwean men and migrated with their families. The other two women divorced before they migrated to the United States. All the women were working at least two jobs to finance their education as well as providing for their families.

Participants were recruited formally using Facebook and telephone. Initially, a draft message describing the study was sent out to select female Facebook contacts. The researcher’s contact details (i.e., email account and phone number) were included so that interested participants could respond. Some participants were also contacted through telephone

*Table 3. Participant Demographics*

Pseudonym	Educational Level	Marital Status
Nyaradzai	Bachelors Degree	Divorced
Chiedza	Bachelors Degree	Married
Chido	Currently in Nursing School	Divorced and remarried
Edith	Pursuing a career in Fashion and Design	Married
Tariro	Currently in Nursing School	Divorced
Netsai	Currently in Nursing School	Married
Josephine	Bachelors Degree	Married

*Note.* Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants.

contacts list. The recruitment process was concluded by inviting interested individuals to attend a face to face meeting where the scope of the project and their central role as participants.

#### THE PHOTOVOICE PROCESS

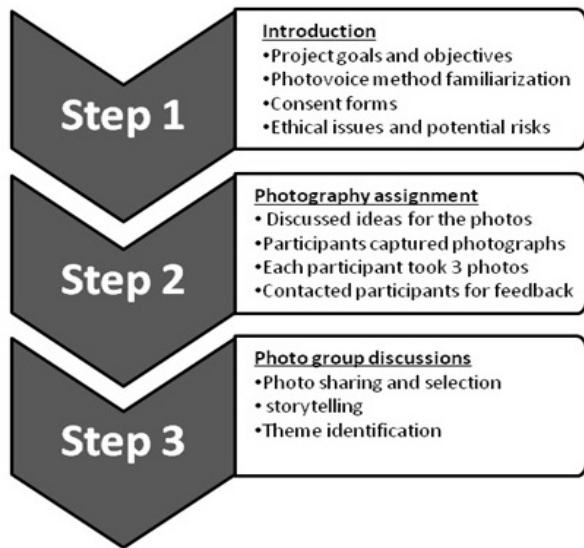


Figure 1. The Photovoice process divided into three steps

**Step One: Introducing Photovoice to Participants:** The first stage included familiarizing participants with the photovoice process. This stage was not complicated because the participants and researcher share the same native language and they were proficient in English. The researcher also translated some of the information that was new to the participants and a little bit complicated which made it easier for them to understand the photovoice process. The researcher also shared with participants some of the photovoice studies that were done to clarify the concept.

Participants were made aware that participation was voluntary and anyone was free to discontinue anytime throughout the project. Ethical

issues and potential risks to the participants during photography taking were discussed and how these risks could be minimized. The meeting also helped to introduce participants to each other and to build a trusting relationship among participants. This relationship was necessary in the final stage of photo sharing where participants were required to be open and honest when sharing their photos.

**Step Two: Photography Assignment:** A second meeting was organized to prepare participants for photograph taking.

The subject matter of the project was discussed again to help participants capture images that perfectly represented their educational experiences. Participants were given four weeks to take pictures they believed to be good illustrations of their educational experiences. Each participant was assigned to take a minimum of three pictures. Participants were however advised not to take pictures that will be a threat to their privacy. Since the University of Cincinnati IRB had concluded that the project did not involve human subjects, participants were told that all pictures should not include human beings. The researcher stayed in contact with participants throughout photograph taking period providing guidance and feedback whenever necessary. Pictures were sent to the researcher's e-mail account and some of the photos taken by participants living in the same neighborhood with the researcher were physically downloaded to the computer used for the project.

**Step Three: Photograph Sharing and Discussion:** After four weeks, a final meeting was organized for participants to share and discuss their photos. Participants brought all their photographs they wanted to share including the notes they wrote during photograph taking. The researcher facilitated the discussions and notes were recorded on flip charts.



## DATA ANALYSIS

Photographs were analyzed using three techniques suggested by Wang and Burris (1997); photo selection, contextualization and codifying.

**Photo selection.** First, each participant chose and presented two photographs they felt were most significant from their pile. This stage was very crucial as it opened the opportunity for dialogue.

**Contextualizing.** Using Freire's (2000) concept of educating for critical consciousness, the women then reflected on the photographs and shared stories on what the photographs meant to them and how they mirror their social and educational experiences. It was during this stage participants were given a voice to talk about their experiences. The **SHOWeD** approach was used to critically analyze the content of the photographs. A Power Point presentation was used to facilitate dialogue and guide the participants through the five questions of the **SHOWeD** model.

- What do you **S**ee here?
- What is really **H**appening?
- How does this relate to **O**ur lives?
- **W**hy does this problem or strength Exist?
- What can we **D**o about it?

(Wang 1999, p.188)

Each letter of the acronym corresponds to a question which prompts the participant to explain why she chose the picture and shared stories related to her educational experiences.

**Codifying.** Finally, the participants combined all their photos and grouped them according to common emerging themes selecting the best photo from each pile. The women grouped photos that showed similarities in their own

experiences. As the participants were discussing the photos, notes were recorded on flip charts to identify emerging themes. Participants agreed on the codes to use for the three identified themes. For equal representation, one photo was chosen from each participant making some themes to be represented by more than one photo in the report.

## FINDINGS

Using the photovoice data analysis approach described above, the women agreed on three themes relating to their educational experiences: 1) An increased self esteem; 2) An increased understanding of women's rights as human rights; 3) Obstacles persist. The first two themes reflected on the fact that better access to education positively transformed the Zimbabwean women's lives. Whereas the third theme reflects that even though the women are happy to be living in the United States where immigrants to a large extent acculturate into the host culture, in some cases their Zimbabwean husbands still maintained some traditional patriarchal tendencies in the household. Still under this theme, structural violence like immigration policies that are not sympathetic to immigrants was observed by participants as another major barrier to women's educational achievements.



Figure 2. Nyaradzai took this photo of a plaque to advise women to always believe in themselves.

### AN INCREASED SELF ESTEEM

The first theme to be identified as a result of photo discussion was labeled *education increases women's self esteem*. The women stated that education raises women's levels of consciousness and they begin to

believe in themselves as well as observing their surroundings critically. They begin to appreciate their “self” and are aware of their essential responsibilities in the society. Nyaradzai who took the photo shown in Figure 2 explained that, sadly, when individuals have been subjected to oppression for a very long time, they stop believing in themselves and lose the meaning of their existence. For example, Zimbabwean women were socialized to be submissive as they grow up; a situation which forces them to value men more than they value themselves. For that reason, women lose personal value and pride at an early age which in turn creates more room for men to persistently take advantage of them. This was apparent in the story she shared,

I grew up in a family where I witnessed women including my mother being violated daily. My father was very educated and had acquired a reasonable amount of wealth. My father provided for his children without doubt. We never starved like the other children I went to school with, whose fathers squandered all their earnings at beer places. Even though we lived a posh lifestyle, I was afraid of my father, there was no freedom for female children and our mother in the house. (Nyaradzai. Group Interview, 14 August 2013).

As reflected in Nyaradzai’s story, lack of education submits women to a life of imprisonment in two ways: lack of self confidence and lack of economic freedom. A supposedly easy choice like ending a bad marriage becomes impossible because culturally only the husband can divorce his wife because he paid lobola (bride price). This, according to participants, diminishes humanity as they now look like purchased commodities to be used and tossed

away when no longer effective. Participants explained that education provide economic stability through better jobs and confidence to question cultural beliefs and practices which support patriarchal domination. For instance, it is now common among educated women to request their families to refrain from the bride price tradition. Nyaradzai graduated with a Bachelor’s Degree and she feels that she has the freedom to make personal choices. She argued that even though her father was very oppressive to their mother, he provided for his children including sending them to good schools. As a result, Nyaradzai was among the few girls that never had to worry about dropping out of school to pave way for a male child’s education. Today, Nyaradzai considers herself very luck, “Unlike my uneducated mother who felt that she had to depend on her husband for survival, I can walk out of an oppressive marriage and still feel proud that I am a mother” (Nyaradzai. Group Interview, 14 August 2013).

Through Nyaradzai’s self reflection, participants also noted that low esteem creates fear among women. They do not believe that they can survive on their own without male support. Nyaradzai explained that her mother would coil back each time she interacted with their father. It was very apparent that she was afraid of him. As young children, Nyaradzai and her siblings thought their mother’s reaction was expected until they were adults and started to realize that she acted out of fear. Nyaradzai believed that marrying early and denied educational opportunities contributed to her mother’s lack of self esteem. “Several times, we would ask her for favors, like going to field trips with friends, you know little things that required money or some time away from home, and each time she would tell us that she first needed to confirm with our father” (Nyaradzai. Group Interview, 14 August 2013).

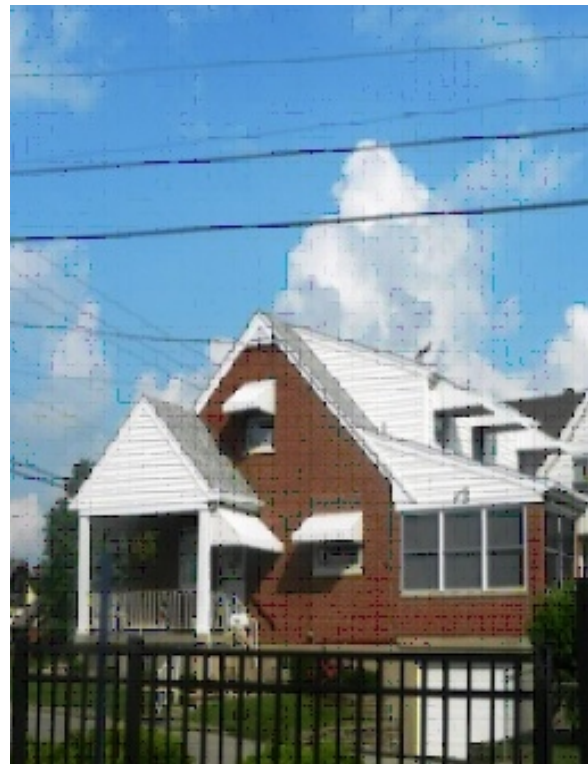
Other participants agreed with Nyaradzai that even in the event of losing a husband who was very oppressive, some of the women do not give themselves a break, they are quick to find a replacement. Particularly those young girls that get impregnated and the men refuse to marry them; they cease to find the meaning of existence. It is very common for such girls to take their own lives especially among those with little education. Tariro who faced the same situation when the man refused to marry her commended, “What these girls fail to critically understand is that having a child out of wedlock is not a humiliation at all and it also does not prevent any opportunities in the future” (Nyaradzai. Group Interview, 14 August 2013). She added that these diminished girls need to accept their situation and that single mothers like herself can take good care of their children.

When Tariro migrated to the United States without any relatives around for support, she was quick to find a male friend to help with bills. Unfortunately, the wrong man was readily available and within a few months of sharing an apartment, she got pregnant. The guy had other pursuits and marriage would slow him down so he decided to take a run leaving Tariro alone. However, Tariro realized that even though her life had changed for the worst she could change it back to normal. It was one day in the classroom when she realized she can make it on her own and ever since that day, she has been thankful that education provided her with the opportunity to always view life positively. She took the photo of a cloudless sky Figure 3 to indicate that she does not feel like there are anymore hindrances in her life now that she is educated and can make personal decisions, “At times I feel at peace that I can live a life of my own without worrying about fighting with a husband over money and telling me what to do

all the time” (Tariro. Group Interview, 14 August 2013).



*Figure 3.* This photo of a cloudless sky taken by Tariro to reflect her new freedom through education



*Figure 4.* “Women have the right to property ownership upon divorce”

## AN INCREASED UNDERSTANDING OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS AS HUMAN RIGHTS

This was an overarching theme that resonated with all the participants. They concurred that women's rights should always be discussed in reference to property ownership such as housing Figure 4 and children Figure 5. The participants noted that most women who take their ex-husbands to divorce court are generally educated and possess a better perception of their rights. It is these women that usually get an equal share of property ownership during divorce settlement. The woman that took the photography of a house Figure 4 stated that women are always kicked out of the house upon divorce leaving them homeless.



*Figure 5. Children's Playground*

This picture of children's playground was taken by Chido when she shared that the majority of uneducated Zimbabwean women still do not believe they have right to fight custody of their children upon divorce.

Chido took a photo Figure 5 of a children's playground to relate her story of losing children when her ex-husband decided to marry another wife. It took her a very long time to understand that as a mother she had the right to share

custody and can even permanently keep her children if the father is too abusive. Chido was married for nine years back in Zimbabwe and was very proud that her husband paid full bride price as culturally expected. "With three children I thought I was secure until my husband started having an affair with another young woman. At first, I did not question until my husband decided that he was marrying the woman" (Chido. Group Interview, 14 August 2013). Not surprisingly, Chido shared that no one in the family sympathized with her and even her aunts told her to just learn to co-habit with the second wife, which she did. The first few years were fine until the husband started to neglect her in favor of the new young wife. The situation got to a point where Chido decided to leave the marriage. Unfortunately, she was forced to leave her three young kids with the husband and was not even allowed to see them. This was not a new situation since culturally children belong to the father's family.

Fighting for her children looked impossible because she had no money and had no idea how to begin the process. Fortunately, for Chido she is grateful to her aunt who later helped her migrate to the United States. Chido is currently working and sending herself to a nursing school. Chido is planning to go back to Zimbabwe to fight for her children. Not only does she now possess enough finances to hire a lawyer, she is now well-informed about her rights as a woman. She advised that women not only require financial resources to fight for their freedom but they need to be the bearers of knowledge so that they can educate the society about the negative impact of gender stereotype on women.

## OBSTACLES PERSIST

A positive outcome from the photovoice group discussions was the acceptance by the women of the reality that education and emancipation cannot be regarded as free gifts but something that one has to



constantly fight for. However, they also revealed that despite all the great measures the women had taken in educating themselves, they are still faced with a lot of challenges. As a result, some women sometimes do not finish their studies or take longer than the average time frame for expected graduation. Some of the obstacles persisting include oppressive husbands and structural violence in the form of immigration



Figure 6. “Even here in the United States, our husbands still believe that our place is in the kitchen.”

*Oppressive Husbands.* Participants explained that migrating to the United States did not completely alter Zimbabwean men’s attitudes towards the position of women in the house. Edith who took the photo of a wedding flower center piece Figure 6 commented that, even though their husbands help with household chores such as cooking which was not possible in Zimbabwe, but when it comes to controlling resources, they slip back to their patriarchal

system of domination. “They still make the decision on how the financial resources should be distributed in the house” (Edith. Group Interview, 14 August 2013). As a result, participants expressed that some women still do not get support from their husbands when they decide to further their studies. Husbands in most cases would force their wives to look for jobs whilst they themselves continue to advance their education. There is still the general belief among the Zimbabwean community in the diaspora that women should be the caretakers of the homes and this implies that they should feed and clothe their families.

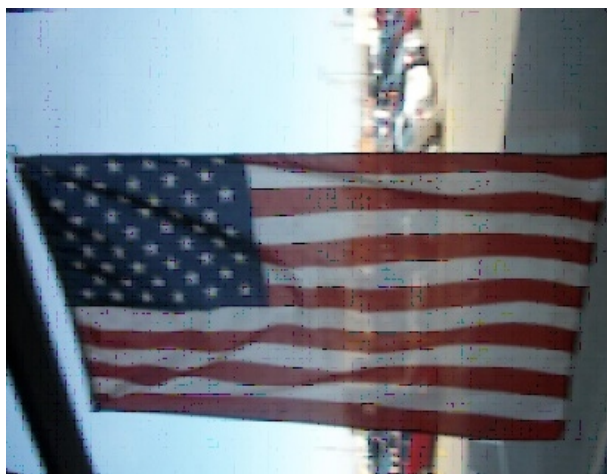
Edith is a victim of how men would prefer to pursue their educational dreams at the expense of their wives. Edith and her husband migrated to the United States in 2011. Just like every Zimbabwean immigrant, their aspirations were to take advantage of both economic and educational opportunities offered in the United States. Only Edith’s husband is benefiting whilst she is forced to make and sell clothes to pay for his education. This is her story;

The reason so far I have not been back in school is not because I don’t want to. Me and my husband sat down and discussed who should go to school first. He said okay, so you have brains in terms of fashion designing, so you can work on that while I go to school. So when he is done and we haven’t used all the money he said we can see where I am with my designing so we can look at other options like me going to school. So that’s the thing that one part goes to school first and the other one later (Edith. Group Interview, 14 August 2013).

Sadly, Edith’s husband does not seem to have completed his studies as he was not satisfied with every program he completed. Seeing that it is rather taking too long for her chance, Edith tried to solve her lack of funding by applying for scholarships but

to date she has had no luck. The women articulated that there are many others in similar situations as Edith.

*Structural Barriers.* Participants stated that when they migrated to the United States to better themselves and their families they were not aware of structural barriers that would interfere with the dream to further their education. The women all concurred that dealing with immigration policies is very challenging, “you have to present your legal status documentation all the time for access to resources”, commented Josephine who took the photo shown in Figure 7 of an American flag.



*Figure 7.* The United States flag

The women cited visa types and immigration status as structural barriers that limit women from gaining access to quality education. “For one to attend school they should possess some form of legal status residence,” commended one of the women (Josephine. Group Interview, 14 August 2013). She expressed that even though more women are migrating alone, some are still migrating under the F-2 visa which makes them dependents to their husbands. This visa type does not allow dependents to seek employment as their F-1 husbands proved to the United States consulate that they will be able to

financially provide for them during their stay in the United States. One of the participants explained that although it is possible for women to change their immigration statuses from the dependent F-2 to F-1 with help from the International Student Office, the process is still very challenging, time consuming and expensive especially when you do not have any source of income.

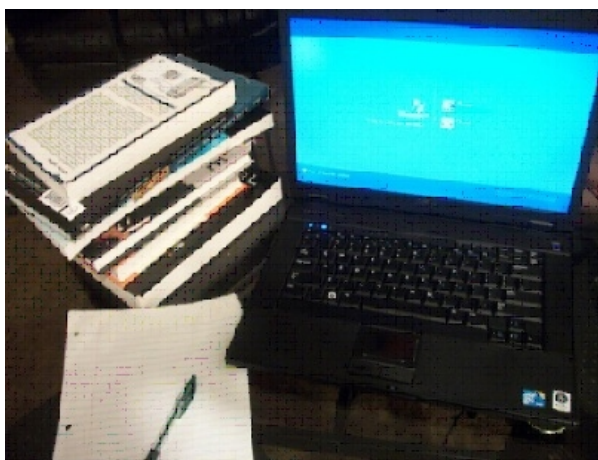


*Figure 8.* “Finishing a college degree without enough funding is a huge challenge for some of us.”

Some women migrated under the F-1 student visa status but had to leave school because the scholarships could not cover all their financial needs. Netsai who is currently pursuing a Nursing Diploma took the photo Figure 8 of a bank ATM to explain the economic challenges that interfere with immigrant women’s educational pursuits. “Some programs have limited funds which results in partial tuition scholarships and a need to make up for the remainder,” she said (Netsai. Group Interview, 14 August 2013). The F-1 international visa only

allows the women to work for 20 hours on campus at minimum wage which hardly covers their monetary requirements. It is even worse for those in undergraduate degrees because the scholarships are limited and highly competitive and also their immigration status limits them from applying for federal loans.

Furthermore, the Graduate Result Exams (GRE), Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT) and other entrance exams required by Universities and Colleges in the United States when applying for graduate school delay immigrant women from continuing with their studies. Participants expressed that the higher scores required for these entrance exams limit their enrolment for higher education. The challenge is on studying and sitting for the exams.



*Figure 9.* A photograph showing books, a computer, pen and a notepad taken by Netsai.

Netsai expressed that she sat for the GRE twice but still failed to pass with the required score needed for the program she was applying for because she was not computer literate. She said the exams are computerized which means that the individual sitting for the exam has to be computer savvy, a requirement not met by most of the women. Netsai bought her first computer

shown Figure 9, after migrating to the United States. Registering for GRE is also expensive especially when these women are not working in better paying jobs. If they fail to pass the exam for the first time, they will have to wait until they find enough funds to register again which means putting the application process on hold. Another participant explained that she has been trying to apply to college programs that do not require GREs. Unfortunately, that has limited the number of universities and programs she could apply for.

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of education as a liberating tool from gender stereotype arising from patriarchal domination. Whereas education is generally regarded as a means for one to secure a high paying job, for Zimbabwean women, education is also a 'liberating tool' from gender stereotype which continue to deny women's freedom to make personal choices in life. This was echoed in Harrell-Bond's work in which she outlined that education through books is a powerful weapon in women's battle for liberation (Harrell-Bond, 2004). In this study all the Zimbabwean women concurred that ending women's oppression involves education for critical consciousness. Access to education is both a human and a woman's right. Based on participants' reflections, the provision of equal rights to women is a difficult challenge that a lot of nations struggle with. Women and girls continue to be forgotten, neglected and discriminated against in the provision of educational opportunities. The women's stories indicated that education can provide the impetus to breakdown gender stereotype in societies and bring about freedom to women. With education, women regain self confidence and an improved understanding of their rights as women.

A common arising theme in this study was that the denial of educational opportunities for women in Zimbabwe has both historical and cultural roots. The missionaries who first settled in Zimbabwe,

followed by colonial governments have all provided education along race and gender lines. The new government following the end of colonialism did not at all change the position of women (Gaidzanwa, 1985, 1992; Gordon, 1994, 1996). Responding to the educational needs of women and girls remained a major challenge for the Zimbabwean government. It is true that the Ministry of Education successfully increased the number of schools with the hope of increasing enrollment rates for all age groups but it failed to promote favorable environments for women and girls to make personal choices regarding their education.

Zimbabwe's bride price system which affiliates women to their husband's patrilineage system forms the bases of oppression. The husband who has complete control over the wife also controls and owns the family property. Patriarchal domination ensures that men acquire all the property rights during marriage or upon divorce which includes the guardianship of children (Gaidzanwa, 1994; Kambarami, 2006). In the rural areas, even though both men and women engage in farming, men are allocated land and women will work in the farms allocated to their men (Gaidzanwa, 1994; Kambarami, 2006; Klaveren van et al., 2010). In the United States as in the case of some participants, the women still do not have the right to property ownership including the wages they have earned. As seen in Edith's story, whose husband is educating himself with her financial resources; it is unlikely that he will allow her to continue with her studies considering the fact that immigrant families barely make enough wages to put aside for savings.

Structural barriers in the form of migration policies have been noted as also impacting the women's education. The women are now fighting not just to end gender discrimination in

the house but also for the recognition of immigrant women's educational needs by political institutions. The absence of immigrant women's educational needs in politics has been criticized by McDonnell (2009) who argued that migration policies only focus on the recruitment of temporary migrants for low wage jobs that cannot be filled by native born Americans. The industry benefits from this cheap labor provided by immigrant women yet there is nothing for them in return in terms of the advancement of their social and occupational mobility (McDonnell, 2009).

Zimbabwean women migrated to the United States with the dream to emancipate themselves through education. Even though they have made greater strides compared to the situation in their home country, they are still victims of neglect. The struggle with college entrance exams as well as the limited access to resources for women with F-2 dependant visa and undocumented immigrants is clear evidence of the slow efforts by the U.S government to make education easily accessible to immigrant populations. Burnett (2005) blames Education for All (EFA) reform for its failure to provide literacy and skills to immigrant women. The policy failed to examine the educational needs for immigrant women coming from developing countries where they were already disadvantaged (Burnett, 2005).

## CONCLUSION

Zimbabwean women's resilience to the patriarchal challenges they experience is reflected through their continued efforts to educate themselves. Gaining access to education would create a Zimbabwean woman who is better equipped to meet challenges in life, including the ability to make important choices and bring about peace and tranquility in her life. The socially constructed belief that men possess all the powers in the house and the society at large is not



infinite; the women can unite and deconstruct that myth. As Freire (2000) stated:

In order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation, they must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as limiting situation which they can transform (p.49).

Therefore, by coming together and sharing personal experiences, this project offered Zimbabwean immigrant women opportunities for participation and self-determination (voice and choice), resilience education for competence and attitudes (self-efficacy) to enact personal power and control, and a skill set to help them become agents of change in their communities while living in the Diaspora (Prilleltensky, Nelson, & Pearson, 2001).

However, even after migrating to the United States some of the educational barriers persist. Relocating to the US does not immediately change their Zimbabwean husband's patriarchal way of thinking and neither does it suddenly improve their poor educational background. In addition, new issues such as such as discrimination based on race, identity and language also emerge. Despite all these impediments, the Zimbabwean women are still expected to compete with American-born women for college places. It is apparent from this photovoice study that the Zimbabwean woman has additional obstacles when compared to the American woman. The question is, do these obstacles hinder educational attainment only or they affect their overall settlement in the diaspora? Therefore, further studies are needed to examine the overall experiences of these women.

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# FACILITATING SERIOUS AND SENSITIVE CLASSROOM DISCUSSIONS THROUGH ANALOG GAMES: A PRACTITIONER'S GUIDE

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*Abstract:* Learning to dialogue across difference is a key practice in democratic education. Yet, facilitating classroom discussions on serious and sensitive topics poses a number of difficulties for educators. This article is designed as a practitioner's guide to support educators in developing their unique style and voice as they maneuver these difficulties and integrate serious and sensitive discussions into their classrooms. Specifically, this article contrasts a variety of strategies for establishing classroom discussion norms, for using games and simulations to deepen students' engagement with serious and sensitive topics, and finally for debriefing students' experiences after interacting with these games and simulations.

## INTRODUCTION

This article serves as a practitioner's guide for classroom teachers who are committed to facilitating discussions on serious and sensitive topics, and are curious to try using alternative media such as analog games (such as role-playing simulations, board games, and card games) to deepen students' engagement with difficult topics. The commitment to support students as they learn to dialogue across difference over serious and sensitive topics is crucial for democracy, but it is also fraught with pedagogical and ethical challenges (Hess & McAvoy, 2014). This is true regardless if the topic is climate change or animal rights, media representations or income disparities. As long as the topic involves the underlying question of "How should we live together?" the conversation will be deeply democratic and inherently problematic (Hess & McAvoy, 2014).

To meet these challenges educators who facilitate serious and sensitive discussions must wrestle with a number of open-ended questions:

- What is a productive response to a student who claims that the discussion triggers discomfort?
- What is a productive response to a student who brings up a topic that impacts a group of peoples (immigrant rights, for example) that are not represented within the classroom?
- What is a productive response to a student who asks the facilitator to directly share their personal opinion on the topic?
- What marks the line between a critical and an offensive comment?
- What marks the line between equitably including all voices and respecting students' decisions to not speak?
- What marks the line between defining an issue as controversial and non-controversial? (what gets selected as a serious and sensitive topic is itself a pedagogical and ethical issue)

These questions demand of the facilitator the practice of reflective judgment (getting clear about one's reasons, aims and purposes for facilitating serious and sensitive discussions) and responsive tact (being attuned to the needs and concerns of students during such discussions).

The use of alternative media (such as games and video clips) can generate thought-provoking responses to the questions of "How should we live together?" found in every controversial topic from

institutionalized racism to nuclear proliferation, as well as increase student engagement on difficult topics (Cowan & Maitles, 2012). Yet, bringing alternative media into a classroom raises its own pedagogical and ethical challenges as well: Does the media representation play forward single narratives and harmful stereotypes? Does it needlessly offend or demean others? Can students opt out of participating?

Issues of appropriateness, relevancy, timeliness, and inclusiveness all emerge with the decision to introduce alternative media into the classroom (Killham & Chandler, 2016). Indeed, how to integrate alternative media into serious and sensitive discussions is itself a serious and sensitive issue (with the underlying question of “How should we live together?”). The purpose of this article is to encourage facilitators in developing their unique style and voice for how to handle all these challenges well. To that end we offer contrasting sets of ways to establish discussion norms, to use analog games, and to debrief analog games.

#### PART 1: ESTABLISHING DISCUSSION NORMS

Discussion norms—shared expectations about how students will treat one another during discussions—are a vital starting point in any class that aims to have discussions on serious and sensitive topics (Killham & Chandler, 2016, Landis, 2008). These should be established long before any game activities are brought into the classroom.

Yet, creating a space that allows everyone to equitably and freely generate discussion norms is itself a challenge—every discussion exists in the context of power-relations that work to benefit some students while marginalizing and silencing others. If the class discussion norms are generated only by those in power (the

teacher or privileged students), then these norms may continue to reify and play forward practices that marginalize and silence students in the classroom.

For this reason, we suggest that activities designed to elicit students’ suggested discussion norms use a participation structure that includes both small-group conversations (such as pair-share) and whole-group share outs. That way all students have multiple opportunities to talk, and no one student (or teacher) can dominate the conversation from start to finish. In the following section we suggest four activities that can help facilitate the process of creating discussion norms.

#### STUDENT GENERATED NARRATIVES

Ask students to take a few moments to think about the wide range of classroom discussions they have participated in. If students are comfortable sharing, ask students to share out the worst classroom discussion that they have witnessed and speak to what made it the worst. Then ask students to share out the best classroom discussion that they have been a part of and what made it the best. Asking students to articulate both the worst and best examples of classroom discussions positions students to see their participation in discussions as a historical and social practice, one that is continuing forward into the current classroom. From this activated reflective vantage point the facilitators can then ask students how they want to treat each other during their time in this specific class together. Are there specific practices students can do to avoid the worst of the worst while aiming for the best of the best? One way to facilitate the explicit establishing of discussion norms at this point is to construct a class charter.

#### CLASS CHARTER

A charter is a public agreement that the class co-constructs together. The facilitator can say, “This is our class together. We will be discussing serious and sensitive topics with one another. How do we want

to feel during these discussions?” The facilitator can write students’ responses on a public space (wall chart, marker board, poster). Students may suggest ideas such as wanting to feel safe, respected, and included in discussions.

To help activate each suggestion the facilitator can ask the class “What does being \_\_\_\_\_ look like in the context of a class discussion?” (safe, respected, included, etc.) And just as importantly, “What does being \_\_\_\_\_ sound like in the context of a class discussion?” These questions help to clarify and nuance the meaning of, for example, safety, respect, and inclusion in the context of actual observable practices. These questions can also open up dialogue around some of the edges (as in pitfalls) of safe, respectful, and inclusive practices. When safe comes to mean the absence of hard and difficult discussions then often nothing is learned. When respect comes to mean coming-to-the-rescue for students who have been wronged in a conversation, this being stood up for can be de-dignifying and disempowering for students who would rather stand up for themselves. When inclusion comes to mean asking students to share from the perspective of their race or gender or class, then often tokenism is played forward (the myopic view that people with trait X all experience the topic of discussion in the exact same way).

After the suggestions for how students want to feel during discussions have been talked about and scribed onto the public space, the facilitator can then ask for suggestions of “what will we do together to make sure that we feel \_\_\_\_\_?” (safe, respected, included, etc.). After soliciting multiple strategies, this activity closes with students coming up to the public space to sign their names.

Having this co-constructed artifact in the room during discussions can help remind students

how they want to treat each other, and can be invoked by the facilitator or other students if the discussion begins to violate any of the norms established in the charter.

#### TED TALKS

By showing students the discussion norms that professional interviewers use to facilitate difficult yet meaningful conversations, students can compare their own life experiences (from the Student-Generated Narratives activity), and their own articulated discussion norms (from the Class Charter activity), to others’ norms, further expanding their repertoire of practices. For this purpose we recommend two TED Talks: Celeste Headlee’s “10 ways to have a better conversation” and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s “The Danger of a Single Story.” April 12, 2017

Coming in at just under 12 minutes Celeste Headlee’s talk will help to articulate the problem of invidious polarization while giving students ten actionable advice points on how to minimize polarization when having a conversation with each other. First, the problem:

So this world that we live in, this world in which every conversation has the potential to devolve into an argument, where our politicians can’t speak to one another and where even the most trivial of issues have someone fighting both passionately for it and against it, it’s not normal.

Headlee points to a Pew Research study that shows that this problem is at its worst in history—we are more divided than ever before, we are less likely to compromise, more likely to make decisions about who we will interact with based on what we believe, and that, taken together, all of this means that we are less likely to listen to one another; to actually hold a balanced conversation. What are Headlee’s remedies? She gives ten that range from don’t multitask to be brief, from don’t pontificate to don’t

equate your experience with theirs. Doing any of these—half paying attention through multi-tasking, going on and on, stating your opinion without allowing others to respond, and making someone else’s moment and experience about you—can come off as de-dignifying and disheartening to the other students.

Novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s “The Danger of a Single Story” reminds us that even if we follow all the steps that we can to become better listeners, so long as we hold singular stories of those who are speaking we will never actually hear the speaker. We will simply hear the singular story that we already hold. There are many singular stories that shape the way we think about race, gender, and class. As Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie puts it, “the single story creates stereotypes. And the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.” All other narratives become flattened and our interlocuter’s experience is never truly heard. That is, their story is never heard in a way that moves or touches us. Worse still,

The consequence of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar.

One vivid example Adichie shares that speaks to the de-dignifying consequences of the singular story is captured in the following exchange:

I recently spoke at a university where a student told me that it was such a shame that Nigerian men were physical abusers like the father character in my novel. I told him that I had just read a novel called “American Psycho” and that it

was such a shame that young Americans were serial murderers.

In this way we see that singular narratives can also follow a deficit-logic. That is, certain people or nations portrayed as lacking, as passive, as in-need-of-being-saved-or-empowered, and so on.

Listening to Adichie’s inspiring talk and the variety of stories she tells about Nigeria to battle the otherwise singular stories of this country can provide students with insight into how to deepen their listening and empathy skills, and thus, how to hold better conversations. Furthermore, attending to where multiple narratives are present or absent helps students to critically engage with representations in news media, social media posts, games, and other cultural artifacts about serious and sensitive topics that are one-sided, incomplete, and deficit-based.

#### PERFORMING CURIOSITY

Cathy Rose Salit (2016) offers an activity designed to help workers learn to listen and collaborate better with each other. We believe this activity can be productively adapted to help students engage in serious and sensitive conversations together. In this activity pairs of individuals are given a controversial topic that they hold different points of view on (Salit uses the example of whether or not soda manufacturers should be allowed to sell sugary drinks in schools). The first individual makes a statement in support or against the topic under discussion and the second student is only allowed to ask curious questions in response. A curious question must be open-ended (not answerable by a quick yes or no), connected to the first individual’s statement (which is the source of the curiosity), and genuine (not an opinion disguised as a question).

To follow Salit’s example, if the first student claims that soda manufacturers should be allowed to sell their drinks in schools and the second student responds by asking if the first student thinks cigarette companies should sell their products in

schools as well, then the second student has failed to perform curiosity. Instead, they have asked a yes-or-no question that moves away from the source of curiosity (soda manufacturers' rights), and that utilizes rhetoric over a genuine question. Salit's advice is to teach individuals not to ask questions that start with *Do* or *Don't* but rather with *Why*, *How*, *Who*, *Where*, or *What*. Asking why someone holds the opinion they do, how they reached that opinion, and what events in their own life have shaped their opinions all help to perform curiosity and keep a discussion open rather than prematurely shut-down by rhetoric or ridicule.

Taken together, these four activities can be used individually or in combination to support students in creating discussion norms together as well as to become better listeners together. Once discussion norms have been established they can be meaningfully invoked to prime positive discussions ahead of time or to resolve and settle disputes that arise when a discussion norm is violated.

For practical examples of how discussion educators can do this well we point readers to Kay Landis' (2008) *Start Talking: A Handbook for Engaging Difficult Dialogues in Higher Education* (see pages 12–17 at <https://www.uaa.alaska.edu/café/difficult-dialogues/upload/2-Ground-Rules.pdf>).

## PART 2: LEARNING THROUGH GAMES

The first section presents a variety of activities designed to help students articulate intentional discussion norms for shaping positive classroom interactions on topics that are serious and sensitive. This next section focuses on the relationship between game-based activities and classroom discussions on difficult topics. This relationship is robust enough that three different case-studies of games will be analyzed:

- Games as *participatory simulations* in which students expand their understanding of a controversial topic by playing characters who relate to the controversial topic in different ways yet are positioned to deliberate across these differences within the game.
- Games as *cultural artifacts* in which players can engage with and critique how well a game does justice to its representation of a controversial topic
- Games as *discussion modifiers* in which the classroom discussion itself is game-ified to allow players to (ideally) improve and sustain discussions.

Joli Sandoz will present her facilitation of *Troubled Lands* (Fennewald & Kievit-Kylar, 2015), our game as participatory simulation case study, Gabriel de los Angeles will present his facilitation of *Two Rooms and a Boom* (Gerding & McCoy, 2013), our game as cultural artifact case study, David Phelps will present his use of *Parrhesia* (Phelps, 2008), our game as *discussion modifier* case-study and Tom Fennewald will close our case studies with a discussion on how to facilitate productive debrief sessions after a classroom plays a game together.

### TROUBLED LANDS: TALKING ABOUT COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Midway through a ten-week quarter, I (Joli) wanted students in a course exploring connections between public policy and community resilience to think about two concepts: social dilemma, and governance (as a term with broader application than “government”). Games as learning activities can provide opportunity for hands-on investigation of specific concepts, and gameplay can result in shared experiential referents that support subsequent discussions and other work to deepen and broaden knowledge.

A number of simulations and computer and analog games address policy issues, social dilemma, and governance. I eventually settled on a card game entitled *Troubled Lands* (Fennewald & Kievit-Kylar, 2015) on the basis of its story and assigned inequities between players. The game encourages player interaction, which supports social construction of knowledge; provides flexible win conditions allowing comparison of three simulated governance approaches; and is designed specifically to elicit social dilemma. Practical considerations of simplicity of rules, relatively short play length (20 to 30 minutes for each playing option), ease of set up, and no-cost print-and-play online availability of game materials also factored into the choice.

*Troubled Lands* participants manage a grid of 12 plots of commonly-held farm and forest land in various states of productivity ranging from eroded to ready-to-harvest. Each of the three players takes on a role which differs from the others in terms of allowable actions and rewards (points scored), resulting in in-game inequalities. Gameplay can be competitive (each of the three players trying to outscore the others), collaborative (players work together to score the highest number of points they collectively can), or independent (players compete not against players at their own table but against their character counterparts (all players who share their same role) at every other table). The latter requires each player repeatedly to decide whether to maximally increase their own score at the expense of other players, or to choose to help others with the ultimate result of scoring fewer points individually while creating a more equitable player community in terms of achievement (points scored by each player in the group), and a healthier metaphorical land (Fennewald & Kievit-Kylar, 2015; Fennewald,

2015; Phelps, Fennewald, Jameson & Sheepy, 2016).

During the week before playing *Troubled Lands*, course participants discussed the difference between government and governance; we relied on Seyle and King's (2014) definition of governance as "[formal or informal] processes by which any complex activity or system is coordinated" (20), and considered game rules as policies for the highly-abstracted actual systems of land management represented by the game. We also watched two short videos explaining the concept of the commons, and read and discussed a *Science Magazine* article, "Revisiting the Commons: Local Lessons, Global Challenges." (Lead article author Elinor Ostrom won the 2009 Nobel Prize in Economics for work analyzing policies and practices related to grassroots governance of *local natural resources around the globe*.) Next, with game designer Tom Fennewald present via an online video call, we played the collaborative, competitive, and independent versions of the game across two class meetings.

Students took part in written and oral debriefings after the first and third play sessions. The following debrief statements suggest that a number of different students were able to explore connections between public policy and community resilience within the context of real-world issues:

Playing [*Troubled Lands*] helped me to understand concepts . . . in a real life construct, making me further reflect on different societal values/goals and the importance of agency and collective responsibility.

In the case of [*Troubled Lands*], we were able to 'try on' different policy practices or orientations, and were quickly (in a matter of hours) able to identify and discuss unhealthy/concerning behaviors and patterns.



Policy affects everyone differently. Some policies affect one person more harshly than others.

I noticed in our last round [independent gameplay], that openly talking about inequality when “all members of the society” [all players] were present allowed for a peaceful and effective and fair solution to the problem. More so, I imagine, than if the privileged members decided for the less privileged, or than if the underprivileged simply requested a resolution on their behalf. The collaboration approach allowed for empathy.

I think [playing *Troubled Lands*] really showed . . . [that] if we all worked together and helped each other, we may get a little less for ourselves but improve everyone’s wellbeing overall.

Taken together, students’ debrief comments demonstrate that the faculty goal of stimulating knowledge-making related to public policy and community resilience was met through the play experience of *Troubled Lands* as a participatory simulation.

#### *TWO ROOMS AND A BOOM: TALKING ABOUT REPRESENTATIONS OF VIOLENCE IN THE MEDIA*

In a recent college class at The Evergreen State College that was focused on game design, I (Gabriel), and my colleague, David, were invited to talk and teach about our philosophies and frameworks of game design. Following my introduction, I gave a short talk on designing with embodiment and affect, as well as making responsible, respectful, and reciprocal relationships with players in mind—three Rs that came out of work with indigenous young people at a STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics) program in the previous years

that continue to fuel my thinking today. After that short framing, we jumped into game play and eventually to the game that I had brought for the class to play, *Two Rooms and a Boom* (Gerding & McCoy, 2013). I selected *Two Rooms and a Boom* for play because of the physical and social interaction it would require for play. However, the class was much larger than the thirty players that would allow for, so in a decision on the fly for those who had not planned on having heavy social interaction be a part of their class time, I opened up the game activity to not only have players but have note-taking observers, giving those who did not want to play a legitimate critical peripheral space, a move that I will now use in future classroom game sessions.

*Two Rooms and a Boom* is a hidden roles party game for six to 30 players where a person in a role of the President is protected or blown up by the Bomber at the end of several rounds of deduction and body exchange between the two rooms. This setting became the discussion point following the game, which was declared overall as fun and that the students would play it again if given the opportunity. They also talked about the game as being possibly offensive or unethical given the terrorist activity centered narrative and, at the time, the current social and political climate regarding ISIS and the US. One student wondered if creators of violent games felt bad about their contributions to game design while at the same time thinking that games that own their position in ethically grey or black designs could be valuable learning tools. Bringing ethics to the forefront helped one student “focus on narratives and their role within power, privilege, and difference within the context of game design” as well as wonder if there are “situations where designing responsibly involves tasteful upheaval of what is traditionally considered ethical or not ethical.” Players were not the only ones getting deep thinking in on this game. Those who were observers noted

that the activity of being an observer allowed them to “engage in their particular curiosities about ramifications of the game’s design without being restricted by the game rules” as well as missing information by not participating, as the game “seemed more like a game of experience.”

This game gave me the chance to see a group game not designed for critical thinking being examined for deeper meanings and effects as a cultural artifact based on a primer of embodiment, affect, and relationality as well as the chance to create a third position in a social game, one of outside observer/ethnographer, which I will use again in any and all game playing and analyzing scenarios.

#### *PARRHESIA*: TALKING WITH FOUCAULT ABOUT POWER RELATIONS

As an undergraduate, I (David) participated in a seminar on the philosophy of Michel Foucault that met daily for a month. The reading list was intense, if only because Foucault’s theories of power are dense and complex. The discussions were even more intense as the class bounced from serious topic to serious topic—from the meaning of gender relations, to the production of knowledge, to the institutionalization of inequities—all considered within the context of Foucault’s perspective of power as a decentered yet consolidating flow. Spending over three hours a day in close quarters with classmates struggling to make sense of readings that themselves focused on power relations, I became hyper-aware of moments when discussion became one-sided, when certain students were silenced, and when rhetorical rants and semantic policing overtook genuine dialogue. In light of our imbalanced discussions I proposed to the teacher the idea of creating a card game that would be based on Foucault’s notions of power (by allowing students to enact

new power relations) while at the same time would interrupt the detrimental ways power was being consolidated during conversation.

Using the backs of business cards (as improvised materials) I drafted a set of conversation cards, enough for players (students and the teacher) to each be dealt three random cards at the beginning of our facilitated discussions. The rules state that the cards can be played at any point of the discussion—they are laid face up on the table and read out loud. Depending on what the card did students could, for example, call out a fellow player who was ranting, or stop someone who was monopolizing the floor. Some cards allowed students to request a break to think while other cards featured Foucault puns to counterbalance Foucault’s dense writing with some lightheartedness. Otherwise the discussion proceeded as normal, with cards being played at strategic moments.

After the first day of piloting this game, one student pointed out that they felt one of the created cards was problematic and could be played in a way that would allow for further abuse and silencing. Another student pointed out that there were still problems with the discussion that the current set of cards did not address. These insights led to a group discussion in which cards were nominated to be removed from the game, and new cards were proposed to be added in. In this way the game evolved after every round of play. This process of evolving the deck of cards supported students in getting clearer and clearer about the specific ways in which power flowed in our seminar, and gave students the agency to impact these flows of power.

I now call the game *Parrhesia*, a Greek term Foucault invokes to refer to frank, authentic and dangerous speech acts (Phelps, 2008). The rules are the same: players create a deck of cards, randomly deal out three to each player at the beginning of a discussion, can play their cards at any strategic moment, and after the game ends can collaborate to

remove problematic cards and propose new cards to be added. The game has value beyond Foucault seminars and can be used as an add-on to moderate small-group discussions on any

controversial topic that ultimately asks “how should we live together?” To help facilitators get started with this game, instructions and example cards that have evolved over iterative use are included in Figure 1.

Figure 1. *Parrhesia* Print and Play Materials



### PART 3: DEBRIEF: UNFORGETTABLE CONVERSATION AND QUESTIONS

Now that we have seen a variety of games that support classroom discussions in different ways let us consider the kinds of meaningful questions that can help students unpack their gameplay experiences and connect them back to larger controversial issues.

Debrief, which can include open conversation, directed questioning, and knowledge consolidation, is often one of the most important—and often one of the most forgotten—ways to support and solidify game-based learning. As Crookall (2010) points out, educators have long included debrief and conversation activities following films and readings, yet many serious game designers and teachers who use serious games neglect the inclusion of debrief

activities to ensure that players have reflected on the requisite material (Crookall, 2010). But, as with great works of literature, games often do not make their messages explicit and rich learning opportunities can be hidden gems buried inside of an entertaining experience waiting to be uncovered. Just as debrief can support recognizing metaphors and symbolism in literature and making connections between literature and life, the same is true of debrief for many games. This is particularly true of games used to support reflection on social justice values as in the above case studies that used *Troubled Lands*, *Two Rooms and a Boom*, and *Parrhesia* (in contrast to games which aim only to train a skill as one might from a math game aimed to teach multiplication skills). In addition to supporting the recognition of metaphors and real life connections, debrief is important in game based learning because the non-linear, non-didactic, open-ended nature of educational games such as these also means that experiences and interpretations can vary greatly from player to player; one of the greatest opportunities for learning can be a discussion in which players consider how their experiences differ and why. Open ended games provide amazing affordances for engaging players in self-paced, reflective learning, but with the double edged sword that players can miss out on making the discoveries that designers and educators intend; this liability can be combated with debrief that centers players on central metaphors, and on the interpretations that others have.

#### SEVERAL APPROACHES TO DEBRIEF

Nicholson (2012) provides a number of models for debriefing after game activities:

Quinsland & Ginkel, (1984), inspired by Bloom's taxonomy:

1. Ask what happened (Knowledge and Comprehension)
2. Ask what was done (Application and Analysis)
3. Discuss approach and solutions (Synthesis)
4. Ending with open discussion (Evaluation and Opinion)

Kolb (2001):

1. Discuss feelings and experience
2. Discuss the viewpoints of others
3. Connect to concepts already explored in class
4. Establish real world connections

Greenway (1993) has a similar four-stage approach:

1. Experience: describe the objective experience
2. Express: about the emotions felt
3. Examine: in which analysis of the scenario is undertaken
4. Explore: in which connections to the real world are made

Thiagarajan (2004) suggests debriefing an activity using this particular order:

1. Feelings
2. What happened
3. What was learned
4. Connection to the real world
5. How learning might be applied outside the game
6. Plans for next steps

Effective debrief need not follow any of these models strictly, but should ultimately have elements that focus players on making connections that support long term learning and connections which can be built upon later. In addition to discussion about actions, feelings, and connections to real life, I (Tom) also suggest asking questions that are specific to the game. For example with *Troubled Lands* and games like it, I recommend questions such as:

- Is there a right thing to do in this game?
- When did you help others during the game? And why?
- How were decisions made? Did some people have more power than others?
- Who had the most resources or abilities? Was it fair?
- Is this game ethical?
- Would you play this game differently next time? What would you do differently?
- What did you learn or think about?
- How is the game like or not like real life?
- How would you change the game?

Questions that meta-critique the game, for example: “How would you change the game?” or “In what ways is the game like or not like real life?” are particularly useful in positioning players not only as consumers, but also as creators and critics. In the case of *Two Rooms and a Boom* the most productive meta-critique question for students was, “is this an ethical game?” Such questions aim to drive imagination and evaluation, positioning players as critical consumers of the game as an artifact.

## DEBRIEFED, BUT NOT YET DONE

Debrief is not the best final step. It is best if you can use a game and a debrief as an introduction to other activities or as something that can be referred back to. If possible I strongly recommend you utilize non-didactic activities when you want to provide a rich, visceral context and experience, which you will have less as a stand alone experience, but rather as a stage for a debrief, which you treat as the centerpiece. Likewise, a debrief is best utilized not when treated as a final step, but rather as setting the stage for other activities, and common reference in the future. Thus, if possible, maximize use of your debrief as a pre-brief, foreshadowing questions and investigations to come. For example, a debrief about *Two Rooms and a Boom* could precede a lesson on terrorism or the secret service, making questions about life sacrifice a good point to end on. Likewise, debrief on *Troubled Lands* could precede play of a government simulation, making questions about how to design government a great classroom inquiry.

## CONCLUSION

Taken together, this practitioner’s guide has presented contrasting ways to establish discussion norms, to integrate analog games into classroom discussions, and to lead a debrief session. We hope that the variety of facilitation practices gathered together here have sparked new ideas for facilitators who are still developing their unique voice and style.

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# SERVICE-LEARNING FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD: EDUCATING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

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*Abstract:* With focus on improving democracy and supporting the social sustainability of society through the work for social justice, this position paper explores the implementation and impact of service-learning in schools as an effective pedagogical model for educating for service to the public good. A social justice pedagogical model with emphasis on development of critical consciousness provides a framework for educators dedicated to education for social change. Meta-analysis studies show impact of service-learning programs yielding high mean effects for students' academic communication, leadership, and problem solving skills, as well as attitudes toward self, interest in civic engagement, and enhanced social skills. An example of a single service-learning case, facilitated by a high school Business and Technology teacher in southeastern USA, and inspired by *Dream of a Nation* resources, is described. Standards for Quality Service Learning Practice are referenced to show how successful Service Learning programs and projects can be effectively embedded within academic curricula to inform, inspire, and engage students in service to the public good.

*Keywords:* service-learning, public good, civic engagement, social justice, *Dream of a Nation*, quality service-learning standards, social sustainability

## INTRODUCTION

“Acts of service are the dues we pay for  
living in a democracy.”  
Marian Wright Edelman

This paper seeks to advance the vision for a stable, socially-sustainable world through the education of youth for service to the public good with emphasis on the work for social justice within an evolving, democratic society. In such a world, education is an integral part of the democratic process dedicated to

building society grounded in the equality, quality of life, and growth of its citizens. Broadly defining *social justice* as a peaceful and stable condition of society wherein fair and just relations exist between individuals and society, this position paper visions a society wherein students learn to serve the public good while they are in school, then continue to serve as they move into later years of service in their community and larger world. Toward achieving this vision, the implementation of service-learning programs in the schools are described and supported herein as effective pedagogical approaches and learning strategies for building and supporting a socially-just-sustainable nation and world.

## SERVICE-LEARNING FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD

There are many pedagogical explanations for what it is for a student to “learn,” and a teacher, to “teach.” There are even more definitions as to how it is that one might be taught to “serve.” Multiple theories of teaching, learning, and serving are formulated at different levels of abstraction and from a mass of interdisciplinary fields. Nevertheless, those who educate generally accept that teachers teach by facilitating (learning) and that when students learn (from instruction and/or experience), they *change* behaviorally, or in the capacity for behavior. . .for the purpose of future application (Fincher, 1978). Succinctly, *service-learning* definitions fit appropriately within these curricular jurisdictions of teaching, learning, and application.

Citing her Cipolle (2004) definition for service-learning, Cipolle (2010), in her book, *Service-Learning and Social Justice: Engaging Students in Social Change*, defines service-learning this way:

Service-learning is a learning strategy in which students have leadership roles in thoughtfully organized service experiences that meet real needs in the community. The service is integrated into the students' academic studies with structured time to research, reflect, discuss, and connect their experiences to their learning and their worldview. (p. 4)

However variously service-learning may be defined, its effective implementation and impact in schools and communities is evidenced by extensive research as notions of what it is to learn expand to include sociocultural issues as the fundamental drivers of thinking and learning. Indeed, whole communities of practice, as well as fields of teaching and learning are enlarging their notions of what it is to learn in the contemporary world (Shoenfeld, 2016). Importantly, *service-learning for social justice* set within the sociocultural context of the learner, the teacher, the school, and the community implies the importance of what goes on in the mind of the learner as an important determinant of the learner's interactions and motivations for service to the public good. Applicably, service-learning for social justice today befits curriculum that supports the improvement of democracy and sustainable society even as educator, Paulo Friere (1997) implied the relevance of service-learning in his description of the work for freedom in Brazil during the economic crises of the 1980s:

Only the improvement of democracy, which implies overcoming social injustice, can demonstrate how worthwhile all the hope (we put into the fight was). . . . We now need to consolidate democracy, shore up its institutions, ensure a return to development, ensure economic balance, with which we may

face the social problems that afflict us. (p. 107)

In agreement, when visioning the improvement of democracy and the social-sustainability of world civilization, the visionary community-builder, Daniel Raphael (2015a) implies the critical importance of service-learning at work in the schools and communities of the world as citizens at local levels unite to build relationships, establish connections, and problem-solve around common goals in unified, sustainable ways. He enlightens, "A sustainable society exists as an integrated system of all the social systems of that society" (p. 19). For democracy to improve, and society to sustain, Raphael emphasizes that the timeless values that sustain society and the foundation for making democratizing problem-solving decisions are the same—rightfully based on the fundamental rights of humans to *equality, quality of life, and growth*. It is at the local level of aggregate society where contributions to the larger society are made. . . as citizens join together around united beliefs, assumptions, and intentions (Raphael, 2015b) to progress (and to sustain) society. In such a world, *education becomes an act of social justice* as teachers seek to connect curriculum to students' lives and the world around them while guiding them in critical inquiry, reflection, and action to identify and solve social problems, and teaching, then, becomes an act of resistance against injustices (Giroux, 1988; cited in Cipolle, 2010).

Understanding student development for service is supported in human development research that reveals that changes in personal identity play key roles in determining behavior (Newman, 1996). Clearly, research shows that students who learn to serve society while they are in school are more likely to continue to engage civically in service when they are no longer in school (Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, & Stephens, 2003). In such a manner, service-learning experiences in school become the



underpinning for personal identity development, the development of one's sense of self, and one's future moral and civic engagement. Further, service-learning allows students to increase their impact in their schools and communities not only through their work while they are in school, but also, by increasing their connection to community, promoting racial understanding, and cultivating a dedication to future service for social justice (Astin, Sax, & Avalos, 1999; Billig, 2000; Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, & Stephens, 2003; Eyler & Giles, 1999). Among highly altruistic adolescents, those who are especially morally and civically committed to service are more likely to identify with moral and civic concerns at the level of their ideal self (Hart & Fegley, 1995, cited in Colby & Damon, 1992).

#### SERVICE-LEARNING AND CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Cipolle (2010) observed that when an individual develops a social justice orientation to service, the task then is to mature in *critical consciousness* as responsible and committed citizens who will work to overcome injustices perpetuated in society. However, she also noted that service-learning experiences alone will not guarantee development of a commitment to social justice. It is when students develop a sense of critical consciousness that service-learning becomes transformative in nature. Aptly, Cipolle's *service-learning for social justice model* fostered the development of critical consciousness for those willing to progress such a transformative path.<sup>1</sup> She offered the following four essential "stage" elements directed toward development of a social justice orientation to service and to a maturing *critical consciousness*:

1. *Self Awareness*. Achieving a deeper self-awareness means having a clear under-

standing of your level of privilege, your values, your role in society, and your responsibility to others. (Participation in service and discussions about moral and civic obligations help individuals clarify their values and become committed to work for the common good.)

2. *Awareness of Others*. Young people, working alongside adults, confronting issues of poverty and discrimination, see social justice work as a possibility for themselves. It provides a basis for them to see their own privilege and power and examine how their actions can contribute to or fight against the status quo.
3. *Awareness of Social Issues*. As students inform themselves on social, economic, and political issues, they question beliefs and assumptions that no longer provide adequate explanations for reality.
4. *Ethic of Service/Change Agent*. Effective Service-learning helps students see their potential to make change. Having many positive service experiences enhances their feelings of competency and efficacy. Doing important work that has real impact on people and the community develops a sense of agency—the belief that one can make a difference. Students develop an ethic of service and adopt it as part of their identity when they work with friends in a culture that values it. People who have a clear sense of their values are more likely to live in accordance with their beliefs, and individuals who regard service as a part of their identity are more likely to connect their personal commitment to service with a profession where they can make a social contribution. (Cipolle, 2010, pp. 9–12)

Cipolle (2010) discriminated between *service-learning*, *community service*, and *critical service*

learning as programs are introduced into the schools. The differences between *community service*, *service-learning*, and *critical service-learning* are explained by examples offered by the National Youth Leadership Council ([www.nylc.org](http://www.nylc.org)). The following examples illustrate how critical service-learning intersects with the goal of social transformation through the use of teaching strategies such as critical analysis, reflection, and action, while at the same time, the social justice component is embedded within activities to foster the development of critical consciousness and student action for social change:

- Cleaning up a riverbank is (COMMUNITY SERVICE).
- Sitting in a science classroom looking at water samples under a microscope is (LEARNING).
- Science students taking samples from local water sources, then analyzing the samples, documenting the results and presenting the scientific information to a pollution control agency is (SERVICE-LEARNING).
- Science students creating public service announcements to raise awareness of human impact on water quality in order to change community attitudes and behavior is (CRITICAL SERVICE-LEARNING) (pp. 4–5).

#### THE IMPACT OF SERVICE-LEARNING IN THE SCHOOLS

Beginning in 1987, only a handful of schools were interested in integrating service-learning within prescribed curriculum (Campus Compact, 2009). But in September, 1998, a strong position paper was issued by the *Communitarian Network* and the *George Washington University Institute for Communitarian Policy Studies*

calling on the USA Administration and Congress to pursue an agenda to make service-learning a reality in schools nationwide *on a voluntary basis* (Anderson, 1998). The lengthy document, titled, *Service Learning: A National Strategy for Youth Development*, begins:

All young people should have available to them the opportunity to engage in community service as part of K–12 and higher education. That is, they should have an opportunity to participate in Service Learning. Whether coordinated by schools or by community-based organizations, Service Learning is community service integrated into an organized curriculum and accompanied by systematic reflection, and it should be promoted and offered within educational institutions (p. 2).

Further, in the position paper (Anderson, 1998), service-learning is recommended for the purpose of building common bonds, a sense of community, and healing inter-group tensions, and the need for service-learning is well established through a thorough review of the literature that supports and explains *why* service-learning is such an integral part of *youth development*. Basic definitions and examples of service-learning are described, questions are answered, guidelines for quality service-learning, assessment of effectiveness, and implementation of service-learning programs are offered, and a national campaign to promote service learning is recommended.

By 2011, service-learning (as a pedagogical model that integrates students' community service with their academic studies) had become an integral part of USA curriculum that boasted more than 1,100 schools (Campus Compact, 2009). Consistently, research shows that the implementation of quality service-learning programs in the schools usually has a positive influence on the community receiving services, on the educational institution hosting the

program (though enhanced and engaging curriculum offerings), and on the student participants who may benefit personally, socially, or academically (Billig, 2009; Conway, Amel, & Gerwien, 2009; White, 2001).

In *A Meta-analysis of the Impact of Service-Learning on Students* published in *The Journal of Experiential Education* (Celio, Durlak & Dymnicki, 2011), sixty-seven service-learning studies involving 11,837 students were reviewed, analyzed, and compared to assess student outcomes associated with the impact of service-learning programs in the schools and to identify the factors associated with the more effective programs. The data indicated that, compared to controls, students participating in service-learning programs in the schools demonstrated significant gains in the following five outcome areas: attitudes toward self, attitudes toward school and learning, civic engagement, social skills, and academic performance. In addition, findings showed a relatively high mean effect for academic performance ( $ES = 0.435$ ) supporting the use of well-conducted service-learning programs in improving K–12 students' academic communication, leadership and problem solving skills (Billig, 2009; Giles & Eyer, 1994; Markus, Howard, & King, 1993). Telling examples of the social-emotional growth of the students participating in the service-learning programs confirmed that students who demonstrated increases in self-esteem and self-concept also more highly internalized moral standards, showed more positive attitudes toward school and education, showed greater interest in, commitment to, and sensitivity toward their communities and their needs, and held stronger beliefs that one can make a difference in the world (Billig, Root, & Jesse, 2005). In sum, the

meta-analysis data confirmed the predictions that certain practices such as linking to curriculum, student-voice, community involvement, and reflection were associated with better service-learning outcomes (Billig, 2009; Conway, Amel, & Gerwien, 2009; White, 2001).

Consequently, the following four recommended practices for the implementation of quality service-learning programs in the schools were published (Celio, Durlak, & Dymnicki, 2011). Quality service-learning programs: (a) link service-learning to academic and program curriculum; (b) incorporate youth voice; (c) involve community partners; and (d) provide opportunities for reflection. The research studies that support the recommended practices are noted in Table 1.

#### SERVICE-LEARNING STANDARDS FOR QUALITY PRACTICE

Robust efforts to identify effective service-learning practices began in 1998 when the National Service-Learning Cooperative created an initial list of 11 essential elements of service-learning (National Service-Learning Cooperative, 1998). The list was revised and updated and became *the K–12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Practice* wherein standards with indicators are designed to link *meaningful service* to curriculum standards (Celio, Durlak, & Dymnicki, 2011). These standards are consistent with the views of leading proponents of service-learning concerning recommended practices for effective service-learning programs (Billig, 2009).

Importantly, meaningful service actively engages students in meaningful and personally-relevant service activities. For example: “Service-Learning encourages participants to understand their service experiences in the context of the underlying societal issues being addressed” ([www.nylc.org](http://www.nylc.org)) as service is effectively linked to curriculum (and as service-

Table 1. *Research Studies that Support the Recommended Practices*

<p>1. Outline clearly for students the service-learning program goals and objectives. These goals and objectives should be aligned with academic curriculum and program activities. The effect of this recommended practice is reported in the literature as the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Stronger student academic engagement and performance outcomes (Billig, Root, &amp; Jesse, 2005)</li> <li>b. Larger increases in problem-solving skills (Conrad &amp; Hedin, 1982)</li> <li>c. Improved learning and satisfaction with the program (Hamilton &amp; Zeldin, 1987)</li> <li>d. Greater transfer of learning to multiple contexts (Boss, 1994)</li> </ul>
<p>2. Provide youth with a strong voice in planning, implementing and evaluating their service-learning experiences (with guidance from adults). The effect of this recommended practice is reported in the literature as the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Students who choose what issues to address in their service-learning projects make greater gains in civic knowledge (Billig, Root, &amp; Jesse, 2005)</li> <li>b. Engagement in service-learning is a strong predictor of multiple positive outcomes, including improving self-efficacy, becoming attached to school and community, valuing academics, and becoming more civically engaged in general (Melchior &amp; Bailis, 2002; Perry &amp; Katula, 2001)</li> </ul>
<p>3. Develop community partnerships and solicit and accept community input on the desired elements and goals of service projects. The effect of this recommended practice is reported in the literature as the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Service-learning benefits both the community partners and students (Gray, et.al., 1998; Harwood &amp; Radoff, 2009)</li> <li>b. Strong community partnerships are associated with long-term program sustainability (Ammon, Furco, Chi, &amp; Middaugh, 2002; Billig, 2002; Kramer, 2000)</li> </ul>
<p>4. Provide opportunities for reflection. The effect of this recommended practice is reported in the literature as the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Some studies have found that reflection is associated with students' experiencing increased self-confidence and engagement in school, greater civic knowledge and social responsibility, and more caring relationships with others (Anderson, 1998; Billig, Root, &amp; Jesse, 2005; Blyth, Saito, &amp; Berkas, 1997)</li> </ul>

learning is intentionally used as an instructional strategy to meet learning goals and/or content standards). Convincingly, the National Youth Leadership Council (NYLC) views service-learning to be the vehicle for empowerment through which students become valuable sources

of information and resources as they contribute to the well-being of their communities. Each year, NYLC conducts training sessions for students and teachers, hosts the National Service-Learning Conference, and supports research and project implementation.

## SERVICE-LEARNING AT THE CLASSROOM LEVEL WITH *DREAM OF A NATION*

The introduction of meaningful, self-selected service-learning projects in one teacher's high school classes was a new and novel approach for teacher and students in a ninth grade Business and Technology course at a large high school in southeastern USA. The teacher, who had never attempted to teach academic standards by way of service-learning projects, was excited about the possibilities for inspiring her students to apply their business and technology skills to problem-solving projects at their school and in their community. Students were introduced to national problem issues with emphasis on building a better America through the *Dream of a Nation (Dream)* resources at [www.dreamofanation.org/educators/](http://www.dreamofanation.org/educators/).<sup>2</sup> *Dream* is a national civic-engagement and education initiative dedicated to amplifying awareness of social, environmental and economic issues while drawing attention to solutions. Dream resources and themes<sup>3</sup> describe the most prevalent and pressing crises currently affecting the USA, including...poverty...public health...failing schools...abandoned elders, children, and veterans...and more...(Hawken, 2011). Each issue is introduced with documented facts concerning the crisis issues, inspiring essays by civically-engaged leaders of the past and present, and multitudes of examples of students and communities who are engaging in problem-solutions. The teacher articulated her teaching objective as the following:

Students who actively participate in the service-learning Dream projects will meet course standards for this Business and Technology course as they grow in those basic social skills that foster democratic worldviews of respect for people of all races and cultures.

Students were given opportunities to self-select a service-learning project based on the issue that were most meaningful to them. Teams of six to eight students (Dream Teams) worked together during class sessions to research their selected issues and to brain-storm together for solutions that they might initiate in their school and/or community. Class assignments included team discussions and debates, readings, reflective journaling activities, creation of media presentations (speeches, posters, brochures, videos), letter writing to public officials, and more. Throughout the semester, the teacher integrated academic curriculum standards for the Business and Technology course with the Dream service-learning project activities. The most popular national crisis issues chosen by the students for their service-learning projects included service to both their high school and their community (see Table 1 for list of most often chosen Dream projects. Asterisks denote Cipolle's discriminating categories).

Academic grades for the students' service-learning projects were assigned based on final reflective papers and active participation in their service-learning projects. Counting as the final exam, the two components equaled 20 percent of the students' course grade. The remaining portion of course grade was based on daily assignments and student performance on Curriculum Standards tests through which students demonstrated mastery of the Business and Technology state standards for the course. After the course was completed, the teacher commented candidly about student participation and performance:

Some students thought the final exam was just a paper grade that filled requirements. They did the research and responded to the issues presented in the Dream of a Nation materials, but they didn't really want to learn anything or solve any community problems. These were not students who performed highest on participation in the

Table 2. *Dream of a Nation of Service-Learning Projects*

Problems/Issues	Ninth Grade Students' Service-Learning Projects
Re-powering America	***Created and distributed flyers for public campaign for conserving energy and recycling aluminum cans and plastic bottles at the high school.
A Nation that Shines	*Cleaned out trash and overgrowth in school's duck pond.
Improving Health	**Jogged with children in the community park (to encourage daily exercise). Created flyers and talked with staff of Parks and Recreation about the necessity of exercise for health of the children involved in recreation activities.
Ending Poverty	**Organized canned food drive for local Food Bank; Held a clothing (new-stylish) give-away event for students at the high school, Participated in clothing give-away at local church; Joined Community Garden where students planted, gardened, harvested, and delivered vegetables to seniors-in-need.
Combatting Bullying	***Created Anti-bullying Club at school (with teacher as faculty sponsor) and held regular meetings; Created and distributed anti-bullying flyers and posters within the high school.

Note: Asterisks denote Cipolle's service-learning categories.

\*Community Service    \*\*Service-Learning    \*\*\*Critical Service-Learning

actual work of the service-learning project. For the most part, those who excelled in the service-learning participation did not score as high on the reflective paper. They were not the highest achievers, but average students, earning high Cs and Bs in the class.

The teacher added,

Interestingly, many higher income, high achieving students in the class did not believe that poverty exists and were not interested in helping others. They were interested in only those course requirements for which they would receive credits. Nevertheless, these same high achievers regretted not doing the community work when they found out that the high-participation students were going to be rewarded with a trip to a national conference. . . to share their service-learning stories.

The five students selected to present at the national conference, received a standing ovation after they told their stories about the exciting service-learning projects they had completed.<sup>4</sup> Forty-five of the 92 students receiving grades for the 9<sup>th</sup> grade Business and Technology course responded to a survey at their private computers in the classroom. Responses were ranked as the following: (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Undecided, (4) Agree, (5) Strongly Agree. Weighted averages for the positive statements ranged from lowest, 3.18 ("Many students at this school go out of their way to treat other students with kindness.") to highest, 4.62 ("I feel safe in this class."). Other responses approaching strongly agree were the following: "I feel safe in this class" (4.62); "I feel good about myself" (4.56); "I think it is important to help other people" (4.57); "I take responsibility for what I do" (4.47); and, "My role as a team member in the Dream of a Nation project was essential" (4.45); The lowest weighted averages fell between "undecided" and "agree" for the following statements: "Many students at this school go out of their way to

treat other students with kindness” (3.18); “I always recycle when I can” (3.56).

Following the Dream service-learning teaching experience, the teacher reflected:

Facilitating my students’ service-learning experiences as they explored the big issues waiting for them when they leave high school, and bringing those issues home to our local school and community, gave me opportunities to teach from my heart in meaningful ways. Real teachers teach from the heart, you know. They teach students how to dream with, or without a textbook. If I could ask for ways to change the work I do in the classroom, I would ask for freedom to do what we, as teachers, do well. We can teach to “Standards” while at the same time, we teach the “head, heart, and hand” (of holistic education). Teachers have the care of hundreds of students within their hands throughout a school year.

This Business Education teacher had 180 ninth grade students in her “hands” that year. She ended the closing interview with the comment, “It is more important to teach about being a whole human being, you know, about caring, about giving and contributing, than about being self-serving, and how to make money.”

#### THE RESOUNDING CALL TO SERVICE TO THE PUBLIC GOOD

The resounding call to service to the public good is not limited to students in schools but includes us all, and many of us respond. One such USA responder is Jonathan M. Tisch (2010), a citizen businessman of New York City. Tisch, writing years after the 9/11 Twin Tower tragedy, calls citizens to overcome pessimism and to transform adversarial relationships among nonprofits,

government, and business into cooperative, mutually beneficial partnerships where all can learn from each other, support one another, and grow together into a better society. In his book, *Citizen You: Doing Your Part to Change the World* (2010) Tisch informs readers of three crucial pieces of USA federal legislation that have opened funding doors for public service, namely, a) passage of the *Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act* (which authorized an increase in the size of *AmeriCorps*; b) creation of the *White House Office on Social Innovation and Civic Participation*—specifically charged with exploring and promoting partnerships among nonprofits, business, philanthropies, and government to help solve social problems; and c) establishment of a federal *Social Innovation Fund* administered by the *Corporation for National and Community Service* for providing seed money for experimental community programs and matching grants to support the expansion of programs that have demonstrated effectiveness. Closing his book, Tisch (2010) offers fifty-two suggestions for the individual who seeks to join the public service movement for social change.—one suggestion for each week of the year. He wrote with inspiration:

There are thousands of ways you can become part of today’s movement toward active citizenship (for transformative change). Some involve giving just a few minutes of your time and energy every day; others are so all-engrossing you may find yourself devoting a lifetime to them. (p.242)

Tisch supports and recommends Americore, now managed by *Service Nation* ([www.servicenation.org](http://www.servicenation.org)) whose data indicate that for every \$1 invested in *AmeriCorps*, or *Senior Corps*, national service members deliver nearly \$4 in services. Service Nation insists that in a time of decreased resources to meet major national challenges such as the dropout crisis, poverty, and health, Americans serving full time for a year

through AmeriCorps or Senior Corps can make all the difference. Creatively, Service Nation is working for legislation to promote a year of service as a pipeline for developing civic leadership and social entrepreneurship in the nation while insisting that the ability to understand differences, to see diversity as a strength, and to get along better as a society requires experience working with different backgrounds. Importantly, Service Nation reports that national service provides young people from all backgrounds with the opportunity to develop leadership and job skills while serving community and country and allows them to advance their careers and education – at a time when so many are unemployed.

In agreement with such all-inclusive visions and hope of service, Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn (2009, 2014) insist that there are simple and effective ways to grow hope and opportunity as humans respond to their deep longings to make a difference in the domestic and international world. Calling all citizens to service for the public good, Kristof and WuDunn, in their books, *“Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide”* (2009) and *“A Path Appears: Transforming Lives, Creating Opportunity”* (2014) sign copies of their books, with the note, *““Hope.”* The couple write about citizens who are making a difference for the public good with stories that make serving look easy. Indeed, they write of a *“social revolution* that involves people tackling social problems, employing new savvy, discipline, and experience to chip away at poverty and injustice” (p. 9)...a revolution that can involve all.

Perhaps a penultimate call to service-learning (with all deference to the United Nations) is the call to the international public good that issues from *The Carter Center*<sup>5</sup> in Atlanta, Georgia,

USA where the latest in research and science is engaged in service to the public good with the stated intention to *wage peace, fight disease, and build hope* throughout the world ([www.cartercenter.org](http://www.cartercenter.org)). Former USA President Jimmy Carter and wife Rosalyn Carter co-founded the organization to improve the lives of people throughout the world. In his recent book, *“Call to Action: Women, Religion, Violence, and Power”* (2014), President Carter writes for the purpose of aligning religious and political life with full equality for girls and women, as he invokes the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights<sup>6</sup> as the basis upon which service to the public good for social justice, peace, and sustainability is grounded.

#### SUMMARY

Service-learning in the schools has the potential to be a powerful influence for improving democracy, overcoming social injustice, and sustaining a socially stable society. Learning to serve can begin in the local classrooms and communities as students become informed and inspired to serve the public good. As learning strategy for students, teaching method for teachers, and undergirding philosophy for those who choose to serve, service-learning leads students and communities to effective solutions to relevant social problems and issues that currently overwhelm. Service-learning experiences at young ages have been shown to affect the way students interpret their later experiences and influence how inclined they will be to pursue ongoing learning and service. That is, service-learning experiences in the schools often play pivotal roles and have critical influences in the longer process of student development that continues beyond school.

The implementation of quality service-learning programs in the schools yields positive impacts on students’ academic performance as well as on problem-solving and social skills, such as positive attitudes toward self, school, and learning. Quality



service-learning programs in the schools embrace recommended practices, organizational structure, and standards that foster effective and positive impact.

Critical service-learning experiences lead to confrontation with issues of social justice that cause students to examine how their actions may contribute to the status quo, and, or how to make changes to the status quo. Critical service-learning intersects with the goal of social transformation as students have opportunities to engage in critical analysis, reflection, and action. Consequently, as students grow critically conscious of social realities, so grows their sense of competency, efficacy, and the capacity to effect real impact on their communities and larger world. As students develop an ethic of service and adopt it as part of their identity, they find places of service in cultures that value it. And individuals who regard service as a part of their identity are more likely to connect their personal commitment to service with a career or profession where they make a real social contributions.

Calls to service, social action, and contribution resound throughout the nation and world. Perhaps never in the history of society has society been so needful of the human resilience that springs forward for service to the public good. Hopefully, students who develop the necessary critical consciousness, academic, and needful social-emotional skills will continue as adults to build a socially-sustainable world where justice, enduring peace, unity, and progress prevail.

## NOTES

1. Chipolle's (2010) social-justice model for service-learning has three core components, including four developmental elements of critical consciousness, three stages of White critical-consciousness development, and strategies for navigating the process. The model was developed from interviews and survey responses from White, middle-class student alumni of Benilde-St. Margaret's School (BSM).
2. Dream of a Nation is a public awareness and education initiative aiming to inform and empower citizens and students with knowledge and solutions for strengthening society. Completely open-sourced and free for download, Dream resources are being used in thousands of classrooms across the country. Dream presents national problems with possible solutions showing multiple examples of service-learning activities for application in schools and communities. At the Educator's platform online, in addition to a downloadable text, are resources that range from curriculum and lesson modules for English Language Arts, Civics and Social Studies, to Environmental Science and Math. Newly developed youth leadership inquiry and action guides are now available too. Visit [www.dreamofanation.org/educators/](http://www.dreamofanation.org/educators/)
3. Dream of a Nation's themes are the following: (1) A People-Centered and Accountable Government; (2) Citizen Stewardship; (3) Creating a Stable and Equitable Economy; (4) A News Media that Informs and Empowers; (5) Aiming for the Best in Education; (6) Re-Powering America; (7) Improving Health and Avoiding Alarming Trends; (8) Ending Poverty and Building Common Wealth; (9) Re-Imaging Business; (10) Strengthening Communities; (11) Waging Peace; (12) A Nation that Shines.
4. For description of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade Business and Technology students' 2015 national conference presentation of their Dream of a Nation service-learning projects (for which they received a standing ovation), see [http://digitalcommons.georgia-southern.edu/nyar\\_savannah/2015/2015/184/](http://digitalcommons.georgia-southern.edu/nyar_savannah/2015/2015/184/)
5. The Carter Center founded by former USA President, Jimmy Carter, in 1981, is a nongovernmental organization that has helped to improve life for people in more than 80 countries by resolving conflicts, advancing democracy and human rights, preventing diseases, and improving mental health care. Former President Carter and Rosalyn Carter affirm... "We can choose to alleviate suffering. We can choose to work together for peace. We can make these changes—and we must."
6. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is a milestone, standard-setting document in the history of human rights. Drafted by representatives with different legal and cultural backgrounds from all regions of the world, the Declaration was proclaimed by the United

Nations General Assembly in Paris on 10 December 1948 General Assembly resolution 217 A soon after the end of WWII as a common standard for human rights achievements for all peoples and all nations. It sets out, for the first time, fundamental human rights to be universally protected. Find downloadable copy of the UDHR at <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/index.html> Listen as Eleanor Roosevelt, former First Lady of the USA, reads the UDHR (in 1948) at <http://www.unmulti-media.org/avlibrary/asset/C100/C1007/>.

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# MASLOW ILLUMINATES RESILIENCE IN STUDENTS PLACED AT RISK

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*Abstract:* The purpose of this study is to get a student's perspective on how a specific charter school provides guidance and support to students who are exposed to trauma or who are experiencing negative life events. This study uses the example of the charter school researched to examine broader ways that schools can better support students placed at risk. Researchers will then consider how the support and guidance offered by the charter schools help the students move through Maslow's hierarchy of human needs. Many studies have been conducted on the application of Maslow's hierarchy of human needs and its impact on motivation; however, few studies have researched how schools serve as a protective factor to help students progress through the hierarchy despite other environmental stressors. Researchers hope to provide a preliminary perspective on this very important matter.

*Keywords:* resilience, care, development, charter schools

## INTRODUCTION

Exposure to violence can have negative effects on an individual's behavior, attitude and school achievement (Schwartz & Gorman, 2003). Students who are chronically exposed to trauma have a greater chance of having issues in school and struggling with academics (Overstreet & Mathews, 2011). In addition to trauma exposure, many students attending school experience family and economic hardships, and may also be exposed to drugs. When combined, these risk factors decrease an individual's resilience and his/her chances of excelling in an academic environment (Mathews, Dempsey & Overstreet, 2009). The purpose of this study is to examine through the example of a high performing charter school how schools provide support and guidance to students as they encounter difficult experiences.

Researchers consider how the support and guidance provided by "Creative Charter School" (pseudonym) also helps students move throughout the hierarchy of human needs. This study is based on the theoretical framework of risk and resilience; while also incorporating the research of Abraham Maslow and the hierarchy of human needs.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### HIERARCHY OF HUMAN NEEDS

Abraham Maslow is well-known in the field of psychology for his theory of self-actualization from the hierarchy of human needs. Research conducted on the hierarchy of human needs by Maslow indicates that individuals are constantly working to achieve the topmost category of self-actualization (Huitt, 2007). The levels of the hierarchy of human needs are as follows:

- Physiological Needs,
- Safety Needs,
- Needs of Love,
- Affection and Belongingness,
- Needs for Esteem, and
- Need for Self-Actualization (Simons, Irwin & Drinnien, 1987).

This hierarchy is often depicted as a triangle; with basic needs on the bottom. At the bottom of the triangle are "Physiological Needs," containing the basic biological needs such as, oxygen, food, water, and a constant body temperature. This group of needs comes first because it contains the factors needed for basic survival. The second set of needs is "Safety Needs," including shelter from the elements, security, order and stability. Once all physiological needs have been met, an individual will then focus on the need for safety. Once an individual's safety

needs have been met, he/she moves on to the next stage of the triangle—“Needs for Love,” “Affection and Belongingness.” This group of needs focuses on the feelings of loneliness that people traditionally try to overcome. When individuals are attempting to meet the needs of this level, they must be able to give and receive love, affection, and possess a sense of belonging.

Next, the hierarchy indicates that “Needs for Esteem” must be met. Individuals at this stage will have needs related to self-esteem and the esteem an individual receives from another. According to Simons et al. (1987), “Humans have a need for a stable, firmly based, high level of self-respect, and respect from others. When these needs are satisfied, the person feels self-confident and valuable as a person in the world” (pp. 1–2). The last set of needs in the basic hierarchy is the “Needs for Self-Actualization.” An individual can only think about these needs if all of the needs prior to it have been met. The need for self-actualization is described as needing to be and doing what an individual feels he/she was born to do (Simons et al., 1987). Maslow’s theory of self-actualization comes out of this final need of the hierarchy of human needs.

Maslow suggests that these needs must be met in order, and that one cannot skip a need before moving on to the next need (Maslow, 1954). Research shows that many factors could work against an individual trying to reach the highest level of self-actualization (Poston, 2009). For instance, one could lose his/her job, have a family emergency, or experience a difficult relationship breakup. One of the main hindrances that Maslow believes could impact an individual’s ability to progress through the hierarchy of human needs is society itself, particularly in the area of education. According to

Maslow, education needs to shift from a “person-stunting tactic to a person-growing approach” (Simon et al., 1987, p. 4).

#### THEORY OF SELF-ACTUALIZATION

Maslow defines a self-actualizing person as one who has the desire to become more than what he/she is currently (Maslow, 1954). However, several other definitions exist for this state of being including the never-ending process of development that one passes through (Heylighen, 1992). Over the years, many people have tried to define self-actualization in a more objective manner, attempting to make it easier to understand and recognize. Due to the vagueness of Maslow’s definition of self-actualization, some scholars argue that it is very difficult to determine whether an individual is truly self-actualizing or not.

A set of scholars in 1998 conducted a study with the purpose of defining self-actualization in a more objective manner. Their main goals were to determine the main attributes that a self-actualizing individual should possess, and to develop an instrument that could be used to better identify a self-actualizing individual (Leclerc et al., 1998). Their research ended in a comprehensive list of the common characteristics of individuals who have reached the self-actualizing level of Maslow’s hierarchy. The list can be used to better identify those individuals who have reached this level from individuals who have not. Results from Leclerc et al.’s (1998) research study identified many indicators of a self-actualizing individual. These indicators are further divided into two categories: openness to experience and reference to self; however, some indicators do fall in both categories. The indicators are listed in Table 1 for convenience. With these 36 indicators in mind, Leclerc et al. (1998) were able to construct the following definition of self-actualization: “a process through

which one's potential is developed in congruence with one's self-perception and one's experience" (p. 79). Further, Leclerc et al. (1998) argue that self-actualization is not an

end-product of development as some say, but rather it is a set of basic characteristics of individuals who are able to function well within their society.

Table 1. *Indicators of self-actualization as described by Leclerc et al (1998)*

Openness to Experience	Reference to Self
1. Are aware of their feelings.	1. Consider themselves responsible for their own life.
2. Have a realistic perception of themselves.	2. Accept responsibility for their actions.
3. Trust in their own organism.	3. Accept the consequences of their choices.
4. Are capable of insight.	4. Act according to their own convictions and values.
5. Are able to accept contradictory feelings.	5. Are able to resist undue social pressure.
6. Are open to change.	6. Feel free to express their opinions.
7. Are aware of their strengths and weaknesses.	7. Enjoy thinking for themselves.
8. Are capable of empathy.	8. Behave in a congruent authentic way.
9. Are capable of not focusing on themselves.	9. Have a well developed sense of ethics.
10. Live in the present (the here and now).	10. Are not paralyzed by the judgment of others.
11. Have a positive perception of human life.	11. Feel free to express their emotions.
12. Accept themselves as they are.	12. Use personal criteria to evaluate themselves.
13. Have a positive perception of the human organism.	13. Are able to get outside established frameworks.
14. Are capable of spontaneous reactions.	14. Have a positive self-esteem.
15. Are capable of intimate relationships.	15. Give meaning to their life.
16. Give meaning to life.	
17. Are capable of commitment.	
Openness to Experience and Reference to Self	
1. Maintain contact with themselves and the other person when communicating.	2. Can cope with failure.
3. Are capable of establishing meaningful relationships.	4. Look for relationships based on mutual respect.

From Leclerc et al. (1998, p. 79).

Despite the difficulty in objectively defining self-actualization, it is important that educators be cognizant of where their students are within Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Educators need to understand that if a student's basic needs have not been met, he/she may struggle to pay attention in class.

#### RISK AND RESILIENCE

The present study is grounded in the theoretical framework of risk and resilience. This theory discusses the impact that environmental factors can have on an individual's development (Gerard & Buehler, 2004). These factors, such as family relationships, social relationships, and other environmental factors can have a negative impact on a student's development. When these factors have a negative impact on students, they are considered risk factors. Risk factors can impact individuals in various ways; some students may continue to function independently and appear unaffected by risk factors, while other individuals may be extremely impacted by the risk factors. The individuals who do not appear to be severely affected by risk factors are considered to be resilient. Resilience is now understood to be the transaction between risk factors and protective factors in a child's life. Protective factors help to mitigate the impact of risk. According to Sameroff and Fiese (2000), "The greater the risk factors, the worse the outcomes; the more protective factors, the better the outcomes" (p. 141). The goal of this study is to determine the ways in which specific charter schools are able to increase students' resiliency when they are impacted by chronic exposure to trauma.

#### METHODS

##### PARTICIPANTS

"Creative Charter School" is a rural school system with 16 different schools at eight

different sites, and a total K–12 enrollment of 5,515 students for the 2009–2010 school year. The school district is located in a rural area of Texas, near the Mexico border. Of the total student enrollment at "Creative Charter School," 94 percent of students are Hispanic, and 78 percent qualify for free or reduced lunch. Of the 16 total schools in this district, the three high schools that have been open long enough to produce graduating classes were included in the study. These three high schools serve approximately 1000 students combined. Of the three high schools in this district participating in the study, 95 percent of students are Hispanic, and 78 percent qualify for free or reduced lunch (Texas Education Agency, 2010).

"Creative Charter School" is considered high achieving based on its state achievement tests, a 100 percent college enrollment rate, and a 93 percent college persistence rate for graduates. School records show that 97 percent of the charter system's students achieved ratings of proficient or advanced on tenth grade English Language Arts exams mandated by No Child Left Behind (NCLB), and 89 percent were proficient or advanced on tenth grade NCLB math exams. Data illustrates this record of achievement at the school-level, as well. On state-wide achievement tests administered during the 2009–2010 school year, High School A achieved a 99 percent passing rate for reading, a 98 percent passing rate for writing, and a 96 percent passing rate for math. High School B achieved a 99 percent passing rate for reading, a 99 percent passing rate for writing, and a 98 percent passing rate for math. High School C achieved a 99 percent passing rate for reading, a 97 percent passing rate for writing, and a 95 percent passing rate for math (Texas Education Agency, 2010).

The surrounding school district from which "Creative Charter School" draws its student population reported that 13.3 percent of their 2005 freshmen class had dropped out by the year 2008.

The district defined “dropping out” as a student who “is not expelled, does not graduate, receive a general equivalency diploma, transfer to another school system, begin college or die.” By comparison, “Creative Charter School” has a 100 percent graduation rate (Texas Education Agency, 2010). If this dropout trend continues, a former state demographer predicts that by 2040, 30 percent of the Texas workforce will not have a high school diploma. One of the most powerful facts is that this specific charter school system is graduating students at a rate of 100 percent despite the students experiencing more demonstrated risks to their education. These risks include living in poverty, coming from families where parents may not have graduated high school, and being first generation college aspirants. In addition to the 100 percent graduation rate, 100 percent of the graduates are accepted into college and attend. Looking out three years after high school graduation, 97 percent of the alumni persist in college. Although a complete analysis of dropout rates and college persistence is outside the scope of the current project, the authors wish to highlight this as a stark contrast between “Creative Charter School” and the surrounding educational environment.

#### METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

A mixed methods qualitative research design was utilized to collect data for this study. Surveys were sent to alumni from “Creative Charter School.” Surveys asked alumni about their experiences at “Creative Charter School”. Survey questions can be found in Appendix A for further review. The survey was sent out to 112 Alumni and 38 returned fully-completed surveys. After analyzing the survey responses, several respondents were contacted for follow-up interviews. Survey respondents were chosen for follow-up interviews based on their

responses to survey questions. Some respondents were asked to participate in follow-up interviews to clarify their responses on the survey, while others were contacted to gain more knowledge on statements from their surveys. During the follow-up interviews, researchers were particularly interested in gaining an understanding of where the students were at on the hierarchy of human needs prior to attending “Creative Charter School” and where they were when they graduated. Interview data provided additional insight into any negative life experiences that the students experienced throughout their time at “Creative Charter School.” Survey and interview data were combined to give the researchers a clear picture of the data needed for this study. In total, 38 alumni completed the survey, and six were contacted for follow-up interviews.

Researchers will use the information available to determine whether the students interviewed have reached the higher levels of the hierarchy of needs and are on a path to achieve the highest stage in the hierarchy of human needs: “Self-Actualization.” Although it is not expected that recently graduated high school students will achieve the top-most category of Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs, this research attempts to determine if they are on track to eventually achieve this category. In addition, this study will attempt to recognize if the individuals display indicators that may represent a beginning stage of self-actualization. This information will help researchers in determining what staff members at “Creative Charter School” are doing to help their students move through Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs when other environmental risk factors would otherwise prevent them from doing so.

#### RESULTS

Results from this research indicate that “Creative Charter School” serves as a protective factor for students who have been exposed to trauma and have experienced negative life events and hardships.



Specific types of violence reported by students of “Creative Charter School” include: street violence, gang violence, drug dealing, and bullying. Moreover, research results indicate that the close relationships between staff and students are one of the most influential protective factors provided by “Creative Charter School” to its students. Several respondents also indicated that the high expectations and accountability from the school helped them progress through their schooling. Survey and interview data indicate that “Creative Charter School” served as a protective factor for many of its students.

#### MASLOW’S HIERARCHY OF HUMAN NEEDS

Responses from the survey, completed by “Creative Charter School” Alumni, were analyzed to determine which needs of the Hierarchy of Human Needs had been met through means of support offered by “Creative Charter School”. Responses were categorized based on descriptors for each of the levels of the Hierarchy of Human Needs. These descriptors were chosen based on the definition of each level as described by Maslow. In addition, indicators for the highest level of need: Self-Actualization was utilized based on the findings from Leclerc et al. (1998) research findings.

*Physiological needs.* Many of the students attending “Creative Charter School” are from low socio-economic status or SES and qualified for Free and Reduced Lunch. According to their website, 59% of the students that attend “Creative Charter School” are eligible for Free and Reduced lunch. “Creative Charter School” makes sure that all students are offered the food they need to live. In addition to this, “Creative Charter School” offers a warm and safe environment. One aspect of physiological needs is that people need a constant body temperature. “Creative Charter School” maintains facilities

that keep the temperature of the school at a comfortable level. Based on the results from the survey, it was determined that seven responses contained information that indicated that their physiological needs had been met due to their attendance at “Creative Charter School.” Although this number is not as high as expected, it is hypothesized that other respondents did not comment on this need because it had been met and was no longer a prominent issue in their lives.

*Safety needs.* As mentioned previously, concerns with safety were major factors that led some students decided to transfer from public schools to “Creative Charter School.” Prior to attending “Creative Charter School”, many students needed to walk through metal detectors and submit to searches by security guards before beginning the school day. Even after going through these extra security measures, students reported seeing fights in the hallways and witnessing drug deals. Some alumni even stated that students at their old public schools would do drugs while at school. The environment within the public schools caused these students to decide to leave in order to find a safer educational environment.

In their interviews and survey responses, students reported feeling that “Creative Charter School” was a safe learning environment. They no longer needed to worry about their safety even without metal detectors or security guards. Respondents stated that no violence or drugs were present at “Creative Charter School”. These differences made “Creative Charter School” a safer environment and helped students move to the next level of Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs. Based on survey responses, six responses contained information that indicated that “Creative Charter School” had assisted individuals in meeting their safety needs. Again, this number is not as high as originally hypothesized. However, we believe that individuals who completed this survey have adjusted to their

new surroundings and are therefore, no longer concerned about meeting their needs for safety.

*Needs of love, affection and belongingness.* “Creative Charter School” helps students meet the needs for this stage of Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs by offering stable and supportive relationships. Many survey respondents commented that they perceived that teachers at “Creative Charter School” truly care about the students attending the school. Respondents stated that they appreciated the support that teachers offered throughout their time at the school. One alumna even stated that the teachers helped care for her and her siblings while her mother was gone for almost four months. This respondent said that teachers from “Creative Charter School” would bring her food and offer their support in any way that they could.

Another alumna stated in his survey response that he felt that he was a member of a family when he attended “Creative Charter School.” He described the support and guidance the teachers and other staff members offered as invaluable. He also stated that he felt as if the teachers were more like friends than teachers because of how supportive and caring they were. “Creative Charter School” helps students meet their needs at this level and helps them move to the next stage of Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs. Based on the survey responses, 24 responses contained information that indicated that “Creative Charter School” had assisted with meeting these individuals’ needs for belonging and love.

*Need for esteem.* While at “Creative Charter School”, students are taught to believe in themselves. Some students’ parents had not attended high school. For many of the students at “Creative Charter School”, they are the first of their family to even consider attending

college. Once students realize their potential and ability to do whatever they want and go to the college of their dreams, they enter the next stage of the hierarchy – the need for Self-Actualization. Based on the survey responses, 30 responses contained information that indicated that “Creative Charter School” had assisted with meeting the individuals’ need for esteem.

*Need for self-actualization.* It was difficult to conclude from the survey and interview data whether or not the alumni that participated in this study currently meet the requirements for this level of Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs, in part due to the difficulty of adequately defining Self-Actualization. For example, some participants show signs of achieving this level through comments on their completed surveys. For instance, one alumna stated, “It enhanced my world view and it helped me understand my personal impact in today’s society” (“Creative Charter School” alumni). There are several indicators for Self-Actualization that are evident within this statement:

- are they aware of their feelings,
- are they capable of insight,
- are they capable of not focusing on themselves,
- can they give meaning to their life, and
- are they able to get outside established frameworks (Leclerc et al., 1998).

Although several indicators for self-actualization are present within this statement, there are far too many indicators that are not present to state that this individual has reached self-actualization.

Another statement by an alumna that shows proof of indicators for Self-Actualization came from a response on the survey asking about relationships with teachers and peers at “Creative Charter School”. This alumna stated “These teachers didn’t treat us like little kids, they gave us the responsibility and believed in us. No matter how

hard we worked, they knew that we could give more. Even if giving us more meant them putting in more time, they were willing to do so to help us reach our academic goals (“Creative Charter School” alumni).” This statement also provides proof of several indicators that are listed in research by Leclerc et al. (1998). Several of these indicators are:

- are they aware of their feelings,
- do they have a realistic perception of themselves,
- are they aware of their strengths and weaknesses,
- do they have a positive perception of human life,
- do they enjoy thinking for themselves, and
- are they capable of establishing meaningful relationships (Leclerc et al., 1998).

Again, we cannot say that this individual has reached self-actualization, due to the fact that too many indicators are missing. In addition, individuals involved in this study are still very young and are not expected to reach the highest level of the hierarchy of human needs at such an early point in their lives.

Interview data also shows proof of some alumni starting to reach this level of Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs. During an interview, an alumnus from “Creative Charter School” discussed his change of mind when entering “Creative Charter School”: “To be honest I look back and when I was in middle school, I didn’t even know what college was. I didn’t. . . I knew I needed to graduate, get to high school and graduate from high school, but that was about it. I never thought other than that. I really never thought college. But that was in middle school, and then once I got to Creative, from the beginning, it was just college, college, college,

college” (“Creative Charter School” alumni). This statement provides evidence of the following indicators for Self-Actualization:

- are they open to change,
- do they trust in their own organism,
- are they aware of their strengths and weaknesses,
- are they capable of commitment,
- do they give meaning to their life, and
- do they act according to their own convictions and values (Leclerc et al., 1998).

Overall, it was determined that no responses from interview data or survey data included information that was a definitive sign of the individuals having reached self-actualization. Although there were several responses which included some of the indicators for self-actualization, these individuals were not determined to have met this level due to the amount of indicators still missing from their responses. In addition, as previously mentioned, it was never expected that these individuals would reach this level due to their young age. There are many working professionals who have yet to reach self-actualization and it would be unrealistic to expect these young individuals to achieve this level.

## DISCUSSION

Our research indicates that “Creative Charter School” helps students overcome difficult life events while moving through Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs. There are many things that “Creative Charter School” does that are different than most other public or private schools. For instance, students at “Creative Charter School” are greeted when they arrive at school every morning. Teachers and students at “Creative Charter School” put in more time than teachers and students at other schools, as well. For example, students arrive at “Creative Charter School” before 7:00 am and do not leave until after 4:30 pm. Often, teachers will

also stay after this time to help students who may be falling behind. Another difference between “Creative Charter School” and other public and private schools is that students at “Creative Charter School” are required to wear a strict uniform every day. Students at “Creative Charter School” are constantly encouraged to plan on attending college after their high school graduation. Students are even taken on campus visits by their teachers to help them select a college that best fits their needs. These are just a few of the unique provisions that “Creative Charter School” do to help students.

In addition, our research shows that “Creative Charter School” is serving as protective factors to students who are exposed to several different risk factors. Several students who completed the survey and answered questions in an individual interview discussed how important and helpful the relationships they had with teachers and students were at “Creative Charter School”. Several respondents mentioned the importance of their teachers during hard times they had experienced. In addition, several respondents commented on the important role that the “Creative Charter School” family played in their success at “Creative Charter School”. Respondents also commented on the importance of the encouragement and high expectations from the teachers. Several alumni commented in their surveys and interviews that the high expectations helped them prepare for college. Both of these factors, relationships with faculty and high expectations, served as powerful protective factors for students attending “Creative Charter School” and experiencing difficult life situations.

These protective factors also helped the students move through Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs. Comments from alumni in the survey and interview data indicate that many respondents

were able to move through the hierarchy of human needs with the assistance of the protective factors offered by “Creative Charter School”. However, we are not intending to suggest that all schools need to do what “Creative Charter School” does. We are merely suggesting that appropriate protective factors can help students who are experiencing difficult life situations move through the hierarchy of human needs.

More research should be conducted in this area to further refine the practices of educators that can help students move through the hierarchy of human needs. This study offers preliminary research indicating that by offering several important protective factors, students who are experiencing life difficulties are able to overcome any hindrances and move through the hierarchy of human needs.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author would like to acknowledge Suzanne Woolf for her contributions to earlier drafts. Suzanne is a School Psychologist with Keystone Area Education Agency. She received her M.A.E. in educational psychology from the University of Northern Iowa.

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## ON THE MERITS OF SUCCESS IN RESILIENCY

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*Abstract:* This special issue of the *Journal of Education and Social Justice* concludes with an honest reflection on resilience pedagogy. The author pays specific attention to contemporary learning environments with tomorrow's leaders. Throughout the narrative, the author appeals to the reader by drawing the reader into a personal account of overcoming adversity. This positionality enables the reader to differentiate between stories of deficiency and voicelessness, and instead, see stories of strength.

By any popular measure, I should not be submitting any conclusions to the articles presented in this special issue. This is, at least, what I have told myself time and time again when I was reminded of the looming deadline by the editors. Unlike many of the individuals who have submitted their work for this special issue, I do not have a Ph.D. nor have I started that pursuit. While I have carefully reviewed each of the papers in this special issue, I fear I have not read into the depths of resiliency. What qualifies me to draw conclusions about the important work these authors have submitted? I have wrestled with this for months leading to the deadline. I wrestle with it still. After many attempts at differing this responsibility, I offer this personal narrative.

With my roots in studying English literature, I have learned the value of the author's own story to reading their works. Stories do not happen within a vacuum. Authors are unique collections of histories, biases, and personal characteristics that inform their choices and the way they relate with the world. Perhaps this alone was the driving force for why I was compelled to write this conclusion, to give voice to that part of me that I have silenced after years of being a professional in higher education.

Now, I will not pretend to have met some of the challenges the subjects of these studies have met. I have not immigrated to a new country, confronted the tragedies of war, or even was subjected to overt bullying at any part of my education. However, I can tell you stories of using academic opportunities and extracurriculars in high school to avoid the growing presence of alcohol, drugs, and financial issues at home. I found myself reaching for religion as one would a Band-Aid to treat a wound that needed stitches. Despite all my attempts to find resources, my battles with suicidal ideation continued through my valedictorian speech. That speech was my public declaration of my achievement to overcome these personal demons, and it was one that unknowingly vilified my parents. Within the day, all my belongings had been packed and I was homeless. My parents' graduation gift would be the 13 year-old mini-van that I lived out of for five weeks.

College was supposed to be my grand escape. I had worked for four years through high school to get into the third best architecture program in the country. It was the only program I applied to, so I was lucky to get in. My history caught up to me though, as I was removed from class the first day for not having the mandatory computer and software. This set me on a course where I would change my major at any sign of struggle, seven times in total, over three years. Meanwhile, I would work over forty hours a week to pay for the tuition, fees, and other costs that meager scholarships, grants, and loans could not cover. It was the price of recovery, and all the previous struggles would resurface from time-to-time. I learned you never really overcome them, and that they can be scars as much as they are trophies.

Through three years of graduate school and now seven years as a professional, I have devoted myself to working for high-achieving students. This focus was never a conscious one, but reflecting on it years later, I realized my story became focused on helping the most driven students to achieve beyond their preconceived capacities in part because I had never felt my own potential was realized. Now though, I am motivated by a belief that I first articulated in graduate school and that I hear reflected in the philosophical approaches to the work in our office and at our university: If we don't invest in the brightest, most talented, and driven students in our colleges and universities to be the greatest versions of themselves, then who are we asking to be the leaders responsible for shaping the discourse of peace? Why not equip the most capable and driven of us with a level of empathy to realize that to be of value to one's self and their immediate loved ones is not enough? Make it incumbent upon them to be contributors of peace in their local and global communities.

While test scores, GPAs, and involvement in leadership opportunities are all convenient measures of success to define these high achieving students, they are not predictors for the level of success that can make a true impact on the world. From studies done by Carol Dweck and Angela Duckworth, we have learned that resiliency or grit is one of the strongest predictors for successfully completing long-term goals. I've observed that these students who are most accustomed to taking chances and risking failure often far exceed even their own expectations for growth and achievement. They tend to be the strongest contributors in every facet of their lives. I often wonder what college campuses could do to change their communities and the world if the most resilient students were seen as the highest achievers instead of the ones with the best test scores. But how do we move

past the convenient measures of success to these more complex measures?

This journal offers several new narratives on where and how we can continue to observe resiliency and each deserves continued study, because unlocking the potential of resiliency could have a significant impact on the individual as well as core community value such as education and peace. Resiliency though by definition privileges the successful and the contributing factors that lead to success. Without success, there is still the struggle. Therein lies the question that might be at the core of continued studies in resiliency: How do we define success? Is it enough to reach personal achievements through continued challenges and obstacles? Or is there some measure of one's impact on their local and global communities that is important to qualifying what success is? Is achieving a sense of personal agency enough while the systemic oppression that offered inequitable challenges persists? In other words, when the personal dream is achieved, is it enough if all the challenging factors remain unchanged?

Once we define success, then the objective and perhaps the responsibility we have is to collect these narratives to evaluate who reaches our standards for success and what factors contributed to that success. We must find the patterns in their stories, name our strongest intuitions, and we must test them. The world has a need for equipping the democratic voice with these narratives of resiliency. If we were to shift the focus of education to developing a sense of empathy, perhaps a type of peace and liberation could be achieved where the merits of academic and social achievements have apparently met their limits. Perhaps then, I would not have spent so much of my introduction (and the previous few weeks) disqualifying my voice and instead focused on the contributions my voice could make. What then could we learn from the voices whose stories remain silent?

# TRAVERSING THE ADVANTAGEOUS INTERSECTION BETWEEN UNBRIDLED CREATIVITY AND CAPABILITY: MY JOURNEY WITH STUDENTS IN MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

Serah Duvall, University of Cincinnati

*Abstract:* This article is presented by Serah Duvall, a pre-service teacher candidate in Middle Childhood Education. Duvall is devoted to the enrichment of Middle Childhood Education through feminist pedagogy, critical consciousness, and early field experiences (Duvall, & Killham, 2016; Killham & Duvall, 2016). Duvall's theoretical and practical experience enable her to craft a compelling first-person account titled "Traversing an Advantageous Intersection: My Journey With Students in Middle Childhood." In her narrative, Duvall awakens us to the resilience required of pre-service teachers working with youth placed at risk.

People's minds wander when I tell them that I am a Middle Childhood Education major. All too quickly, they think of me as a fresh-faced, naive young student that has no idea what she is in for. They apologize, often feeling sorry for the professional destiny I have chosen. But, if I must be honest with the world, particularly those who have shared their condolences, it is disheartening to continually witness the general negativity towards teachers working with middle childhood-aged students.

I must, even if temporarily, set aside the troubled faces and endless questions about my sanity. I must advance in my studies, and therefore take you to present day. I settled into my desk. The clock strikes the top of the hour. The first session of my course, "Introduction to Middle Childhood Field Experience" is now underway. Not long after, the "crazy" talk continues.

My professor wasted no time with anecdotes, inspiring Pinterest quotes, and epiphany-inducing lectures. Instead, the first thing my professor announced was that we, the students

before her, were in the right place if we were a special breed of crazy. I simultaneously felt comfort and discontent. Even in my short experience working with middle school students, I have found that middle schoolers are at an advantageous intersection between unbridled creativity and the capability of fostering meaningful mentored relationships with educators. Below, I share how I came across this intersection and committed myself to the betterment of middle school education.

A year ago, I was offered an opportunity to mentor students at a local K–12 school as part of their after school programming. This particular after school mentoring program was designated for children who were of low socioeconomic status, had behavioral problems, or were on an individualized education plan. Feeling a bit sheltered myself, I had no experience working with a diverse and challenging population.

I accepted the opportunity, mostly to fulfill a community service requirement for a class in which I was enrolled. Taken by surprise, I was overwhelmed with the devotion I felt towards the students in the program. The vast majority of them were always in good spirits, often greeting me with smiles and enthusiasm. By and large, the children were excited to see the tutors, motivated to work, and delighted to be surrounded by their friends.

After staying with the after school mentoring program for a couple of months, I had worked with every child except for one. This student's name was Keith. Keith, labeled by the program staff as a "problem child," normally worked exclusively with the head tutor. Because I had never interacted with Keith, I wrongly defined him by his (mis)behavior.



Keith's infamous reputation for outbursts preceded him. I noted to myself that this boy never wanted to do homework, and he would run around recklessly avoiding his responsibilities. I had grown so accustomed to working with children who were steadfast to getting their work done that Keith's behavior was appalling.

Yet, one day I arrived to the mentoring program, and I was spontaneously paired with him. At the time, I was immediately put off. I grumbled. I resisted. I was not about to work with the "problem child." To this end, without having even said a word to him, my attitude doomed our tutoring session.

My first day working together with Keith had ended. I was certain that I was going to look in the mirror and find out my hair had grayed in that span of two hours. Keith adamantly demonstrated that he was going to be the boldest, most stubborn, difficult student. I allowed him the upper hand. I speculated that fighting him and engaging in a power struggle would not only indulge his behavior and boost his ego, but lower the other students' morale.

To my disbelief, the mentoring program continued to pair me with Keith. All parties, not just me, wondered if there was any hope in the pairing. To me, Keith remained the problem child. To him, I was an officer, watching and waiting for him to do his homework. It was not until I stopped to listen to Keith differently that I was able to have a breakthrough. Keith had been signaling that he had something to say, a clue to his motivation and engagement, if you will.

With each mentoring session, Keith grew more comfortable with me, and I with him. Soon to follow, Keith opened up to me about his tumultuous home life, and I was able to identify with him differently. I began to recognize patterns on the days when he was especially emotional. The only way he knew to protect himself was either through violence when he sensed a direct threat, or running away to be solitary when he felt opposition.

The more we were able to relate, the more my opinion of him evolved. I was beginning to believe, maybe, just maybe, I would persevere. In no way was my own personal upbringing even close or equivalent to his; however, I remained empathetic. Some tutoring sessions remained difficult; however, after that interaction I thought, "everything really did change." External factors, such as his home situation, would weigh heavily on our session's productivity, yet I think he realized that I am not just some "officer," that I actually did care about him and his homework.

I was struck by Keith's demeanor; he made a complete turnaround. I was struck by my demeanor; I made a complete turnaround. Through caring, I was able to become one of the only adults in his life that understood his situation. I think, upon reflection, it was in that moment that we both did not feel so alone. He started to regularly talk to me about what was going on in his life. I responded as best as possible, with advice when I could.

The outcome of this situation I credit with being my, "aha!" moment, my "Why I want to be a middle childhood teacher" moment. Now, I wake up each morning, fully committed to my journey with students in middle childhood.

# PLAUSIBILITY, CREDIBILITY, AND INTEGRITY: THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF PEACE EDUCATION ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

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*Abstract:* In this conclusion, the authors apply the lens of social reconstructivism in order to speak to the quality of research in the field of peace education. The authors advocate for stakeholders to strengthen and reinforce the assessment and evaluative techniques of their respective peace education programs, as well as associated research. In doing so, the article agglomerates the research components of this collection and addresses scalability that allows for integration across contexts.

## A REQUIRED (RE)EXAMINATION OF RESEARCH DESIGN

Through the lens of social reconstructivism (Freire, 2006), this paper summons stakeholders in the field of Peace Studies (c.f., University of Cincinnati's Urban Center for Social Justice, Peace Education & Research and Center for Hope & Justice Education) to galvanize the assessment and evaluative techniques of their respective peace education programs. Herein, we petition stakeholders to (re)examine the design of their research studies, with significant preeminence placed upon:

- the comparison of baseline data with immediate post-treatment and delayed post-treatment data (i.e., longitudinal research),
- collaborative, transdisciplinary research teams, and
- triangulation through multilayered analysis and recognition of relational context.

This (re)examination of research design is required to in order to substantiate commonly employed qualitative methods, such as self report measures, case studies, and focus groups. It is also deemed essential for quantitative measures, in order to provide rich, accurate portrayals of the observed phenomenon.

## INVESTING IN THE LONGEVITY OF PEACE EDUCATION

For those invested in the success of the field peace education, an initial step is recommended: an exhaustive, systematic review which scrutinizes the methodology employed to determine functionality and effectiveness of the implementation of intervention programs. We encourage researchers to analyze previously published articles in a number of critical categories, such as:

- conflict resolution,
- violence prevention,
- students placed at risk or overcoming adversity,
- PTSD treatment programs for child soldiers, war veterans, and survivors of domestic violence, and
- peace education programs focused on service, equality and human rights.

Secondly, we regard research partnerships as key determinants of future success. These research partnerships should consist of a wide range of stakeholders, including the survivor of trauma, the caregiver, and the familial or community support

systems. Special attention must be paid to the stakeholders who often feel voiceless.

We appeal to programs currently lacking in any type of reported follow-up measures. Institutions are encouraged to engage researchers in conversation, with the goal of developing appropriate follow-up measures that incur the levity of a longitudinal research design.

We recognize the challenges associated with longitudinal research. To positively impact the feasibility of studies, we revivify the need for peace education programs to embrace community-based approaches. It is vital that peace education programs and researchers involve the community as a means of improving their long-term efforts. Furthermore, community-based approaches empower family and community stakeholders to exercise control over their collective lives.

Lastly, we avouch the importance of substantiation through multiple instruments. In our exploration of the related literature, we witnessed an overwhelming reliance on single-source self-reflection literature, which offers only one means for assessing the quality of a program. We ascertained an alarming number of reports that merely aggregate their data from surveys, observations and questionnaires administered during the program. Consequently, we wish to simultaneously emphasize the importance of participant voice that can be substantiated. As an extension of this, we encourage researchers to consider contextual and relational triangulation (Cronin, 2014; Hawkins 1974/2002), as well as multilayered analysis (c.f., Gilligan's Listening Guide, McCormack's Lens).

## FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

As others have in their respective fields (c.f., Cronin, 2014; Hazel, Newman, & Barrett, 2016), we call on the authors in this special issue to take the above recommendations into consideration as they advance their work. We recognize the unique challenges of empirically-based peace work and corresponding research, and hereby call on the authors of this special issue, our readers, and respective stakeholders to assemble. Join us in our efforts to improve the plausibility, credibility, and integrity of peace education research.

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